

Mission Outreach in the Congregation

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Introduction

The procedure which Jesus followed in evangelism is simple. He called two pairs of fisherman and promised to make them “fishers of men” if they would follow him (Matt. 4:18-22). After a night in prayer, he hand-picked twelve men from among his disciples to be “apostles” (Luke 6: 12-13). The word is significant. It means literally to “send away” or “send out”. The intended purpose for the twelve is obvious from their collective name. They were to be sent out with the good news of the kingdom.

Jesus began by instructing the apostles. They followed him in his preaching journeys throughout Palestine and learned by listening and observing. He spent time with them in private, later they received “on the job “training” by being sent out into the towns and villages on missions of preaching and healing (Matt. 10:11). Jesus followed a pattern of gathering and scattering. He gathered the apostles for prayer and instruction and scattered them in mission of service and preaching.

Later in addition to the twelve Jesus called seventy others (Luke 10:1). An increase in his evangelistic outreach demanded an increase in the number of workers. Again, he followed the practice already established with the apostles. He sent the seventy out, two by two, into all the towns and villages with a message about the kingdom (Luke 10:9).

When Jesus chose the seventy, he repeated his concern for workers in the harvest given earlier to the twelve “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). It was when the seventy returned with a favorable report on their mission that Jesus predicted the ultimate fall of Satan by saying, “I beheld Satan as lightening fall from heaven” (Luke 10:17)

The gospel writers are explicit regarding the principle which Jesus followed in bringing the good news of the kingdom to others. He gathered men and instructed them. Then they were scattered to teach others. They returned for more instruction as a group and then went out to work again. This same principle is to be at work today in our congregations too. Men, women and children gather in our churches for worship and instruction. They scatter into their homes, jobs, places of recreation and education. They are being sent out to bring a message of the kingdom. It would not be out of place at this point to ask is this principle really working as it should? Is this concept clearly shared and practiced by clergy and laity?

History and traditions have taken their toll. Today many a church member—and quite a number of clergymen, too—see the church to which they belong resembling anything but a mighty army on the march, more like a polite society for the rolling of bandages for African dispensaries rather than a bloodied band of warriors who come together only to be reinvigorated for further battle; more like men and women who feel obligated to give at least some sort of support to a very shaky organization rather than soldiers who meet to recount their victories and get together in order to close ranks and be carried along to the final conquest of him under whose feet God has placed all things. Many today look at themselves and scarcely know what it means to wield the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God; many must honestly confess that they are little described when they are told that the soldier of God is one who has done all in order that he may be able to stand. Many own to tragic defeats in their own lives and complete ease in

their membership in the church that can participate in victory only if it is push-button warfare that calls for no personal involvement, no personal sacrifice, no personal willingness to become accustomed to the sight of its own blood.

When a church quits going out in search of conquests for the kingdom, it begins to smell of the sacred. It begins to play church and mumble. A congregation turned in upon itself tends to become stiff and formal and cold. Reaching out to others is a source of new life in a church. It forces a church to think of what its essential purposes are and of how well it is achieving them. The effort to make the Christian faith plain to others is what best makes it clear for the members of a church. “Evangelize or fossilize” is still the law. *Mission outreach in the congregation* is still God’s plan for bringing His kingdom to the heathen and for preserving the life of the congregation.

The Congregation Has A Mission

Mission is an activity of the Church which is instituted, regulated and blessed by God. Not everything which is a part of the church, therefore, is mission. The pursuit of success and self-preservation often move the church to activities which consume much energy but which in themselves are not mission. Even such measurable goals “souls gained”, bricks laid, budgets met, meetings conducted, etc., may not be mission, but only motions.

The mission of the Church is a mission from God. There is a mission because there is a God who sends. In the Scriptures and for the salvation of men we find the Father sending the Son and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. And when the Son comes He brings not only Himself, but also the Father and the Spirit; and when the Holy Spirit comes, he comes that He may bring the Father and the Son. The Father sends the Son into the world to accomplish redemption. The message, therefore, of mission is not so much “This do” as “This happened”. But even the sending of the message to the heathen is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit whom the Father and the Son send along with the Church on mission. So in the sending of the Holy Spirit God continues the mission which began and which will end with the coming of His Son.

The mission of God is His saving activity. The Church has part in that mission as the agency of God for the proclamation of God’s saving activity. God’s choice that the Church should be the agent of His mission is evident from the beginning. In the first promise of the Savior, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15) God declared His determination not only to save His people, but to save them through them. Such is the love revealed in that mission that soon we find the godly proclaiming mission. “Then began men to call upon (call out) the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26b). Enos and his brethren proclaim publicly the revelation of the Lord. It is not enough for them to worship privately. They, without a mission command, nevertheless feel the desire to participate in God’s mission. They have something better to boast of than themselves; they boast in the Lord.

Genesis 12 is another significant chapter in teaching the mission of God through men. “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I’ll bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3). Out of all the world God called Abraham and his family. To

what? To be blessed? Or to be a blessing? What God has in mind for Abraham is that He will so richly bless him and his descendents that they will share their blessedness with all the world.

God did not call Abraham to be the father of His people just for Abraham's sake. God was thinking of the whole world when He called Abraham. God's election of Israel has no connection with favoritism; His election is a commissioning. Israel is to be the expression of God's love for all the Old Testament world. Through Abraham and Israel God would confront the world so that they would be a blessing to the whole world. The existence of Israel was justified, is God's own judgment, only so long as she allowed herself to be God's instrument for mission. When Israel would no longer serve God's mission, our Lord took from her the blessing of the Gospel and gave them to the heathen.

God's intended purpose of carrying on His mission through the Church exists for the New Testament Church also. Christ says to us, "As my Father hath sent me so send I you" (John 20:21). Of the NT Church Peter writes, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light". (I Peter 2:9-10). It is clear that the Church has no right to these honorable titles apart from the purpose for which these qualifications were given. When the Church ceases to "shew forth the praises" of the Lord then the Church ceases to be a "chosen generation...a peculiar people." Then the Church ceases to be mission; it ceases to be Church.

Certainly the Christian congregation, because of the believers in its midst through the administration of Word and sacraments, today shares in this wonderful mission of God. As we look at the early Christian Church we clearly see the vital role which congregations played. The missionary journeys of Paul serve as an apt illustration of the importance of the congregation. Paul's usual practice in bringing the Gospel to the new territory was to preach first in the Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:2). He continued here until he was driven out, usually by the Jewish leaders who were envious of his influence. Then Paul and those who believed his message began to meet elsewhere. A congregation was born which was often destined to have influence throughout an entire region.

Luke says these early Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Here in the earliest history of the Christian Church we find the pattern of gathering for worship which has characterized Christianity for Twenty centuries. Christians have always been a "gathering people," finding comfort and strength in God and in one another. We also find the early congregations were a "scattering church". The early Christians were continually spreading the good news or the Gospel in the temple, in their homes, and in the streets (Acts 5:28, 42).

When persecution drove the followers of Christ out of Jerusalem, Luke reports, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4). It is important to note that the antecedent of "they" is not the apostles. After a frightening experience with Peter and the other apostles, the rulers decided to leave them alone for a while. It was the congregation of Christians who went everywhere telling the good news of Jesus.

In all probability the great missionary congregation in Antioch of Syria was planted by unknown Christians from ordinary walks of life. At first, the Christian who left Jerusalem preached only to the Jews. (Acts 11:19). Others, however, began preaching also the Greeks (Acts 11:20). In Antioch where this combination resulted in great numbers turning to the Lord, Barnabus and Saul were later called to minister with a congregation already established!

Comparatively it would seem that few congregations today are following the New Testament principle of gathering and scattering. Congregational life usually reveals a "com-type"

attitude. The faithful are exhorted weekly through the sermon in the bulletin and by the church paper to be “faithful to services.” Much emphasis is placed upon “keeping up the attendance.” A high attendance in proportion to the average is cause for elation, whereas a low attendance is cause for sagging spirits.

The number of people present at stated services and the amount of the offering furnish the measuring rod whereby congregation and minister are often judged a “success.” These figures become the spiritual statistics of the congregation.

The “come-to-church” congregation certainly does have a mission, and by God’s grace it certainly does participate in God’s mission. The “come-to-church” congregation is exercising its mission responsibility much like that of Israel in the Old Testament. Israel’s missionary impulse was exercised not by going out into all the world but by remaining stationary and allowing the light of the glory of God to shine through her. They let the ends of the earth see their light and come to them.

Such participation in mission, which might be called centripetal mission, is still an important part of the mission picture. When the life of the Christian community is different from the life of the non-Christian community, then men begin to be drawn toward its fellowship. At least men begin to ask questions.

The love of God is brought to people in various ways: we live it, we speak it; we nurture it. Using the analogy of a farmer and his field, we could say that by living the message of God’s love we prepare the soil; by speaking it we sow the seed; by nurturing it we cultivate the growing plant. A strong congregation is required for letting the light of God’s love truly shine in splendor. Centripetal mission is an essential role of the Christian Congregation today!

However, while the mission of the Old Testament church was perhaps entirely centripetal, God’s will for the New Testament involves more. In God’s purposes the concentration of His glorious light in one nation was right for the Old Testament. That same God purposes that the scattering of the Church to all the world is right for the New Testament era. Centrifugal mission is instituted by the Lord of the Church with His directive to disciples to “go...teach...baptize...and teach” of Matt. 28:18-20. Centrifugal mission, the scattering of the gathering people with the announcement of salvation, is not an added option of the New Testament church. By design of God it belongs to the very nature of the New Testament church. It is part of every disciple’s citizenship rights and responsibilities! Like the early Christian church we are to be a church which gathers for worship and scatters in witness!

No congregation can be unconcerned about the quality of its own spiritual life, centripetal mission. On the other hand, it would be hazardous to idealize the first century church. For example, Paul’s first letter to Corinthians reveals immaturity, immorality, lawsuits between members, faulty concepts of marriage, problems regarding food offered to idols, complaints about paying ministers, drunkenness at the Lord’s Supper, disruption about tongues, and false teaching about the resurrection of Christians. One of the great mysteries of the Gospel is that God uses immature and imperfect people to bring others to the perfect Christ. If every congregation must retard its evangelistic out-reach until each member is perfect, then the Day of Judgment will arrive first. We sometimes forget that congregations are groups of forgiven sinners. Paul never forgot what he was before Christ changed his life (I Tim. 1:15-16). Our testimony to the outsider is not a recitation of our own goodness, but rather a recital of the great saving acts of God through Christ by which salvation is available to all. We continue in daily fellowship with God because of his daily forgiveness.

God has given us a mission; we exist for the sake of that mission. God chose Israel for mission. When Israel failed to respond to its missionary role, Israel fell under judgment. First the Northern Kingdom was deported and lost its identity as a people of God. God carried on His mission through Judah, but as Judah became so wicked it would not carry on its mission Judah fell under judgment and was deported. God then carried on His mission to the world through the faithful remnant. In time even the remnant turned aside from God's mission. Within a generation of Christ, the mission which Israel had forsaken was taken from there forever. In the meantime the Lord Christ had risen from the dead and recommitted His mission to his disciples and to the church of the Gentiles.

In the history of Israel is the warning that if we fail in mission, we shall fall under judgment and the mission will be given to those who welcome it. God was long-suffering with Israel of old, but the time came when the mission had to be given to a faithful people.

Certainly God has not chosen our Wisconsin Synod to be for the New Testament what Israel was for the Old Testament. All of God's revelation from Abraham down to Jesus and Paul and John was not exclusively directed toward us. God is now our possession. But when we fail in mission it will not be long until the ultimate seduction takes place with us as it did with Israel. It is so easy to begin to think of ourselves as being tremendously advantaged and the rest of the world simply not as fortunate as we are. This satisfied a great human need to be "in," and fosters an indifference toward the problems of others. Like Israel, if we do not let ourselves be used by God, we will begin to use Him for ourselves. Instead of Him being our Advocate, we become His advocates, trying to convince others of what He has done for us. Instead of His grasping us, we grasp Him for ourselves. Thus you find a man who quite piously says that as he drives to town he prays to Jesus for a parking place and when he gets to this destination, sure enough, Jesus has provided one. Or another who says that since he became a more active member in the church his sales contracts have spiraled upward. Do you see what this is saying? Jesus is our servant—busy finding us parking places or clients. If we lose our sense of mission, if we no longer see ourselves as existing, in this world for the sake of God's mission, then like Israel of old we make ourselves the lords of Jesus. If that happens, can God's judgement be far away?

The Pastor Leads His People in Mission

To fulfill the great commission given by our Lord to reach the world for Him, the pastor must lead his congregation to begin the task in its own community. If we cannot get the message of salvation to everyone where we live, it is scarcely possible that we shall ever get it to the millions whose languages are unfamiliar and whose governments are antagonistic to Christianity. Whatever the need in the local congregation, at the heart of its solution is the pastor.

Above all else the pastor ought to be a Christian. The pastor must be an eyewitness of the living Christ through his face-to-face encounter and fellowship with Him in the Word. What he is before men is a reflection of what he is with his Savior. The pastor, above all else, has to resist the continual pressure to *do* rather than to study and pray. It takes time to learn to walk with the Lord in prayer and in the Word. Rushing into and out of God's presence keeps modern men from securing the blessing which Moses received. To that humble man who tarried in intercession God replied, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Ex. 33:14). To be about our father's business we must daily seek his presence and plan.

The pastor must be an example; he must set the pace. His devotional life is revealed in the flow of his daily life. In writing to the church at Corinth Paul twice commanded them, "Be ye followers of me" (I Cor. 4:16: 11:1). Writing to the Philippians, he exhorted them, "Be followers

together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example” (Phil. 3:17); and counseled them further, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (4:9). Such words strike us as being a bit egotistical, until we realize that whether one says it or not, the leader is being followed!

It is interesting that Jesus did not introduce the subject of prayer. The disciples themselves asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” This came after observing prayer in the life of our Lord. They constantly found that his number-one priority was fellowship with the infinite God.

As fellow-Christians with our members, as God-given examples, we lead our congregation in mission. We are the first ones to be making evangelism calls. We are there to show our congregation that mission is the most important thing in our lives.

For most ministers stage fright is in inverse proportion to the size of the audience. They can pour out their hearts before a congregation with little embarrassment but talking to one or two people about personal religion may be blocked by an unendurable nervousness. There is nothing in a minister’s work which forces this on him. One who is deeply dedicated to his calling may complete his seminary training and be ordained and go through years of pastorate without ever talking face to face with anyone about the deepest things of life. The pastor is the natural teacher and leader of his congregation in evangelism. It forces him to learn, and it forces him to practice. A program of lay visitation is likely to bring the pastor something essential which he may never get in any other way.

A preacher cannot be sure that his public messages are not missing the mark unless in intimate talk with people he has learned what that mark really is. The best preaching has been described as simply conversation continued. Its mood is “...as I was saying.” If the pastor has not been talking of such matters in private, sermon preparation will come only from books and sermons and will sound like books.

There are many subtle pressures at work in the ministry. It is a lofty calling for which no one is worthy. There are demands for the very best, and in response we set high ideals and keep trying to achieve them. As long as we know that we are not succeeding and as long as we recognize our imperfections, we are safe, but this is not as easy as it sounds. A person teaches and preaches about the ideal, he begins to imagine that he has attained it because he talks about it so much. Other people expect a minister to be good enough to be a minister. He doubles his will power and drives on with gritted teeth. Very gradually and very subtly he becomes a misguided Pharisee. When he steps into the pulpit or teaches his class he is not plain John Brown; his is Moses on Mt. Sinai or Paul on Mars Hill.

No man is good enough for the Christian ministry; that is part of the paradox of the calling. But like everybody else the minister does not have to rely on his own merit and his own goodness. He is somewhat like an alcoholic who has become sober through treatment. He can help others not because he is without fault and above blame, but because he has found a power that makes for sobriety or righteousness. A pastor who sits with people where they sit and who talks with them about the needs of their souls, a pastor who face to face speaks of sin and forgiveness will himself more easily know and practice that his relationship with the congregation is horizontal, not vertical. He is to walk ahead of them, not reign over them. And if he expects his people to bleed for their Savior, then he should be willing to hemorrhage—spiritually speaking.

The pastor will not let himself be or continue to be the “mission” of the congregation. He will rather develop the concept and practice of the equipping ministry. The New Testament rings

out with the idea of a serving people of God, not the creation of first and second class citizens in the kingdom of God.

The death knell to a special system of priests with a favored position before God was symbolized when Jesus hung on the cross and the great curtain in the temple which separated the holy place from the holy of holier was ripped in two. In the new dispensation all of God's people are to be a "royal priesthood" (I Peter 2:9).

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, the apostle Paul leaves very little doubt about the primary role of those who function as leaders in the Church. They are to equip the saints for ministry (v. 11). Unfortunately the KJV has a comma which separates "saints" from "the work of the ministry." Leaving out the comma the passage reads: "And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;" (Eph. 4:11, 12). The work of Christian leadership is here clearly defined as preparing the people of God to minister.

The failure to read the New Testament clearly in regard to "ministry" has led to at least several important errors. One is what is to be the function of the ministry. At present the congregation observes while "the minister" performs his ministry. He becomes the one who preaches, teaches, calls on the sick, visits the sick, visits the new-born, ministers to the bereaved, edits the church paper, takes charge of the bulletin, drops in on backsliders, and, if he has time, visits the unchurched. If a minister does well according to the expectations of the congregation, he is praised for his efforts. If, on the other hand he performs poorly according to their expectations, he is usually encouraged to minister elsewhere.

Such a misguided concept of the nature of the ministry in the congregation can give ministers the feeling of constantly being on trial. The insecurity of their position can easily involve them in a power struggle in order to insure their leadership. Some may even look upon themselves as a type of corporation executive. Their methods would be perfectly acceptable in the world of big business. Believing strongly in the rights of their own leadership, they begin to make their influence felt in all areas of congregational life even to the color of the paint on the walls of the fellowship room or the menu which the ladies are to serve for a gathering. The refusal by some of the congregation to accept their influence is tantamount to a rejection of their personal leadership.

Another related problem to this wrong concept of the ministry is the idea that the minister is employed primarily to minister to the congregation. His salary comes from the congregation. The members of a congregation have certain expectation of their minister, most of which are related to the needs of the congregation. If a minister fails to call upon a member of the congregation who is in the hospital, he may be sternly reminded of his failure. On the other hand, he may repeatedly pass by the home of a poor family with several children attending no Sunday School and be censured by no one.

Because the pressure points upon a minister are from within the congregation, and because ministers, too, are forgiven sinners like all other Christians, minister and congregation may succumb to a monastic society, busily and happily ministering to one another with little concern for the spiritual needs of others, aside from making financial contributions for the mission program of Synod. On the other hand, the minister may have the genuine heart of an evangelist and be almost incapable of finding the needed time to express his concern for the lost. Undeniably the above is a caricature yet in varying degrees this is what has been and is happening in all of our congregations!

The minister who desires to follow the apostolic tradition should see himself as an “equipper” of others to minister. He can develop a pastoring ministry by training others to assist in making calls on the sick and delinquent. He can develop an evangelistic ministry by visiting the homes of the lost with those from the congregation who have a concern for evangelism. He can encourage a ministry benevolence by helping to discover ways of assisting those who are in need.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy; “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). The word “commit” is a strong imperative. One illustration of Paul’s willingness to “commit” is given in Acts 18. He had labored with Aquila and Priscilla, two other Jewish tentmakers whom he disciplined in the Gospel. After Paul left them, these two saw an opportunity to witness to Apollos, a brilliant orator who had come from Alexandria to Ephesus. He knew the teaching of John the Baptist but was evidently uninformed about the resurrected Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Quickly they taught this young man: “and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). This couple unlocked their hearts and their knowledge of the Lord to this inadequately taught man.

The Scriptures further relate that Apollos “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:28); Apollos profited by that reflection of Paul’s teaching which he had learned from Priscilla and Aquilla. Paul, Aquilla and Priscilla, Apollos, the convinced Jews—four “generations” resulting from the teaching ministry of a man who always looked toward future generations while discipling men.

Great in the kingdom of God is that faithful pastor who does the work of an evangelist. But greater still is that pastor who uses his ministry to multiply workers for the kingdom of God.

The Congregation Reaches Out In Mission

Multiplication is God’s plan to populate the world, both physically and spiritually His first command given to man was to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Starting with two people the earth now is bulging with approximately three billion. The “corruptible seed” (I Peter 1:23) certainly has multiplied. Christians are born, however, not “of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God” (Peter 1:23). If, therefore, “corruptible seed” can produce approximately three billion people, cannot the “incorruptible seed” of the Word of God do the same? Today there are millions more who have never heard of the name of Christ than there were in the days of the Apostles. Multiplication is the plan of God for matching spiritual birth with population explosion.

A few years after Jesus gave His global evangelizing commission in Palestine, Paul is writing to Christians in Rome. That the Gospel has gone as far as Rome in such a short time demonstrates the type of evangelistic zeal which these early Christians had. Christianity spread because it was essentially a lay movement in which every member was out fishing. Wherever they were and wherever they went, they spoke a good word for Christ. It is significant that the word “lay man” is derived from the Greek word “*laos*”, meaning people. This is the word which the New Testament uses to designate the messianic people, the royal priesthood of all believers. To be a layman is to be a kingdom man. It is to be in Christ, called to share in the evangelistic task.

Jerome in the fourth century said, “Baptism is the ordination of the laity.” In other words, everyone who has been baptized has been ordained as an evangelist. To deny this fact is to deny the Church of 99% of its workers. All of the pastors in America, spending every free minute

seeing people in their homes, could only make a small beginning in the task. Most such visits must be made in the evening, and many of a pastor's evenings are filled by church affairs.

The Power of the laity has been called "the greatest untapped force in the Christian Church." The country's worst unemployment problem is its spiritual unemployment. It is a sad thing that many a church has found no better use for the spiritual abilities of its fine members than to ask them to hand out bulletins and cut the grass. There is a dim point to the story of the minister who preached so movingly on Christian service that one of the congregation came to him and said, "You have made me ashamed of myself. What is there I can do for the kingdom?" "Gracious, I don't know," the embarrassed preacher said. "We already have sixty ushers!"

Paul Faust in "Reborn To Multiply" refers to that directive of our Lord that as humans we are to be the parents of children, that God has instilled into man and woman the normal desire to bear and enjoy children. He then goes on to write: "Christians do well to note that our Lord has a similar plan for His spiritual family, the Christian Church. Here, too, he wills that every Christian should have a part in propagating this spiritual family, in bearing spiritual children. Yes, He has instilled into us, who are His family of faith, a natural desire to have and enjoy spiritual children. In a much higher sense He has a directive to "be fruitful and multiply" to all who have been reborn into the family of Jesus Christ."

And it is in congregations where we need to find such desire for spiritual propagation. Congregations, as in the early Christian church, are to be the Spiritual homes which foster such Spirit-born desires; congregations are to be there to nurture the infant faith of such spiritual children which the members bear.

The participation of the entire congregation in the mission of God needs to be emphasized through teaching. The pressures of a self-serving institution need to be relaxed. The structures of our congregations and our practice of the ministry need to be re-examined. Congregations and pastors need to make a renewed study of the New Testament concepts of ministry, the priesthood of all believers, and the scattering mission of God. The end result of such study would prayerfully be that we no longer speak of a minister and his congregation, but rather of a ministering congregation. Since congregational participation in ministry is not merely a matter of sitting in a prescribed number of worship services and meetings, a congregation which formerly had three hundred members with one minister now has ideally three hundred and one ministers.

Working through problems relating to ministry and mission must not be looked upon as merely an academic exercise. The future of millions around the globe is dependent upon the correct solutions being found. Since heresy involves not only wrong teaching of God's Lord but also good doctrine which is not practiced, such study is involved also with issue of faithfulness to our God. Graf in "The Church In The Community" writes; "It is a perversion to structure the congregational organization in such a way as to give the people in the church the routine tasks, that is, the secular operations, technical tasks, while the pastor deals with the specifically Christian work." This is no implication that counting money, bringing the collection plate to the front, and cleaning the communion ware are not ministry. They are acts of ministry, but the laymen are capable of much more if they are equipped.

The issue goes much deeper than merely changing the minister's title from "Reverend" to "Pastor." A congregation which sees itself spoken about by Jesus when He says, "As my Father hath sent me even so send I you," will begin to look for additional ways to minister and will begin to put the pressure on the pastor where it truly belongs—the pressure to make him an effective "equipper" of God's people that they might more effectively perform their ministry.

They will not let their pastor be simply the sermon maker and the participant of every meeting. They will demand that the pastor take time for the work of discipling individuals, of producing the needed teachers, leaders and soul-winners.

When it comes to telling someone about Jesus Christ, confessing one's faith in Christ, and inviting people to trust in Christ, our members are often at a complete loss for words. It is as if they had suddenly become dumb. At best, they will offer an invitation to come to church or to meet the pastor. There is usually no reference to Christ or to salvation.

The development of any kind of art—and evangelism is an art—requires practice be it paintings, playing the piano, or playing baseball. Until we teach the art of opening a conversation, making a transition to spiritual things, and testifying we have not been a very evangelistic people, even though the Word flows in never ending streams from our pulpits.

Unless Christ is presented as the Savior of sinners, there is no Gospel. There is no Gospel without words! There is an interesting story in the Book of Job. When the last of the calamities had struck Job down with miserable boils from head to toe, making him look a horrible mess, some friends came to visit and comfort him by showing their love to him. So they sat down around him silently, shaking their heads with sad expressions on their faces to convey their sympathy. And they tore their own clothes to show how they felt, threw dust on their heads and raised their voices and wept. They were willing to serve Job this way, and others ways too, if by doing so they could help him. They would gladly have brought him a cup of cold water or scratched him where he itched. They wanted him to know that they had not abandoned him. So they sat there by him, the friends did, seven days and seven nights, saying not a word. Presumably their actions should speak louder than words. Yet there is not the slightest evidence that Job found any comfort at all in the silent presence of his friends. On the contrary, when the seven days were over, Job had broken down completely. He was now perfectly ready to curse God and die. That was some mighty effective comfort his friends had brought!

An evangelistic outreach by the congregation which stresses a comfortable or beautiful house of worship, a paved parking lot, a good preacher, an attractive youth program or some similar emphasis is to be faulted. An evangelistic outreach which only emphasized love and concern for people's needs or which merely demonstrates friendliness likewise fails.

Christianity is history; it has come down to us by words. Somebody has to write or say the words. There is no gospel without words, no sacrament either without words, no power and no Spirit without words. That's just the way it is with the Gospel. It is the foolishness of preaching that saves those who believe (I Cor. 1:18-2:5). The words have to go out into all the earth and to the end of the world (Romans 10:5-18).

"Silence is golden," is a common expression. But when it comes to speaking the good news of our salvation, silence is not golden; it is chicken. And likely there is a yellow streak down the back of every one of us. We should not mistake the cause of it, however. The desire to be a witness and the qualifications for being a witness are the work of the Holy Ghost. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses," said Jesus. Surely much of the hesitancy to witness which we encounter is not due to a lack of the Spirit, but to a lack of having learned the art of witnessing.

Pastors in seminary learn the art of public speaking. Teachers learn the art of presenting a lesson. Salesmen are trained to make their sales pitch by presenting their product, asking questions, overcoming objections, and seeking commitments. Similarly the Christian needs training in the art of presenting his faith. He needs some assistance to guide him in handling rather common objections and situations.

Nor are we lacking in approved and tested materials for use in such training. The booklets “Study To Be Witnesses” and “Train To Be Witnesses” are filled with many excellent suggestions. The Manual “Talk About The Savior” offers a fine on-the-job training format. It is an evangelism method which is Biblical; it is understandable; it gets to the very heart of what our Christian faith is all about. Its method of an experienced caller taking with him two others who first only observe but gradually begin to take over parts of the call builds confidence through experience.

Many congregations believe in evangelism in general without believing in any sort of evangelism in particular. They mistrust all the methods. Every evangelistic method the church has used can do great harm, but this is also true of every area of the church’s work. While it is true that a church can be over-mechanized, it is just as true that no great thing can be done without some mechanics. Machinery does not have to kill the Spirit. Ezekiel saw God in a vision of wheels and wheels within wheels (Ez. 1:15-21). But the Holy Ghost was shining through the wheels. This is the test for all church machinery: The Spirit must still dominate the machine.

We live in a mechanized, orderly society. People feel comfortable in the midst of this organization. We respect well-organized institutions; we are critical of poorly organized efforts. We believe in efficiency of energy and time. Likewise we believe that organizational structure can be used in the service of the Gospel. Accordingly we have developed thoroughly organized programs of education on the Synodical and local levels. We establish in our congregations Board for Christian Education and we dignify its existence with a paragraph in the constitution or by-laws of the congregation. We precisely define the responsibilities of this board providing for regular reports to the church council and voters assembly. In our Sunday School we carefully recruit, and train teachers. We give them specific teaching assignments; we assign them a class. Not leaving anything to chance, we supply them with materials and teacher’s guides. We do this in our Sunday Schools and similarly in our Christian day schools without any fear that structure and organization will hinder the work of the Holy Spirit.

We also give constitutional dignity and detailed structure to the financial stewardship of our congregations. We even go to the awesome point of recording the exact financial performance of each member and supplying them with regular reports. Still we insist that our people’s financial performance is the fruit of the Spirit, the response of our people to the love of God in Christ. We even participate in a Synod-wide thank-offering. It is thoroughly structured with film strips, posters, envelopes, reports et alia. Yet we call it “125 Years of Grace”. We thank the Lord that His grace continues to move among us, producing the flow of \$4,000,000.

The Church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel to the world is achieved only in part by the instruction of its own membership and only in part by financial stewardship. The Church’s mission also includes that ministry of the Gospel which we call evangelism, witnessing to Christ in the congregation and the community. It would be a shame to leave this area of the Church’s mission without the services of that structure and organization which are considered beneficial in other areas of the Church’s work. To invest education and financial stewardship with organizational dignity and to leave evangelism without such structure and dignity is to demean the importance of evangelism in the minds of our members. They are used to the idea that anything worth doing in the church is worthy of being done decently and in order. When we risked the loss of being motivated by the love of Christ and the promptings of the Holy Spirit by organizing education and financial stewardship, did we not obligate ourselves to take the same risk with evangelism, which is just as primary a work of the Church? Otherwise we instruct our people to believe that evangelism is just the curious avocation of a few, that it is no real

responsibility of the church, that it is not an activity deserving of the congregation's careful attention and promotion.

In a peaceful society organized activity can flourish. Let's make good use of the stability which God has granted our nation. Let's organize to be witnesses in our communities. That little booklet "Organize To Be Witnesses" has many fine helps. It is just what the busy pastor needs to give structure to evangelism in his congregation.

The Object of Mission Outreach

It is futile to dream of evangelizing people in general. There is no such thing as a person in general. Evangelism never begins until definite people are identified and kept in view. It is easy and cheap to talk in terms of loving the whole world, but we and our congregations cannot love the world if we dislike the unchurched family across the street and do nothing to extend God's mission to them!

Some small town or rural churches have let themselves believe that there are no persons within their area to whom they can successfully bring God's good news of salvation in Christ. Discouraged city churches in neighborhoods where the population has changed often assume that no one who might be brought into their church lives near them. These assumptions come from looking over people's heads rather than at them.

We are too prone to judge by appearances. We say that Jews and Blacks will not have anything to do with us. We say that the family which has been driving past our church for five years surely must not be interested or else they would have come. We say that we would like to help those people with a limited education, but they would probably fit better in some other kind of church. We can be respecters of persons, but things are not as they seem to be. The rich man dies; the poor man dies. The size of their respective funerals and tombstones doesn't matter to the worms who enjoy both equally.

However urgent the need for new churches to serve new communities created by the restless, moving, building people of America, the major task of our church extension is one that does not require the erection of a single additional church building or the organizing of one new congregation. It is to be done rather by intensifying the life, witness and sense of mission of our existing churches.

More than half of the people in the United States make no profession of faith in Jesus Christ. By the thousands they are living on the doorsteps of our churches. For them the terror of sin, the bite of the conscience, the fear of death are just as real as they ever have been for the heathen. In every community in which we minister there is senseless living and hopeless dying. There are people who are suffering the most tragic loss a life can have. They grope and strive and hope without ever turning to Christ, who came to earth that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

We like to think of our churches as established institutions, like banks or post offices—but they are not. They are mission stations, out on the frontier of faith. They are outposts of Christianity, surrounded by the heathen. Our church members are native Christians, living under constant pressure from those who do not share their faith and cannot understand their point of view. When they cross the streets outside their churches, they go over into Macedonia. God sent His love into a heathen world. We bring that love to the heathen of the world.

Conclusion

We have a mission, because God has entrusted us with that mission. God never intended that that mission be fulfilled within the walls of New Testament Churches. Nor did He will that only pastors and teachers be a ministering people and the rest of Christendom be spectators God speaks to His Church. The Church is commissioned to scatter and turn the world up-side down with its message.

But it will do little good to force the idea of mission and evangelism upon our congregations. No fantastic “ninety-day wonder” program will suddenly set the world on fire. When God makes something lasting He usually takes time. Jesus Himself took several years of constant discipling to prepare twelve men for mission. Paul spent three years in the Sinai peninsula learning to know Christ.

To see mission outreach really begin to multiply in your congregation will take time, perhaps several yours. But this is not long. A pastor may for a while sacrifice valuable time in working with individuals and when he does not see progress in a few months may consider the program unproductive. But through continued efforts of prayer, study and meditation; through time spent with individuals in personal training and spiritual building, through preaching and teaching filled with the spirit and love for God’s mission, “a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time” (Isaiah 60:22). May God grant it!