

INTER-CONGREGATIONAL COOPERATION: EXPANDING PARISHIONERS' VIEWS OF
MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

In the strictest sense of the word, there is only one true Christian Church which includes every single person who has been bought by the blood of Christ. In common usage, however, there are countless churches, each separate and divided from the others in visible congregations. How can we as pastors of visible congregations help our congregation members recognize the Universal Church, and broaden their view of ministry with specific application to inter-congregational awareness and cooperation? To find some answers to this question, this thesis will look at commonly practiced forms of inter-congregational cooperation.

But it is equally important to know how to use those tools. Parts two and three will see how two different areas implemented ideas of cooperation in different ways. These examples will show the need to create a culture where everyone is on the same side and working towards the same goal. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to engage the members in working together at a shared task that will benefit all of the congregations.

INTRODUCTION

When the average WELS member hears the word church, what comes to mind? Is it the Sunday service where Christians gather and worship their Lord? Is it the special building that is designated as God's house? Maybe he or she thinks of a whole church body, like the Roman Catholic Church, or the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. A few might come up with the teaching of the Universal Invisible Church, which contains everyone who truly believes in Jesus as their Savior. In practical application, however, most people combine elements of all of these. Yet often, even though they don't define it clearly as such, WELS members come up with the idea that the church, at least as far as it concerns them, is bound up in their congregation.

All of these definitions of church are acceptable in modern usage, and all of the meanings are closely related. It would take only a few minutes thought to take almost anyone through all of the above meanings, no matter which they came up with first. Besides perhaps missing some theological depths to the term, it would seem at a glance that it does not much matter what comes to a person's mind when the topic of church is brought up.

Why then would it matter what a person imagines when thinking of the Church?

While understanding the word church in different ways is harmless in itself, what a person thinks is often fuel for their actions. If someone primarily thinks of Church as the Sunday gathering, then their focus will be on that single hour of worship rather than what goes on the other six days of the week. If Church is primarily the building, then the focus is on keeping the doors open and the lights on.

The view of the Church as only a person's congregation can be especially damaging, particularly to cooperation. This view does not focus on a specific aspect of ministry to the

exclusion of other sections. But it does narrow the focus to only their immediate church family and can blind them to their larger family in Christ. This can lead to an internal focus and the detriment of outreach, expansion, and inter-congregational cooperation.

This narrowing of focus is understandable and can even be helpful insofar as it makes the abstract idea of the Church as Christ's body tangible to them. And for some, their own congregation is the entirety of Christ's work that they can see. This is especially true for isolated rural congregations.

This view especially runs into problems when there is more than one congregation in town. If someone unconsciously views their own congregation as the center for Christ's work in that area, they will tend to have conflict with any other group that would come in claiming the same. This is not so bad when the congregations are not in fellowship with each other. But it can be disastrous when the congregations are in the same fellowship.

Other, less Christian, concerns also rise up. Even though no one wants to be known as a sheep-stealing church, the accusations still come out. Congregations do not work well together if the members feel like they are in competition with each other.

Unfortunately, situations where congregations might accidentally step on each other's toes are becoming more common. Travel times have drastically decreased since many congregations were founded. Congregations that used to be considered distant neighbors are now effectively in each other's backyards. This feeling of competition and sheep stealing is only amplified by the lessening of previous geographic boundaries. It is not unusual to see cars driving past a church building to attend a service at a different congregation in the same fellowship, even though it's further away.

So, what is the solution then? Should the synod forcefully merge any congregations that are now considered too close together? While that suggestion might make a certain amount of business sense (and indeed might be the wisest course of action in certain situations) the logistics of forcing a multitude of mergers would make such a course unfeasible. That is even before considering the lost opportunities that might be brought by poorly planned mergers. Synodically placing hard and fast boundaries for each congregation would be impractical. In the author's opinion, the best plan that can realistically be set forward as a model for all situations is education and training toward the goal of cooperation, and perhaps even interdependence. Both pastors and laypeople need to be willing to work together with the understanding that the other congregation is another part of the body of Christ. That other congregation is working to fulfill the same Great Commission. They are brothers and sisters in faith and work. The question of how to implement this education will be the focus of this study. It will begin by looking at tools that may be useful in building a spirit of cooperation. After that, this paper will look into two examples of inter-congregational cooperation to see some examples of how to use those tools.

CURRENT INTER-CONGREGATION COOPERATION

The Most Common Forms of Inter-Congregational Cooperation

Inter-Congregation cooperation is not a new concept, even if the necessity and perceived blessings of it have grown with time. To lay the groundwork for a deeper look into specific examples of congregational cooperation, this paper sorts such cooperation into three main types. The first and broadest form is Synodical cooperation, where the cooperation is not directly between two congregations but a large body in general. The second form is federational cooperation, where multiple congregations come together for something not inherently linked to a single member congregation. The third and narrowest form is direct congregational cooperation, where individual congregations are the ones making decisions and taking action.

Synodical Cooperation

Arguably, the earliest form of inter-congregational cooperation can be seen in the pages of Scripture in Acts 11:28–30. “One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. [...] The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” Paul even praised the Macedonian Christians for their overflowing generosity in 2 Corinthians 8. From the times of the early Church, Christians had a spirit of concern and support for their brothers and sisters throughout the world. They were more than willing to join together and donate for a relief project, as we would call it in today’s language.

Though travel was much slower than today, the individual congregations would not have been isolated. They had contact and interaction with the whole of Christendom. The Roman road system allowed for traveling preachers and missionaries, the exchange of letters, and projects like the collection for the Jerusalem Christians. All these factors united the early Christians despite the distance between them.

A number of these are carried on even today. Guest preachers are a familiar sight in many pulpits. Magazines like *Forward in Christ* inform parishioners about issues and ministries across the world. Projects announced in the monthly *WELS Connection* give churches the chance to contribute to the needs of their brothers and sisters across the nation and even other countries. One recent example of such a project was the campaign to gather funding for the Vietnam Seminary of the Hmong Fellowship Church.

This sort of cooperation has been going on in our Synod ever since the founding congregations decided to dedicate themselves to walking together. This form of cooperation does expand the view of ministry as a reminder of the larger body of believers, and we give thanks for the blessings we receive through it. It is ideal for achieving large projects. The cooperation it offers, however, is generally recognizable as different from the sort practiced in the other two forms. Though these projects and communications involve the cooperation of the congregations in a broad sense, the focus tends to be on the assembled congregations as a synod instead of the individual congregations. Put another way, Synodical cooperation has relatively little focus on how the congregations interact with each other, and much more focus on the congregations united as a single group. It can be a helpful first step towards a congregational cooperation mindset, but it will likely not bring anyone the entire way or immediately quell hard feelings of

competition. But this unity cannot be underestimated. The feeling of “being on the same side” that it brings is often the foundation for more personal forms of inter-congregation cooperation.

Federational Cooperation

A step more personal than Synodical cooperation are projects done at a federation level. The most clear and obvious example of this kind of cooperation is the support of area Lutheran high schools. Many area Lutheran high schools are not supported by a single congregation, but instead are supported by a federation of multiple local congregations. Unlike most synod-wide projects, area Lutheran high schools are a place where multiple congregations do not just contribute to the same distant goal, but children of the congregations actually mingle and members at times even work side by side with members of different congregations in the federation.

Unfortunately, practicality limits the effectiveness of using federation schools as tools for growing a spirit of cooperation in WELS congregations. Throughout the whole of the Synod there are only 27 area Lutheran high schools¹, and those schools are not distributed evenly. Most of them are in the Mid-West, where there is the highest concentration of WELS churches that could help support a high school. Hypothetically speaking, a congregation in Wisconsin could be sending their children to Fox Valley Lutheran, Kettle Moraine Lutheran, Kingdom Prep Lutheran, Lakeside Lutheran, Luther High, Manitowoc Lutheran, Northland Lutheran, Shoreland Lutheran, Winnebago Lutheran Academy, or Wisconsin Lutheran. Contrast that with a congregation in the Dakotas, where the only choice for WELS high school education is Great

1. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Book of Reports and Memorials 2019*. (Waukesha, WI. 2019) 49.

Plains in Watertown, SD, on the eastern end of the state.² The children may all gather there, but parents on the western end of the state likely won't have many chances to be heavily involved with the school or other congregations in the federation. Not every congregation will have equal access to an area Lutheran high school to gather around, nor necessarily have the same level of interest. It is a tool for fostering cooperation, but it should not be the only tool.

Area Lutheran high schools are one excellent example of congregations coming together in a federation to achieve a specific goal better than the individual congregations could do by themselves. Christian education is always an excellent point to gather around, but the concept of gathering in a neutral federation need not be restricted only to that. Smaller, less official groups can be formed to do projects in the community, provide a service for members, or any number of other options. Even having cross congregational social gatherings for mutual encouragement would be a sort of federation cooperation. The ROC in Watertown, WI is an excellent example of this, as will be seen in part three.

Federational cooperation is, in some ways, the easiest way to do a form of congregational cooperation. It can be used for many sizes of projects. The federation is neutral ground. It is formed with the understanding that the group is something separate from the individual congregations and will only act for the specific goal of the federation. Forming or joining a federation does not need to change anything about the way the congregation operates. This makes it easier for members to take the step and cooperate. Even if members are not interested or active in what the federation is doing, they are aware that the congregation is part of that federation. A bridge is still built to help connect that member with the work of the wider church.

2. WELS.net "WELS High Schools." <https://wels.net/serving-you/christian-life/education/lutheran-schools/wels-high-schools/>

Direct Congregational Cooperation

Direct congregational cooperation is when the congregations in question take action together without a buffer. Unlike a federation, which is something separate from the congregations, this direct form is tied in with the regular workings of each of the member congregations. Thus it is harder to point out. Most of the time this form of cooperation is more informal. More often it consists in unspoken agreements, rather than constitutions or bylaws. It can encompass anything from sharing a space for activities, to drawing soft boundaries for where the congregations can evangelize or what type of people that the different congregations will focus on. An example of this will be examined in part three.

Similar to federational cooperation, direct cooperation is often begun by the congregations rather than the leadership or presidents of the districts of the synod. Unlike a normal federation, this form of cooperation is continued primarily or exclusively by the affected congregations, rather than putting the management in the hands of a third party (such as a school board). This can make direct cooperation more personal, and in a way, more difficult. Cooperation of this sort is more prone to difficulties without a higher body to give the final word.

For many congregations, this is the area in which they most need to grow. Their church is an important and emotional thing to them, and anything that might be perceived as an attack or invasion can make them defensive. Ideally, every member would grow to a point where they would be willing to act to help members of another congregation at no benefit to their own and be willing to receive help from neighboring congregations without offense.

Multi-Parish and Multi-Site Ministry

In addition to the general outlines of cooperation detailed above, there are some particularly interesting forms of direct cooperation that require special mention: Multi-Parish and Multi-Site. These two seem to be opposites at first glance but can sometimes end up at effectively the same place in terms of congregational cooperation. Both can be helpful. But if either of them is not done well, it can paper over a problem while the real issue continues to fester. This paper will look into specific examples in part two to see how multi-site can be done well.

Multi-Parish

Multi-Parish ministry is more and more being considered when an established congregation and community is too small by itself to support a full-time pastor. This has become more common, especially in rural areas, as families move away to look for jobs. In some places there are even tri-parishes and at least one quad-parish where one pastor serves three or four different congregations. This is different from a single congregation with multiple sites or a preaching station in addition to their church. While those are one body in multiple places, a multi-parish has the pastor serve multiple distinct congregations, often with their own councils and budgets.

In terms of practicality, this allows congregations to split the cost of a full-time minister. This set-up can also serve as an official vacancy call at a time when there is concern over pastor supply. In terms of inter-congregational cooperation, having one pastor for multiple congregations can be an effective method of fostering a spirit of cooperation. Even though cooperation is not its primary goal, it might help foster a spirit more accommodating to other

congregations. In that way it is superior to extending a part-time call to a semi-retired pastor who would serve a single congregation.

Multi-parish ministry is not normally organized with the sole intention of increasing cooperation between congregations, but it does so as a side effect. The inconveniences of multi-parish ministry are actually one of the more prominent reminders of the other congregations. For example, it is not physically possible for the one pastor to be in two places at the same time. Both congregations cannot each have their Sunday services at 8 AM. Each congregation is forced to consider the schedule of the other congregation when planning meetings or events of their own.

These inconveniences will usually have one of two effects: Either a parishioner will become closer to the other congregation and become more understanding of their needs, at times even attending church at the other congregation, or the parishioner will remain dedicated to a specific congregation or location.

To give a concrete example of this, there is a tri-parish in South Dakota where the author guest preached. It consists of two smaller congregations in towns A and B, fifteen minutes apart from each other, along with a larger congregation in C, a little under an hour away. The pastor does one early service at either A or B, alternating between the two on a weekly basis. He then drives to town C for the late service. The expectation is that those in A and B would attend the early service in whichever place it is held that week. Sadly, the members from A would drive out for services at B, but the members from B would not often drive out to A.

There is also the emotional issue tied along with cooperation in a multi-parish setting. For a number of congregations, becoming part of a dual parish can seem like a failure, as will be seen later in the analysis of St. John's considerations towards consolidating with Christ Alone. They

can feel like they are “giving up” on having their own pastor and have become nothing but a glorified preaching station. This is especially true if a larger and more active congregation is also part of that parish. Some may feel like the pastor is not theirs and is just serving them as a permanent vacancy. Others may simply be uneasy at any kind of change, even if it is necessary. Not everyone will feel that way, but it is something to be aware of. Continued Bible study, Sunday school, and fellowship events held in the building can help somewhat to dispel the feeling, but there is no magic solution.

Multi-Parish ministry is a useful tool for congregations that cannot support a full-time pastor on their own, and a viable alternative to calling a retired pastor. It can lead some to widen their views and be more willing to work with the other congregations whom their pastor also serves. It can also cause some to feel that the church is dying and begin to circle the wagons. Care must be taken, as in most things in ministry.

Multi-Site Ministry

Multi-Site ministry is where one congregation with one overseeing board has an established and permanent presence in multiple places. Another term used to describe this is “Split Campus,” which perhaps is a better description to describe the philosophy behind it. It is supposed to be “one church with two locations,”³ as it is most commonly used in WELS.

Multi-site ministry is an adapted form of “daughtering” a congregation. The major difference is that rather than a new independent congregation being formed, it is the outreach of

3. Brian Hackmann. *Ministry Outside the Box: A Study of the Split Campus Trend in WELS Parish Ministry at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. (WELS Essay File. 2006), 3.

an established congregation into a new location. There is no plan for the new location to become independent; instead it is an extension of the original. In his thesis on the topic, Troy Schreiner defines it in the broadest scope as, “One church, meeting in multiple locations, sharing a common vision, budget, leadership, and board.”⁴

There are multiple flavors of multi-site ministry that can be used separately or together depending on the situation of the congregation. Technology can be used to beam a sermon, a whole service, or even more out to a separate church outpost. A congregation can partner with a business and share its facilities. The new location might even be made to seem like a carbon copy of the original location. There is a great deal of possible variety that can be used to fit into a variety of situations.⁵

One particular form of multi-site ministry is worth special consideration. A number of congregations have begun to record, or to even stream, worship services. This allows the sick, homebound, and geographically distant to have a greater connection with the congregation. That connection is rather limited, though. They can hear and see the service, but usually not interact with it. That is why Northland, a non-denominational congregation in Central California, decided to try a new paradigm of ministry that they called a “distributed church.” They hold multiple live worship services per weekend with special internet ministers to care for the online worshipers. Furthermore, later on they also opened “distributed sites” where members could join in on a single worship service from multiple locations through two-way video connections.⁶

4. Troy R Schreiner, “THE BLESSINGS OF PROPERLY APPLIED MULTI-SITE CHURCH PLANTING IN THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD,” 2014, 6.

5. Schreiner. 7-8.

6. Heidi A. Campbell and Michael W. DeLashmutt, “Studying Technology and Ecclesiology in Online Multi-Site Worship,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 2 (May 4, 2014): 271–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2014.903662>.

Part of what led them to focus on their distributed sites is a view of the church as a body of people, rather than a building or location. Unfortunately, their worship emphasizes a feeling of connectedness based on a shared emotional experience, rather than a shared mission and message.⁷ There are, nevertheless, still some interesting lessons that can be learned from them. They put considerable effort into maximizing the use and connectedness of their technology. They have multiple ministers ready to help in the online services that they hold, as well as in person at their distributed sites. They take great pains to allow as many people as possible to have access to one service at the same time to foster a greater feeling of connection. Above all, they intentionalized the use of technology to build and aid connectivity. They did not merely create a framework and assume that technology would do the job of connecting everyone as a single congregation. Any WELS congregation that takes the leap to online services needs to remember that technology is a tool, but it needs to be used well. Poor effort leads to poor results.

This also needs to be remembered about multi-site ministry in general. It is a useful method, but the method alone is not what automatically brings in more members. Multi-site is still an adapted form of daughtering a congregation. It is a solution for an overcrowded congregation. It is a tool for growth and outreach in a healthy congregation, not a cure for a shrinking congregation. The congregation already needs to be willing and active in reaching out to their immediate vicinity before they try to expand elsewhere.⁸

Multi-site ministry can, however, be used to serve struggling congregations in a different way. Some congregations began multi-site ministry as partnerships with struggling congregations that effectively merge with a larger congregation. Two in particular were Bethany

7. Campbell and DeLashmutt, 278-279.

8. Schreiner, 7-8.

in Kenosha and St. Andrew in Middleton. The locations that would become their second sites were originally independent congregations that were faltering. The move toward a merger in a multi-site setting eased the financial burden significantly on both sides of the exchange. Furthermore, it opened the way for more outreach into Kenosha and Middleton with more backing than the previously struggling congregations could provide by themselves.⁹

These two examples are especially interesting to a conversation about inter-congregational cooperation. In essence, this sort of multi-site ministry incorporates a different congregation into itself as part of its expansion. If done well, both the parishioners of the healthy congregation and the one merged are naturally brought together to work as one team. It could be an amazing eye-opener and train the congregation always to keep in the mind the history and needs of their brothers and sisters.

If done poorly, however, mergers of this sort can fail utterly to integrate the two congregations. It may leave a troop of the “old guard” that only worship in their own church building and unconsciously treats the situation as if they were part of a dual parish. A joining of the congregations on paper does not automatically mean that the people will act as if they were always together. It is important to communicate and welcome everyone into the new single congregation at every location involved. Christ Alone is an excellent example of this, as will be seen in part two. WELS’ Commission on Congregational Counseling also offers the Merging for Mission Program for that reason. It helps congregations to see the importance of merging for the right reasons and with the right mindset, as well as helping with the needed steps for a smooth transition.¹⁰

9. Hackmann, 5-6.

10. WELS *BORAM* 2019. 34.

The same sorts of problems can still arise even when there is only one congregation in multiple locations. Communication is always essential, especially when there is one pastor or leader who is responsible for the second site, and has limited interaction with the main site which would be served by its own pastor. The idea of the “face with the place” has its benefits and should not be discarded, but the vision of the pastors at the separate sites can conflict if they aren’t communicating.¹¹

Poor communication can be a problem that affects laypeople as well. Multi-site ministry can require a great deal of lay support to do well, depending on what style of multi-site is being used. This is an incredible opportunity to increase lay involvement, if the congregation knows what needs to be done, and where. Having multiple locations complicates the issue, since there may be cases where a person who primarily goes to one site is the one with the skills to solve a problem at a different site. Regular reminders of the church’s vision and clear, intentional communication is necessary to focus everyone on the work of the church as a whole, rather than focusing on the location and ministry that they normally interact with.¹²

Despite all of the possible flaws and pitfalls that can bring down a multi-site ministry, it is still a useful option for outreach. It can also open the eyes of parishioners beyond the familiar faces and buildings so that they remember the universal church. It can remove strain on a congregation that has outgrown its worship space. It gives a solid reminder to both pastors and parishioners to remember that they are not alone. More than that, to even get off the ground it requires members to expand their vision beyond themselves.¹³

11. Schreiner, 38–39.

12. Hackmann, 11.

13. Schreiner, 39–42.

Collective vs Individual Ministry: Kendal Cook's Thesis

A review of inter-congregational cooperation in the WELS would not be complete without looking at Kendall Cook's 2015 thesis on a similar topic of collective vs individual ministry. He examines two different styles of ministry for multiple congregations in close proximity. His paper asks the question: "Is there a better form of ministry for those congregations which exist in close proximity to one another." He contrasted the individually declining congregations of Dodge County with the Mequon-Thiensville congregations that were moving towards forming the collective congregation of Christ Alone.

Ultimately, though he does not wish to say that it would always be the best plan in every situation, he holds forward the vision of a collective church as something to at least be considered. He notes many smaller benefits, such as fuller pews, a larger choir, and a combined budget that would allow for more substantial projects. These smaller benefits pale in comparison to the increase in efficiency, though. As just one example, instead of multiple pastors spending fifteen to twenty hours writing and memorizing a sermon each week, there would only be one pastor doing so. This allows the other pastors to have a much freer schedule, so they can focus on their particular area of service. That would result in over two thousand hours a year that could be dedicated to evangelism, counseling, or continuing education.¹⁴

This form of ministry is not without its difficulties, though. It is, in essence, a variant of multi-site ministry that is formed from multiple existing congregations willingly joining together.

14. Kendall Cook, "COLLECTIVE VS. INDIVIDUAL MINISTRY: A LOOK AT A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO MINISTRY FOR MULTIPLE CONGREGATIONS IN A SMALL AREA," 2015, 29–32.

All the normal difficulties of multi-site apply double, and more besides. Because the congregations are usually relatively stable, they do not necessarily feel the same pressure to join a collective ministry. Those congregations have history, and many members are proud of that history, for better or for worse.¹⁵ Unfortunately, that pride can blind. As one of Cook's interviews said, "Understand that congregations, in general, are generally selfish."¹⁶ The people of every congregation need to be roused to look outside their own bubbles. Unless careful instruction is taken first, the root problem will not be addressed.

Even further, there is also the issue of personal control. Many smaller congregations feel that if they consolidate, then they will be swallowed up into a larger whole and their opinions will cease to matter. Again, careful instruction, and a detailed plan will often be necessary before even attempting to put this into practice.¹⁷

Cook used the developing project that would become Christ Alone as his example. When he wrote his thesis, the plan was still in the formation and education stage. Changes would inevitably come as the plan was put into practice. To gain the most benefit, this paper will also look at the practical implementation of these plans. This will give an opportunity to see how one congregation handled the issues that arose in their efforts for inter-congregational cooperation. After observing the strategies used by Christ Alone, the congregations in Watertown, WI, will also be examined to see how their different ministry settings led them on different paths.

15. Cook, 15.

16. Anonymous interview, via Cook, 18.

17. Cook, 20.

A LOOK AT CHRIST ALONE IN 2019

Methodology of Research

Research on the studied congregations was done primarily through interviews. Those interviews were augmented by congregational statistics from the WELS Yearbook. These statistics help to paint a more complete picture of the specific context of ministry for these specific congregations that helped to lead them to adopting this form of inter-congregational cooperation. The pastors of the congregations in question were interviewed first, due to the possible sensitivity of the issue. After the pastors were interviewed, the president of the congregation and other members suggested by the pastors were interviewed to receive their perspective on specific issues.

The Current Situation

In the years since Kendall Cook wrote his thesis the process of consolidation has gone forward with Calvary and Trinity south consolidating into Christ Alone. At the time of writing this paper, Trinity west and St. John have declined to join the consolidation. They have over a thousand baptized members, and over eight hundred communicant members.¹⁸

18. Taken from the 2019 WELS Yearbook.



Membership at Calvary has been rising steadily overall. Their long-term growth is driven by consistent adult confirmations and confessions of faith. Their school confirms enough children to consistently outpace burials. Transfers in and out are typically close enough to each other that they come out equal in the long term.

According to the congregational statistics, the consolidation into Christ Alone did not add all of the one hundred and fifty communicant members from Trinity south at the same time. A simple explanation would be that members transferred in different years. An alternate and unfortunate explanation is that a number of Trinity south members declined to join Christ Alone in the consolidation. A similar thing is happening at St. John's and their own consideration of consolidation with Christ Alone. A number of St. John's members have gone elsewhere because they prefer the feel of a smaller congregation and think that St. John's would be forced to consolidate. Both are likely parts of the truth; some might have transferred membership early, and others might have gone to another congregation that they felt would suit them better. Not everyone will agree with consolidation, no matter how well the benefits are explained, and their fears denied. All that can be done is to continue reaching out while still strengthening and training the saints gathered.

The original plan was for all of the pastors of the participating congregations to remain in the new consolidated congregation. With Calvary and Trinity south, this would lead to having three pastors serving the new congregation. Unfortunately, Pastor Weinrich of Trinity south was unable to continue serving in the ministry due to a vocal cord infection and was forced to retire early. At the time of writing, Pastors Ebert and Scheuerlein serve the new congregation as the two full-time pastors. The work Pastor Weinrich would have done is covered by the two pastors, and Pastor Weinrich's salary is used to pay for four part-time positions in the United Christ Alone. These positions are parish administrator, property manager, worship coordinator, and member ministry coordinator.¹⁹ The parish administrator takes care of the administration work that often is given to the pastors, freeing them to do other work. The property manager takes care of the eleven buildings at the two sites. The Worship Coordinator helps with choirs and planning worship to take another responsibility off of the pastor's plate. The most interesting and rare position is the member ministry coordinator. She organized a church database with the interests and gifts of the members of the consolidated congregation and would come up with names of possible volunteers for whatever job or position would need to be filled. Whoever needed the service would know who to ask and contact. This was of particular use because of the consolidation brought together many members that the board doesn't know well yet. The woman in this position has since stepped back but left an organized database that will help find volunteers and keep members positively engaged with the congregation.

One interesting aspect that played a part in setting the proper tone of the consolidation was the changing of the name. The fear of a number in the former Trinity south was that they would be absorbed into the larger congregation and outvoted, so that their voice would not be

19. Interview 2.

heard. There were some in the former Calvary who thought that the change was unnecessary. While the gesture was largely symbolic, changing the name indicated that this was not meant to be an absorption, but the creation of an entirely new congregation from the two joining.

In addition to these ministry positions, Christ Alone also restructured the boards of the congregation which Calvary used to have, the school board, the property board, and the board of elders. The feeling was that responsibilities tended to be unevenly distributed. The board of elders was being tasked with most of the issues, since they weren't school or property issues.²⁰ When only one group was working on most of the problems, many problems didn't receive the time and attention that they needed.

To begin with, they established a Consolidation Building committee, that is, a committee dedicated to building an appropriate structure for consolidation. To figure out what structure would work best for their needs, they made a list of what needed to be done and tried to find a way to evenly divide their ten largest issues appropriately among a group of sixty volunteers. The board considered how to best handle issues such as finances, property, areas of ministry and member involvement in the framework of a single consolidated congregation. Eventually they decided upon a structure made up of three boards and four committees: The Board of Finance, the School Board, the Board of Elders, Member Ministry Committee, Spiritual Growth Committee, Properties Committee, and the Evangelism or Outreach Committee. They also have other minor sub-committees, such as the Worship Committee under the Board of Elders. They are planning to remain flexible and add more if situations call for it.²¹

20. Interview 2.

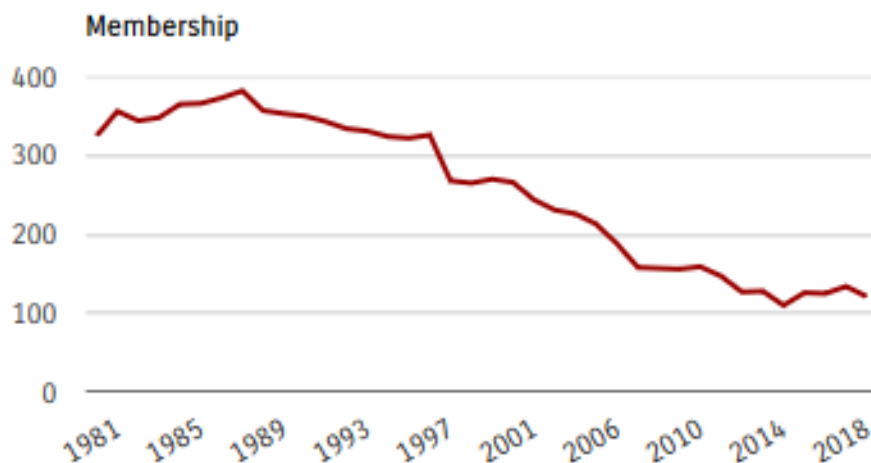
21. Interview 2.

Christ Alone has two campuses, Calvary, and Trinity south. In the planning of the consolidation, they made it clear that no property was going to be sold in the first five years. As the consolidation has gone on, any desire to do so even after the five years has seemed to decrease. Both locations are in regular use for their own unique benefits. Thursday worship and Bible study are held in the smaller Trinity south campus, which is better organized for a smaller worship service and feels fuller than the Calvary campus would with the smaller crowd. The basement of the Trinity south location is frequently used for youth group gatherings. Christ Alone school makes use of the soccer fields and larger green space of the Trinity south campus. The Calvary campus, meanwhile, hosts the main school building. It is also the location of the two Sunday services that the congregation holds. The worship and fellowship areas are much more spacious at the Calvary campus than Trinity south and is thus preferred for larger events.

In addition to their work with the officially consolidated congregation, Pastors Ebert and Scheuerlein are also serving the congregation at St. John's East Mequon after Pastor Koehler accepted a call away in January of 2019. As the circuit pastor, Ebert agreed to serve them in any way possible. He suggested that they let Christ Alone serve them for a year, and then after a year to revisit the issue of potential consolidation with Christ Alone.²² Discussions are still in progress at the time of writing.

St. John's has been slowly declining, like many WELS congregations. As of 2018, they had just over one hundred and twenty members, with just under one hundred communicant members. That is down significantly from over two hundred and sixty members in 2000, with two hundred twenty as communicant members.

22. Interview 2.



The congregation has decreased to less than half of its size twenty years ago, or around a third of its size forty years ago. They consistently have a few infant baptisms every year, at about the same rate as funerals. They usually have one or two child confirmations per year. They have an adult baptism or adult confirmation every other year or so. Unfortunately, those are far less than the amount of people that drift away from the congregation.²³

Christ Alone's Philosophy of Ministry

Christ Alone's specific vision statement is, "to know Christ, and to make his love known in our families, communities, and nation." To complete that goal, they worked to better manage time and ministry to better reach out and educate.

From the beginning, Christ Alone has structured itself to solve issues that need to be resolved more efficiently and to build the body of Christ as much as possible with the blessings that God has given them. Their philosophy is to improve in fulfilling the needs of the

23. 2019 Congregational Statistics.

congregation better and deeper with more efficiency than before.²⁴ Part of that vision is realized in consolidation. Prior to considering consolidation, the pastors of the four congregations had organized their efforts through a joint ministry Facebook page. They tried to work together for advertisement and to generally avoid stepping on each other's toes. Their inspiration for consolidation was the question of what could be done if the original five pastors in the area were to combine efforts more closely. With only one pastor working on creating a sermon how much could the other three do with the time that they would otherwise have spent writing?

Unfortunately, they did not see the results to that question as pastor Weinrich was forced to retire early and the other congregations declined to join the consolidation. The most visible benefits that they seem to be enjoying currently is not the extra work that could be done, but that a vacancy has not been created from the absence of a pastor. While perhaps not ideal, this benefit is undeniably practical when graduating seminary classes have been smaller than retiring seminary classes.

Consolidation also brought together fractions of groups that would have been too small to justify meeting if they were in scattered congregations. One example would be the Ladies Aid. Calvary had formerly not been able to have a Ladies Aid, while Trinity south did have a group. The consolidation doubled the attendance for the group, and it was a blessing from the point of view for both congregations.

Additionally, a note must be made that consolidation was brought forward for the reasons detailed above, not for financial reasons.²⁵ While finances are inevitably a part of the equation, the focus was on improvements to ministry. Looking at it from a financial viewpoint only is far

24. Interview 5.

25. Interview 5.

too narrow, though it is an issue that is at the front of the mind for some.²⁶ Financial needs are necessary to consider, but the vision for Christ Alone has finances as a means of spreading the gospel instead of a goal in itself.

Another way that this vision plays itself out is in the emphasis on lay involvement. As detailed above, they have reorganized their lay leadership to better distribute responsibility and avoid burnout. This helps to bring in members from both sites into a single body together. Furthermore, it encourages them to take personal and active ownership of ministry in the new consolidated congregation. The focus on lay involvement also has a practical side-effect. It helps by clearing the pastor's desk of some responsibilities that don't need a pastor. In smaller congregations especially, there are many tasks that a pastor simply does, even if someone else could have taken care of it. This increased lay involvement allows the pastor to focus more on other aspects of ministry.²⁷ This is especially helpful in their current situation, as they work to best utilize the blessings of both congregations while also filling the vacancy at St. John's. Two pastors cannot do everything that four pastors in the three congregations did previously. Even if they thought they could, it would not advance the ministry for them to spend their time that way.

Prime Ministerial Concerns

The prime ministerial concern facing Christ Alone at the moment is the question of how to handle consolidation. This concerns both the already established one between Calvary and Trinity south, but also the possibility of adding St. John's to the consolidation.

26. Interview 6.

27. Interview 5.

The consolidation between Calvary and Trinity south became official in 2017.

Consolidation on paper does not immediately bring true unity between two groups of people with different histories, though. There is history and pride in both camps. There are compromises that need to be made, even though sometimes people from one camp do not see the need. An example would be the location of services. There are a good number of members who have a strong connection to a location and service. When the Thursday night service and Bible study were moved from the Calvary campus to the Trinity south campus, not everyone followed. The same holds true in reverse with the lack of Sunday services at the Trinity south campus. As a member originally from Trinity south observed, “People hang onto history. [...] Where you go to church and what the building looks like isn’t really... We have to be careful not to elevate that aspect of thinking, because that’s not where God exists. God does not exist in that statue that you have just seen since you can remember. [...] People’s lightbulbs go on at different intervals...”²⁸

Additionally, there is the question of whether St. John’s will join Christ Alone or join Trinity west in a dual parish partnership. Originally, the congregation voted against joining with Christ Alone at its founding. The vacancy prompted them to take another look at their situation and to reconsider consolidation. A prevailing spirit is that consolidation is only a more preferable alternative to bankruptcy. As one member put it, “All think we have to [consolidate] because of financial reasons.”²⁹ They feel that consolidation would be absorption and destroy their particular culture. They are afraid that the casual family-oriented style of St. John’s would be replaced by corporate formality. Most talks have been formal, and the primary contact with

28. Interview 3.

29. Interview 6.

Christ Alone throughout the joint worship trial has been through the pastors.³⁰ The congregation is divided, and the talks are still ongoing.

Other supporting ministry concerns for Christ Alone are Christian education and continuing outreach. They are working on improving education through all of the Christian life. They are working on internationalizing outreach in the early childhood center, improving education at the day school, supporting the teens with the youth group, and improving stewardship of the adults with the Ten for Ten program.³¹ In everything, they are aiming for continued growth and excellence. They are willing to act and move forward to reach in and reach out with the Gospel to make Christ known in every opportunity that God has given them. And that is an attitude worthy of emulation.

Planned Solutions

The congregational president of Christ Alone had an interesting observation,

A lot of our pastors, well, all our Pastors are exceptional shepherds, but they need to learn to be better ranchers, and be able to overlook the whole process. Not taking away from what they are trained to do, but, kind of be at the five-thousand-foot level. 'I'm touching souls, but you guys are doing the whatever, the day to day business end of running a one thousand communicant congregation.' Or a fifty-communicant congregation, or a twenty-five-communicant congregation. Let us do what we are trained to do.³²

There are some things that need to be driven primarily by the congregation, not the pastor directly driving the congregation. Consolidation especially can be helped if pastors step back and

30. Interview 6.

31. Interview 4.

32. Interview 4.

let the members of the new body work between themselves casually, provided the right atmosphere has been created.

There are tasks that pastors do, especially in smaller congregations, that they take on primarily because of efficiency. Someone has to do it, and it is faster for the pastor to do it than hunting down someone to volunteer. The pastor is typically the one who is expected to take responsibility for many things. If something gets bottlenecked, it tends to be on the pastor's desk.³³ Christ Alone has undertaken a dedication to lay involvement, which can go a long way to helping create a sense of unity. They intentionally made sure that members from both Calvary and Trinity south were present on councils.³⁴ Consolidation was not just a fancy word for a hostile takeover, so they worked to make sure that the members from Trinity south felt that their voices were heard. On the other hand, consolidation was not a fancy term for a dual parish either. Both sites belong to members from Trinity south just as much as they do to members from Calvary, and they are expected to take ownership and participate in the life of the congregation.

This need for lay involvement would also seem to apply in the consolidation considerations with St. John's. One of the greatest fears of the members there is that they will be absorbed. As one member said, "Right now St. John's is a friendly family-oriented church not like the large corporate style of Christ Alone."³⁵ When asked about what changes could be made to make consolidation easier, he replied, "A friendly atmosphere between the congregations."³⁶ A consistent theme that came out in his responses is that the only interaction is through the pastors. Ideas and plans have come from the pastors. Talks have been through the pastors. When

33. Interview 5.

34. Interview 2.

35. Interview 6.

36. Interview 6.

asked about the Joint Worship Trial, he responded, “We are doing that right now, but the only relation-building has been with the pastors.”³⁷ It seems that they are feeling like outsiders to Christ Alone, and interactions with the pastors alone are not bridging the gap.

These feelings echo a sentiment from the congregational president of Christ Alone.

When we were first talking about consolidation, I know the pastors were talking, which was great, but I would have spent more time, I think, talking with congregational members. St. John’s is uncomfortable. Pastor Scheuerlein and Pastor Ebert have done a great job reaching out to them. I believe Pastor Ebert has gone to all of their council meetings. We have invited them to our voter’s meetings. They’re a small church, we’re a big church. We’re formal, they’re not so formal. But one of the mistakes I feel we made early on was not having more meetings between the council presidents over a drink and just said ‘what are you afraid of? What are your congregational members saying?’ I believe that people don’t like to be pushed or pulled, but people like to be escorted. And I can’t help but wonder if we couldn’t have sat down as believers, not pastors, and just talked about what people are feeling.³⁸

Consolidation is two congregations coming together to make a new body. That union will hopefully last longer than the pastor’s ministry at that congregation. Pastors cannot establish a union that the congregation does not want. If a congregation is not on board with consolidation, it won’t get off the ground. It would be wise to have the congregation actively involved in consolidation considerations.

Of course, this is not a silver bullet. These more casual interactions can also be more dangerous without a moderating influence. There is a great deal of emotion and history at stake in the minds of some people. A member from Trinity south recalled how some members brought up events and opinions from fifty years ago when talking about consolidation.³⁹ People tend to keep themselves more in check and avoid saying certain things in the presence of a pastor. That

37. Interview 6.

38. Interview 4.

39. Interview 3.

can be both good and bad. It can moderate a discussion, but a pastor's presence can also keep people from speaking up about a concern that they have.⁴⁰ While it obviously won't be right away, there does come a time when it could be more beneficial for the pastor to step back and let the congregational leaders work over their issues as brothers in the faith.

History, or people's perception of history, also plays an essential part in consolidation. Effective cooperation is only possible if everyone feels that they are on the same team, and history is often what people use to decide that.⁴¹ If two congregations feel that they aren't on the same side, it will be near impossible to lead them to see that all of them have the same goal. If the two sides do not look toward the same goal, then it would be foolish to expect them to think that they could work together.

Historic grudges need to be gently removed. Sometimes its as simple as reminding everyone that the people who wronged the congregation in the past are very likely not who they are negotiating with.⁴² Other times it might be helpful to let both sides speak for themselves to remove any false ideas.⁴³ Perhaps most importantly, undue pride in the congregation as an organization instead of as a servant needs to be broken down. Proper pride is instead rooted in following and serving Christ and focused on the same goal on the same side as the brothers from the other congregation.

40. Interview 4.

41. Interviews 2, 3, and 4 all mentioned the importance of reminding everyone that they are on the same side. The wording is a synthesis of their emphasis.

42. Interview 3.

43. Interview 4.

THE CONGREGATIONS OF WATERTOWN, WI

Methodology of Research

The information of this section is compiled from interviews done with the pastors of the congregations in Watertown. These interviews were supplemented by papers from the essay file that went into more depth on the history of the congregations and projects in question.

Current State of the Congregations in Watertown

Considering the amount of Wisconsin Synod history tied up in Watertown, it is to be expected that the town would be a stronghold of WELS. Not many, however, would expect the form that would take. In a synod often characterized by small country churches, Watertown is home to four large congregations, three of them with membership over one thousand.

The situation of the congregations in Watertown is markedly different from that of Mequon-Thiensville. While the congregations are not equal in size, all four are at least fairly large and definitively self-supporting. All four congregations have a Lutheran Elementary school associated with them, with Trinity and St. Luke's working together in their school. This is unlike the situation in Mequon-Thiensville, where only Calvary had a Christian day-school out of the four congregations and was the single "large congregation" of the group.

The history and context of ministry in Watertown is drastically different from that of Mequon-Thiensville, which is why it was chosen as the balancing example for the latter. Application differs from context to context. By comparing and contrasting the applications in these two varied situations, the underlying principles can be better highlighted.

Trinity Lutheran

Trinity Lutheran was originally started as an English-speaking mission of St. Mark's. They are the smallest of the four congregations in Watertown.



Their membership as of 2018 was over six hundred, with five hundred and fifty communicant members. They reliably have a few adult confirmations or professions of faith per year. For the last decade, they have consistently had more funerals than baptisms per year. They support five teachers for Trinity-St. Luke's school.⁴⁴

St. Luke's Lutheran Church

Their partner congregation, St. Luke's, is the oldest of the four congregations, though the congregation officially joined the WELS much later. The congregation was formed sometime

44. WELS Yearbook 2019.

before 1849 and originally organized under the name “The Evangelical Church of Watertown.”⁴⁵

The Evangelical Church of Watertown was not confessional, nor were they interested in joining any synod. They would hire any preacher that was Lutheran, Reformed, or Evangelical. Their dislike of the state church likely played a part in their bold 1849 decision that the congregation would never join any kind of church body.⁴⁶

Their position against joining any church body was first swayed under Pastor Heinrich Fack when he pushed for them to join the Protestant Association in 1862 and ‘64. Nothing resulted of it at the time, though the idea was planted.⁴⁷

The pastor that was hired after Fack, Pastor Hoyer, led the congregation into fellowship with the Society of the Free Evangelical Protestant Church of North America. The congregation dropped out of the society two years after joining, possibly because Pastor Hoyer had left the congregation. After that, the congregation remained independent from any larger congregational body until joining the WELS in 1966, despite being in fellowship with St. Mark’s since 1911.⁴⁸ Their history as an independent congregation for so long has given them a distinct perspective from most congregations in WELS. They have the spirit of an outlier, and tend to be more laid-back, more flexible, less formal, and less traditional.⁴⁹

In terms of numbers, St. Luke’s has been steadily growing. They serve over sixteen hundred members, with over twelve hundred communicant members.

45. Heuer, Preston T. “The Long Journey of Independence to Find a Home: St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI.” Seminary Essay File. 2010. 2.

46. Heuer. 2.

47. Heuer. 7.

48. Heuer 9, 19, 13.

49. Interview 7.



Baptisms per year usually exceed funerals. Their outreach is bearing fruit in a crop of adult confirmands usually over five per year. They support six teachers for the cooperative school with Trinity.⁵⁰

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

St. Mark's was formed in 1854 by Pomeranian immigrants who wanted to avoid the doctrinal laxity of congregations like the Evangelical Church of Watertown but couldn't accept the rigid confessional doctrinal stance of the Old Lutherans that made up St. John's. Instead these German immigrants formed their own congregation under Rev. Christian Sans, an eloquent preacher without seminary training or strong Lutheran convictions.⁵¹

Through an act of providence, Johannes Bading was called to serve two splinter congregations in the Watertown area at the same time that Sans was removed from his position

50. WELS Yearbook 2019.

51. Fricke, Thomas J. "A Tale of Two Churches: The Early Years of St. Mark's and St. John's in Watertown (1852-1860)" Seminary Essay File. 1983. 5-6.

as pastor at St. Mark's. The congregation saw his ministry and recognized his abilities. They called him at the same meeting that they dismissed Sans in 1860.⁵² If Bading began his work a few months later, it is likely that St. Mark's would have settled down with another doctrinally indifferent pastor. Without Bading it is unlikely that St. Mark's would have joined the Wisconsin Synod, and Watertown might not have had any significance for WELS.

St. Mark's is one of the largest congregations in WELS, currently serving over twenty-five hundred members, with over twenty-two hundred being communicant members. They are active in outreach and bring in many new confirmands. They have been in decline since 2005.



Their baptisms easily exceed their yearly funerals, and their mission work consistently bears fruit with adult baptisms, and numbers of adult confirmations/professions of faith ranging from the mid-twenties to near fifty new adult communicant members. The decline in numbers since 2005 seems to be primarily driven in the “removals” category of losses. Every year since 2005, they have had double digits in the category. In 2008 and 2009 they removed over a hundred members each year. Their school has twelve teachers.⁵³

52. Fricke. 12.

53. WELS Yearbook 2019.

St. John's Lutheran Church

St. John's was organized in 1851 by a group of Old Lutherans looking for Orthodox Lutheran worship in Watertown. They joined the Missouri Synod within a few years of their founding.⁵⁴ They remained with the LCMS for over a century, before they finally broke fellowship in 1971. They joined the FAL (Federation of Authentic Lutherans) as part of their effort to call the LCMS to repentance, but the FAL soon dissolved. When their efforts to reform the LCMS proved fruitless and the FAL dissolved, they naturally joined the WELS in 1975.⁵⁵

St. John's currently has over eleven hundred members, with roughly nine hundred fifty communicant members.



St. John's does not consistently have more baptisms than burials. They usually have a few adult confirmations or professions of faith every year. Their school has eight teachers.⁵⁶

54. Heuer. 3-5.

55. Ertl, Jordan. "To Whom Shall We Go? An Interview with Eugene P. Kauffeld Regarding the Split of St. John's Watertown with the Missouri Synod." Essay File. 2010. 2-5.

56. WELS 2019 Yearbook.

Philosophies of Ministry and Prime Ministerial Concerns

Rather than attempting to combine into a single body to better cooperate their efforts, the churches of Watertown seem focused on improving their own niche of ministry independently while cooperating for larger projects. A significant part of this is the scale. There are only so many people that can fit into a single service, and only so many services that can realistically fit in a weekend. Trying to have one pastor do services for the combined membership of all the congregations would simply be impractical unless an expensive new building would be constructed. Furthermore, it would be incredibly difficult to minister to a congregation of that size. Just learning the names and faces of all his parishioners would be extremely difficult for a pastor, even more so than it is in a congregation of only one thousand. One pastor made a comment that the churches in Watertown are already big, and don't need to get any bigger. He went on to say that some people even feel that no congregation should even exceed two hundred and fifty communicants before daughtering a new congregation.⁵⁷ If the congregations all came together, there would perhaps be some gains in efficiency, but that might easily be outweighed by a loss in effectiveness.

Instead the congregations seem to choose to generally cooperate by diversification and focusing on a niche. The pastors made no mention of any formal agreements for general ministry during interviews, implying that organization is largely informal when it comes to general ministry. To give an example of this niche focus, St. Mark's is focused on Hispanic outreach. They are the only congregation of the four to have a Spanish service, and the congregation is doing their best to reach out to people that no one else is.⁵⁸ Another example would be St.

57. Interview 7.

58. Interview 1.

Luke's. They are focused on creating a small church feel to worship in a larger church setting. They have treats for before church, work heavily on member care, are working on creating smaller shepherding units, and even started to encourage and support members in forming other smaller ministry groups.⁵⁹

While the congregations do not often directly cooperate, they will frequently work together for projects separate from the congregations. All of the congregations support Alpha Resource Center (ARC)⁶⁰ and the Recreation and Outreach Center (ROC). They have recently also formed a board that is intended to help better coordinate the congregations.⁶¹

The congregations are not hostile to each other or territorial per se, but there is a feeling that the congregations need to be careful of stepping on each other's toes. A pastor relayed an anecdote where one of his congregation members was trying to reach out and invite people to the congregational picnic. It turned out that one of those that was invited was already a member of a different congregation and almost took offense at the invitation.⁶² The people know their own congregations, and with rare exceptions, stick to their own group.⁶³ A way to describe it might be that they view members of other congregations as cousins, but not necessarily brothers and sisters. They are family and they will gladly work alongside them at times, but there is a bit of distance between the groups.

59. Interview 7.

60. The ARC started as WELS Lutherans for Life, changed its name to Christian Life Resources in 1999, then to Alpha Life Resources in 2001, before it changed its logo and name to the current ARC in 2019. Alphalifecenter.org.

61. Interview 7.

62. Interview 8.

63. Interview 1.

History plays a minor but present role in the ministry efforts of the congregations. On the positive side, a proper pride in their orthodox Lutheran heritage helps to tune the ears of every generation to the wonderful truths in the scriptures. On the negative side, history can send a congregation into a rut. Traditions can be carried along simply because they are traditions, whether they are helpful or not and whether people understand them or not. Ideas can be unduly vetoed since, “we tried it before and it didn’t work,”⁶⁴ without acknowledging differences in times or execution. History can make members hesitant to commit to changes, because they haven’t done it before. History can either unite people and congregations around a common confession or divide them by maintaining historic rivalries and hostilities.

Cooperation in Practice

The Watertown congregations do not have the same sort of needs from inter-congregational cooperation as most congregations. They can fill most of their needs by themselves because of their size and the culture of their setting. If a pastor needs support, he can find it from either his fellow pastors who serve at the same congregation or the many members of his congregation, some of whom are retired pastors.⁶⁵

All of that does not mean that there is no formal cooperation, though. To give one example, St. Luke’s and Trinity operate a shared elementary school. There are some jobs that are either better achieved with everyone working together or are only feasible with that kind of joint effort. Another example of the former would be how they rotate pastors holding services for

64. Interview 8.

65. Interview 7.

nursing homes. The pastors of each congregation could hold services for their own members in the nursing homes every week, but that would be rather inefficient and consistently take up a great deal of time and effort. Instead of separately serving only their members, they cooperate to rotate between the congregations for who does the nursing home service each week.⁶⁶

An example of the latter would be the ROC. The youth center itself was imagined as a joint project between the four congregations to fulfill a need in the community.⁶⁷ The funding and board of directors are all distributed between the four congregations.⁶⁸ The location is not attached to any of the congregations. The director is dedicated to the ROC solely, he does not have responsibilities with any of the congregations.

Aside from the director, the ROC is staffed by volunteers from the four congregations. From a congregation cooperation viewpoint, this creates a place for the members of different congregations to rub shoulders as they work together in ministry. They are constantly seeking out new volunteers to help out so that the workers do not burn out. This actually helps to build cooperation in a natural way. Even if one congregation could get the operation off the ground, the decreased pool of volunteers would raise the stress level and ultimately lead to a worse experience for the teens. And it is important to note that the ROC is active and intentional in both reaching out with the gospel through their service, and also involving laypeople in that work. It really is a way to bring the community together and closer to Jesus in the same action.

In general, the congregations of Watertown have less need for direct congregational cooperation because of their size, but they are actively involved with federational projects that

66. Interview 1.

67. Arndt, Shaun. "The History of the Watertown Recreation and Outreach Center: Connecting Teens to the ROCK through the ROC." Essay File. 2004. 5.

68. Arndt. 13.

are separate from the congregations. Even if the congregations do not often cross paths directly, they still eagerly work together for the advancement of the gospel. The members of the congregations do not all have a sense of extreme closeness with members of other congregations, but they are willing to work together.

CONCLUSION

Inter-congregational cooperation comes in multiple forms, with some of the most useful for cooperation being federational cooperation, multi-parish, and multi-site. But these tools must be used properly. The specific form and type of cooperation best for a situation will be determined by the abilities and needs of the congregations in question and their specific context. Lifting Christ Alone's style of cooperation would not work in Watertown. Combining just two of the Watertown congregations would be more likely to exacerbate issues than to solve them. The reverse is true if Christ Alone tried to imitate the federational style of the churches of Watertown without changing anything. With Christ Alone as the one "large" congregation in the area, there exists the definite temptation to either feel that the smaller congregation is getting crowded out of the joint work, or that Christ Alone could handle all the work alone.

What the approaches of both have in common is the intentional use of lay involvement, and the carefully considered use of efficiency.

Christ Alone has gone further than the congregations of Watertown. Not only have they intentionalized and encouraged lay involvement, they hired someone to help invite people to participate in the work of the congregation. This is partially out of the necessity of their situation. Consolidation brought in fresh faces and gave the opportunity for a recommitment to intentional involvement by the lay members of the congregation. It might be helpful for many congregations to follow their example and take the time to create a database of talents and interests of the communicants in order to help with involvement. The congregations of Watertown take a slightly looser approach, but they have more opportunities to serve alongside others.

There will likely be times when the pastor might need to step back from a project to allow the lay members of the congregation to truly take ownership of the work and play their part in ministry.

The issue of efficiency is one that needs to be carefully considered. What might seem to be more efficient at first glance could be revealed as detrimental given more consideration. However, it is an issue that needs to be faced for the good of the congregation, especially with the smaller seminary classes and vacancy rate. Efficiency can open the way for a much more focused ministry and allows more time to be spent on other aspects of ministry.

Areas for further study include communication between the leadership of the church and the congregation. Originally the topic was touched upon as part of communicating the vision of the church to its members, but that hid surprising depths. Another possible area of study would be the effect that called worker training schools can have on the surrounding churches. Seminary professors played a part in the consolidation work at Christ Alone. Professors at Martin Luther Prep contribute to the abundance of guest preachers in Watertown and attracts many retirees that affect the culture of the congregations.

Ultimately, the goal of these efforts is simple. As one pastor said at the conclusion of the interview, “Treasure the brotherhood.”⁶⁹ These are brothers and sisters in the faith. The congregation is only a single part in the whole body of Christ. Church is not just a building with walls, but every Christian together working to share the good news. Treasure that brotherhood.

69. Interview 7.

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