

ROUSING THE SLEEPING GIANTS: A LOOK INTO THE SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP OF
MEN

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is aimed at the discipleship of males who did not have a strong model of spiritual leadership in their early lives (Practical Theology). There are numerous studies on training men up in a Christian way from a young age, but they often presume having strong male leadership already in the family. How does a man know what to do if he did not experience male spiritual leadership in his family as he was growing up? I want to research what churches and church-related organizations are doing, synthesize the information, and then attempt to tailor and package it for our WELS settings.

In view of the father's crucial role in passing on the faith and in view of many fathers not being trained as spiritual leaders, my research seeks to find the best methods to take adult men who do not know how to be spiritual leaders and train them to be spiritual leaders in the areas of personal spiritual growth and family spiritual growth.

INTRODUCTION

Why do we have so many backdoor losses? Why are so many marriages in shambles? Why are teens slipping through our fingers? I suspect the biggest factor is that men are not being strong biblical spiritual leaders in their household.

What is the genesis of this problem? Adam was passive when a snake was talking with his wife! He should have stepped up and shut down the conversation the moment God's good will was put into question.

We see this trend continue in the life of the patriarchs. Why does Abram tell Sarai to lie about their marriage in Genesis 12:11-13? It would be like going to a bar and telling your wife to take off her wedding ring. Abram is asking his wife to protect him when he is called by God to protect his wife. This leads to his wife being taken out of his hands and Abram ends up rebuked by a pagan. Abram's lack of spiritual leadership leaves his witness to the Lord severely diminished. What a strain on Abram's marriage!

Another notable scene of poor spiritual leadership happened when Abram went along with his wife's plan to produce an heir according to the social norm of surrogacy instead of telling his wife to continue to trust and wait for God's plan. Abram thought that this would placate his wife, but it only compounded the matter. Sarah started abusing Hagar, a pregnant woman, to the point that Hagar ran away. Abram was again passive in this situation; he was complicit in abuse. This is shown to us by the name the angel of the Lord prescribes for the child, Ishmael (the Lord hears). The angel gives us the specific rationale for that name as well. "And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the Lord has given heed to your affliction" (Genesis 16:11, NASB). We hear the angel of the Lord (preincarnate Jesus) tell Hagar to return

and submit, but we do not get to see what her return to Sarai looked like. Why should Abram and Sarai listen to Hagar's story? The Lord had given her the gender reveal! And the God-given name was a double-edged sword. It was a call to repentance for Abram and Sarai but a comfort to Hagar. Abram had failed to be a spiritual leader in this part of his life, but he repented as he gave Ishmael this God-given name that was a cutting rebuke against his own behavior.

Despite these shortcomings, Abram is still the father of all who believe. However, we strive to keep ourselves from making such egregious mistakes and strive toward the faith that trusts that God will raise our sons to life. But how can we attain this if the fathers, the men of our congregation, are not taking up their God-given roles? How can we guard against being sleeping men, who fail to stand up to the spiritual forces of evil that lurk and subtly turn us away from God? What can we do to bolster our weak flesh?

As we see this in ourselves, how can we help those lukewarm men in our congregation and move them from begrudgingly placating their wives by going to church to the point where they are the one initiating home devotions and the like? How can we get them to see that they are spiritual giants? To try to answer these questions, I have interviewed three pastors, one layperson who specializes in the whole welling of man, and one layperson who specializes in culture change. By recording my interviews with them, I pray that I will challenge some of our cultural norms and give you ideology and tactics for fostering a culture in your congregation that leads from men who are sleeping to men who are spiritual giants.

METHODOLOGY

I conducted my research by interviewing three pastors and two laypersons. I asked each pastor the same list of questions.¹ While I reiterated these questions for the laypersons, I did not have them answer directly because the questions were directed towards pastors.

Each interviewee was contacted via email. I told them who I was, what my thesis was, and why I wanted to interview them specifically. I sent them a questionnaire that outlined the structure of the interview with specific questions and an Informed Consent Form, which gave a summary of my thesis and the consent to record the interview to be deleted later after the contents had been gleaned. It also allowed the interviewer to use the name of those interviewed and their contents. When a person agreed to be interviewed, I set up a time to interview them via Zoom. There were no incentives for the participants to participate other than their personal interest in the topic. Each request for permission was not under pressure but was voluntary. All interviewees gave permission for the interview to be recorded, and all gave permission for their names to be used in this paper. Each interviewee signed and dated the form. A copy of the blank form can be found in Appendix II.

The questionnaire that I sent to the three pastors was identical. I wanted each of them to ponder the same questions. This gave me a point of reference when comparing their answers. I

¹ The questions are listed in Appendix 1

presented the questionnaire to the two laypersons but I did not make them follow it strictly. The laypersons I interviewed had methods that I wanted to apply to my findings, so asking them to strictly answer my questions would not have proved fruitful.

I sent the questionnaire ahead of time so that the participants could read through it and have a thought-through response. My hope was that this would lead to a productive, high-quality interview.

FINDINGS

In this section, I share what I gleaned from each interview as it pertains to helping men to become Christian spiritual leaders or enhance their leadership. I will note if the interviewees concur with each other or if they differ in opinions. I interviewed pastors from different ministry settings. I interviewed one foreign missionary, one pastor who has a multi-site ministry, and one pastor of a standard² Midwestern congregation.

Interview 1 Rob Wendland (World Missionary)

In my first interview I wanted to get outside our American mold and see if the issues we face regarding the spiritual leadership of men are ubiquitous. I decided to interview a man who served recently as a world missionary. To start off the interview, I asked Wisconsin Lutheran

² All I mean is that it does not have any special status like new mission, home mission, multi-language, etc.

Seminary Prof. Robert Wendland³ what overarching cultural aspects affected men being spiritual leaders in Africa.

Prof. Wendland lamented the lack of church attendance by many African men. It was not all bad, as he noted “when I would have a family that worshiped all together, the husband, the wife, their children, that was probably, I would say 40-45% of the time.”⁴ This trend led to an elevated level of involvement by the women of the congregation to the point that they had formalized groups. Prof. Wendland explained: “So historically, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa, both in Zambia and Malawi, has a very strong women's ministry in the congregations. And that has been really formalized. They have meetings, they have district and even synod conventions that the women will get together on.” While we might bemoan the fact that the men are not generally taking up their role as spiritual leader, we could be happy that the women are being strong spiritual leaders and getting the job done in lieu of their husbands. But Prof. Wendland highlighted another issue,

And so, while the women are really getting involved in the congregation, we couldn't really count on the men to be carrying out a lot of aspects of ministry outside the congregation. Now, that being said, traditionally men have a cultural position of authority over women in Malawi, in Zambia, But if you had leaders...in the congregation who were tasked with the various ministries of the congregation all the way from choir to Sunday school to the various boards and committees on the congregation that would all usually be staffed by men usually in the rural areas.

And so when the men gathered together to do the business of the congregation, or when the congregation gathered to do its business, it was the men who were participating there. And it became an issue in my later years because the men would decide things and the men would say, “This is the way that the congregation will be going,” but who were the ones who worshiped more faithfully? It was the women. So then the men come together, and you say the men in the congregation need to make a decision or we have the equivalent of a voter's meeting, the men would make the decision. And then many of

³ Prof. Robert Wendland grew up in Africa while his father was a missionary there. Later he himself also served in Africa, but is currently serving as a Professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

⁴ Robert Wendland, interviewed by author, Mequon, WI, 10-18-2022.

those men, for whatever reason, weren't faithful in regular Sunday-to-Sunday worship or even other opportunities during the week. It's the women who were. And so, more and more women were saying, well, at least we should be present to hear what men are saying because in prior times the women would even be dismissed.

This is an interesting problem. When the time came to make a decision in the congregation, the inactive men would be making all the decisions typically without any input from the women who were the ones mostly running the ministries on the congregational level.

Our conversation shifted towards culture affecting the formation of men as they are growing up. A steady field of instruction could be found in confirmation until the age of “manhood.”

And what was the real problem? Sometimes it was because the young men had gone through their initiation rites and then the church had problems with their initiation rites because they're very, if not syncretistic, very pagan. They had initiation rites both for boys and for girls. But after they would go through the initiation, boys become men, girls become women, and then they sit separately in the congregation. Women sit on one side and the men sit on the other side together. So they're not even usually sitting together as families. In the rural areas, I think it was less than 1% where I would see a complete family unit worshipping together on a Sunday morning.⁵ They would always separate men's side and women/children's side.⁶

Even though the youth had less cultural baggage in regard to spiritual formation, the entrance into manhood was not far off and once that happened it could create an artificial barrier. This even played out in Bible study.⁷

⁵ I asked Prof. Wendland later in the interview about why they didn't have specific men's ministry. “I think because they naturally aggregated into the two groups, men, women to the point where oftentimes I wouldn't know that a man and a woman are married, they would come to church at different times, they would sit in different places in the congregation. The children aren't going up to Dad like they're going up to Mom.”

⁶ Wendland, interview. “Men and women were very separate, no public displays of affection in any way whatsoever publicly. That can only be done in the cover of darkness. Not even holding hands.”

⁷ Wendland, interview. “So in Bible study it would become more of a challenge. You are teaching and the men will want to answer because they're supposed to be the ones who have the answers, but sometimes the women have the better answers. So it was trying to figure out how do we respect both aspects of culture where maybe I can just be an ignorant white guy. And whereas if they had a Malawian, the Malawian would be expected to know that you just call on the men and you don't call on the women because that's just what you do. But I could say, oh, I'm

The advantage of African culture is that the men seek and want to be the spiritual leaders of the congregation, Prof. Wendland talked about the dynamic of working with these leaders in the church who see the local or foreign pastor who can come in read the Scripture lesson and expound without any notes.

And so local leaders want to be able to do the same thing or otherwise they're going to be seen as inferior. But then the sermons that they preach can often be very legalistic in their bent because they haven't done a lot of the study that they need. So I became very patient in trying to work with these men and figuring out, all right, I don't want to crush them completely. I'm glad that they're coming, number one. Number two, I'm glad that they're able to lead. Number three then I want them to be able to lead in a biblical, in a gospel-centered way.

Another strength of this culture is that men know how to be leaders in general, but this leadership does not always translate to orthodox spiritual leadership. It begs the question, how do you work in this delicate balance where those who are acting and accepted as spiritual leaders are incompetent?

Prof. Wendland led by example in various ways. He introduced a model sermon book. He got the congregations to allow for two sermons to be preached⁸, and in this way, he could listen to the other leader who would be acting as pastor⁹ when Prof. Wendland would be absent going to other bush churches. Since the other pastor would be preaching Prof. Wendland could hear what he was saying, and since it was important to have a big meal for a guest pastor, Prof.

just an ignorant white guy. Even though I knew that's the way it was supposed to be because I wanted the voice of the women and I wanted to hear what the women had to say and to contribute.”

⁸ Imagine our churches not having two services but two sermons that everybody stayed for!

⁹ Wendland, interview. Sometimes he would be the president of the congregation and sometimes he would just be a man that the congregation asks because he's eloquent or has education.

Wendland would have time to talk to the other leader about what that leader said in his message.¹⁰

In addition to preaching, all preparation, teaching, and church business needed to be carried out. Prof. Wendland would teach confirmation, Bible study, and carry out necessary meetings, but then he would leave instruction for men leading the church in his absence. This involved reading sermons and carrying out meetings. But this did not always happen according to plan as the men were weaker leaders in spiritual affairs. So some congregations adopted the following model:

And then later, some congregations got smart, and then they would allow me to work with the men. But then they would also have a woman come in afterwards, one of the women leaders in a congregation, and then she would say, all right, give me a summary. What are some of the things that you told the men? And then they would hold the men accountable while I was gone and they could use the authority that I have. You told the missionary this, so when are we going to be doing this? And it wouldn't be seen then as a woman trying to take authority that a man has.

Accountability seems to be something that most men need to fight against the old Adam. Here we see that women had to be accountability partners but in a non-authoritative way. They referenced the missionary's title and authority, not their own, to remind the leader to accomplish the tasks that were assigned to them.

I asked Prof. Wendland, "What would you do if you had a magic wand and could have anything in your African congregations?" He had a few congregations that had a couple solid men, but the synod was lacking pastors, so he would always recommend them for the pastoral ministry. Instead of doing that, Prof. Wendland would hope they could stay in their local congregation and be trained more organically so their spiritual leadership was not missed.

¹⁰ Much like we do in our homiletics class sermon reviews.

So I walk through them with that¹¹ and there were a few men who really caught on and became solid leaders in the congregation. And so my magic wand would be that there would be at least 1, 2, 3, 4 of these guys would be able to work together and resonate off one another and then when the missionary would come or the pastor would come, that they would have a substantive discussion. And then you're sort of doing your localized pastor training in each congregation rather than taking them away to go to Lilongwe or Zambia for the next seven years.

What his magic wand is getting at is having a group of strong male laity that can also work with one another.¹² “And that's what is really missing in a lot of our African congregations. You might have individual strong personalities in each congregation, but being able to gather together as a team is kind of rare.” Having a team of strong men who work with and support their pastor is a challenge. As talented guys are recruited to the pastoral ministry, it can create a leadership vacuum into which another man steps with this paradigm: “The rural paradigm is that when you have a man who is put in charge of something, he often rules it kind of like a chief and then my way is the right way and you don't question me, you don't criticize me.” Because of these situations, rural pastors often butted heads with local leaders. The local pastors did not always have the best finesse in these situations. “The easy way for our national pastors to go is to lay down the trump card. I am the pastor; I am the authority in the congregation.” This often led to hostile rather than evangelical discussions.

I asked Prof. Wendland how he would arrive at that magic wand scenario if he were to return to Africa. He said that he would identify those boys whose mothers take them to church

¹¹ Wendland, interview. “I would be talking to the local preacher and I would ask what he said today and how it went. What things do you think could have gone better? Let me look at that text again. And I wouldn't put it in terms of this is law, this is gospel or this is malady, this is cure. But my questions were leading in that direction. Where do we see here, what's the problem that we see that God is condemning?”

¹² Baucham, Voddie Jr. *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 30. It is good for us to note that this is how God designed the church to work. “In Titus chapter 2 that the gifts of godliness and maturity are not only for individual believers but also for the church for the purpose of discipling and mentoring.”

and choir.¹³ Get to them before they reach manhood and plug them in the male leadership in the congregation. Start getting to know and nurture them individually, but then bring them into leadership meetings and place them where you think they fit best, e.g. evangelism.

This is the dynamic in some parts of Africa. While quite different from American culture, we will see that there are some parallels to ministry in the United States.

¹³ Wendland, interview. "Taking these people who participate in choir when the kids are young--in some congregations it was a hundred percent, every kid over six. Between six and 15, 16, everybody is there. It's just what you do."

Interview 2 Ben Berger (Men of His Word)

There are a few annual conferences in WELS for men. One of them is Men of His Word. Parish Pastor Ben Berger (St. Paul, Winneconne, WI) is currently one of the men responsible for it. I interviewed him.

First, I asked Pastor Berger about Men of His Word to see what it has to offer in men to help them be spiritual leaders. He pointed me to their purpose statement. “Men of His Word equips Christian men to take a leadership role within their family, within their congregation, and in their community.”¹⁴

Their game plan:

1. Host men’s conferences that bring men together to discuss relevant issues and equip them to lead.
2. Develop and share resources for both individuals and groups to challenge men in their homes and congregations.¹⁵

These goals are worthy, but I wanted to see if this is what they are practicing and if it is having the desired outcome. So, I asked whether Pastor Berger thought that the group is succeeding in that goal. He outlined what a conference looks like with roughly 16-18 different breakout sessions on topics like marriage, parenting, anger management, personal management, leadership in the congregation, and leadership in the community. Pastor Berger agreed with me that it is hard to quantify whether the conference is having its desired outcome but pointed me to the expansion of the conference as well as its unique content as possible evidence of its success.

¹⁴ <https://www.menofhisword.org/>

¹⁵ <https://www.menofhisword.org/>

Before COVID we had over 700 men coming. With COVID, we did a virtual year and then last year was I think was in the four hundreds. And so we're working on building our numbers back up...between the three¹⁶ we've reached well over a thousand men and if nothing else, it raises awareness for the need for male leadership and the training to be a male leader. It is also unique in the type of content it brings...But I will say it's succeeding in the sense that it's engaging hundreds of men. And from that point, I don't think there's anything else in our (synod) that's as large or as specifically directed towards men... It gets beyond the typical congregational men's ministry that is thought of in two ways. It's a men's Bible study, but that might not be specific to men or it tends to be fellowship among men.¹⁷ Instead, this conference specifically gives male leadership training. And I think the conference accomplishes that.¹⁸

I asked whether he would augment anything about the conference. "One of the challenges that the leadership group has been wrestling with for years is it's great to have a conference once a year and it lasts pretty much the whole day.¹⁹ How do we help congregations to get to the next level, which is the local ministry? How do we help congregations establish an ongoing men's ministry?"²⁰ Pastor Berger shared that part of men's ministry is fellowship, like shooting skeet, but we do not want to stop there. "Men's fellowship is great, but I think it still falls short of the leadership training aspect."²¹

I asked if the conference connects people to join a church group for further growth.

Pastor Berger responded "Not real directly. I think that in all of the different breakouts, there is an encouragement to take what you've learned and apply it. And as I said, some of that's

¹⁶ Now there are three locations: Oshkosh, WI; Phoenix, AZ; and Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁷ It is content that could be for anyone but the group happens to just be men.

¹⁸ Ben Berger, interviewed by author, Zoom, 10-20-2022.

¹⁹ So it's once a day, once a year.

²⁰ Berger, interview.

²¹ Berger, interview.

more go and apply this at your home.”²² This comment led to this further statement about male leadership, “I really think that male leadership starts at home and not necessarily in the congregation. I believe that in the past they've tried to have some breakouts or discussions that were directed more at how to help guys begin a men's ministry in their church. But I'm not sure that really has ever come to fruition or had anything come out of it specifically.”²³

Pastor Berger talked about major cultural problems with implications for male leadership. One example is the emasculation of men in conjunction with feminism, this trend was highlighted in shows like the Simpsons, Family Guy, and the like.²⁴ Author Robbie Low says this in the same vein, “You cannot feminize the church and keep the men, and you cannot keep the children if you do not keep the men.”²⁵

Pastor Berger also mentioned outsourcing, “Children are not growing up with their dad teaching them how to throw a ball²⁶ This may be related to another cultural problem, which is the willingness of men to be relegated to the background. “It is that old Adam in all men.”²⁷ Pastor Berger also mentioned business but felt that was more of an excuse than the real issue. “You can be in a church with clear boundaries concerning the family responsibility in multigenerational discipleship, a clear understanding of the gospel, and a commitment to a catechetical approach--

²² Berger, interview.

²³ Berger, interview.

²⁴ Berger, interview.

²⁵ Low, Robbie. "The Truth About Men and Church." Touchstone, June 2003, 33.

²⁶ Berger, interview.

²⁷ Berger, interview.

yet still families do not catechize due to the most powerful foe of them all. I'm speaking of sloth. When the rubber meets the road, we're just plain lazy."²⁸ We see that in the end, sloth is a killer.

Because Pastor Berger said leadership starts at the home and not necessarily in the congregation, I gave him a scenario. A man marries one of your members, goes through Bible Information Class (BIC), but does not ever become particularly interested. And so he's maybe not going to start being a leader at home because he just thinks, why would I do that? So in that sense, do you see the need for a congregational group, a strong congregational group to be exist to then pull that guy in and show him this is what men do? Pastor Berger answered, "I think this is where we're lacking as a synod."²⁹ ... So your scenario is great. Somebody comes through BIC. I have to confess, I'm not sure that my BIC has enough intentionality built into it, specific to being a spiritual leader."

Pastor Berger highlighted the issue of mothers with husbands who are not interested in leading the family in a spiritual way, so the mother is acting as the spiritual leader³⁰, but there are also those who don't want to join our church; they just want the youth programming. What do we have to do to create spiritual leaders at home? "Ideally that would be the father or the husband if it'd be the man as God's designed it...I don't think we have anywhere in our synod where we're doing that BIC, Bible study, Sunday school. And I think it's often every pastor encourages their people to do home devotions." Pastor Berger did not think that encouraging home devotions goes far enough in making spiritual leaders out of men. He wondered if even our pastors have learned this particular habit.

²⁸ Baucham, Family Shepherds, 70-71

²⁹ Berger, interview. "I'm along with everybody else because I haven't figured it out either."

³⁰ We will not get into all the exceptions of broken homes in this paper.

“But where do we learn how to do that?... Has anybody ever taught you? We learned at seminary you learn how to do exegesis and prepare a sermon. You and I learn how to do teaching for Bible study and you're encouraged to do personal devotion, but where do we ever learn how to do it?³¹ And I think that's actually the beginning of the male leadership at the home. I think 1 Timothy 3:4-4 implies that.”

Pastor Berger wondered if our BICs or premarital counseling courses are lacking the specific training men need to effectively serve as the spiritual leader of their house. “The one place that I find I have the most opportunity to do any of this is pre-marriage classes. And then at our church, we do a baptism Bible study before we do any baptisms. And so that gives us a chance to talk about the, here's what God does in baptism, but here's the follow-up. And we get to talk about home devotion and whole life and spiritual life and those scenarios. But other than that, it's just not formalized.”³²

What are some possible ways to model spiritual leadership for the men of our congregations? I brought up doing home visits with every family. Pastor Berger responded, “Home visits are always going to be the best because it's one-on-one attention. There's a reality there. I've never gotten to that point...I think that would be an effective place to start. However, I would also say that there is an important value to the group.³³ And so ideally, maybe it would start with a home visit, but then that would lead into connecting men, in this case, to a group that

³¹ Berger, interview. “Especially if it is not modeled in the home you grew up in.”

³² Berger, interview.

³³ Berger, interview, talking about another pastor who actually visited every home. “He said the problem he noticed was they might have done it for a week or two, but then they kind of trailed off.”

is going to both encourage them, train them, and hold them accountable.³⁴ Some potential strategies in ministry include: monthly men's meeting where men are trained in four key areas (three months for each area), family discipleship/evangelism, marriage enrichment, children rearing, and lifestyle evaluation.

Such a plan could also utilize monthly shepherding calling and an annual home visit call. Elders and pastors would be in charge of this calling/accountability process.³⁵

While Berger would like the family to be the starting place for spiritual leadership, the church also plays a role, and I asked Pastor Berger what he is currently doing at church for families, especially training male leadership. "I have revamped Sunday school at my local congregation. We got rid of the age segregated classes taught by volunteers, and I call it Family Impressions. It's based on Deuteronomy 6. The whole model of my Sunday School now is meant to train parents with the emphasis or encouragement on the dads to lead home devotions." He uses a version of Luther's four strands and the built-in catechism in the new hymnal. What does it teach about God? (What quality of God is being emphasized)³⁶ How does it lead you to confess your sin? How does it point you to Jesus?³⁷ What does the Holy Spirit want you to believe or do?³⁸ Pastor Berger does this with each family sitting as a unit working on answering

³⁴ Berger, interview, talking about a pastor who gathered small family groups to help them continue doing home devotions. "And he asked their permission to text them every day to ask, what did you do today spiritually? And he tried to keep the expectations low. He said, it'd be great if you could read the Bible and have a devotion every day. But at the very least, the encouragement is to say the Lord's Prayer and the blessing. And in the text, all he wanted them to respond was yes or no, thumbs up, thumbs down."

³⁵ Baucham, *Family Shepherds*, 181-183.

³⁶ Berger, interview. He thinks most people naturally skip over this question.

³⁷ Berger, interview. He tries to steer people away from always saying he died on the cross. He tries to steer them to Jesus' active obedience. What sin did he resist or what did he do?

³⁸ Berger, interview. How is this going to change your life?

these questions together and then reporting to the group as a whole. He does this with the intention that now the family can do the same thing at home.

Pastor Berger has received a certain amount of pushback from starting this model. “There's a huge resistance and pushback because there's a culture shift where the people have learned, oh, this is your job. Why are you asking me to do it? But that's the whole problem is that that parents are not leading in the home.”³⁹

I asked Pastor Berger if he thought a group outside the church setting that encourages home devotions (an accountability system) would be better than a formal church group, because a church group will potentially pigeonhole faith life to church and not the home.

Pastor Berger answered, “So I think that it needs to work together...I think that the best thing that the pastors could be doing beyond preaching and general teaching, Bible studies, catechism, whatever it might be...is actually the training of leaders. I have another concept running around in my head, concept number one. The family is the original small group. So small groups are growing more and more. And the benefit of a small group is the same as a benefit of a congregation. It gives you a smaller community of people. And some of our churches are so big that we need to subdivide it into small groups. And the second one is simply that the family is the group.”⁴⁰

How would a congregation keep this going? “There's a lot of work that could be accomplished if we quit doing all the work and did more training starting with the men. The

³⁹ Berger, interview.

⁴⁰ Berger, interview.

purpose of the men's group then would become ongoing training, but also encouragement and accountability.”⁴¹

Pastor Berger tried this, but the main problem was the men who were coming were already doing these things and had no children in the home anymore. These men could be mentors for younger men.

⁴¹ Berger, interview.

Interview 3 Bill Monday (Discipleship Coordinator)

Pastor Bill Monday serves at St. Peter, Freedom, WI, and is the Discipleship Coordinator for the WELS Northern Wisconsin District.

I started the interview by asking Pastor Monday what he sees as the major cultural issues at large that keep men from fulfilling their roles as spiritual leader.

I think our culture tells parents that it is demeaning for them to have to stay home and watch their kids and raise their kids. There's no honor in that. But life is found in pursuing your careers. I think feminism, the way our culture practices it really, enabled men to abdicate their responsibilities. And our culture has no time for honoring manhood. Fatherhood. And then we wonder why husbands don't want to stick around or they don't want to get married in the first place. So in our culture really, everything's upside down. Men can't be the leads we would like⁴² and, we've exalted women over them to their own detriment.”⁴³

Pastor Monday also sees outsourcing as a major issue. “I would say this, I think in our American culture, and I think this is mirrored in the church and as far as families even, we have this tendency to outsource pretty much everything.” This is seen in coaching for example. Fewer and fewer fathers are actually teaching their son to throw a ball; instead, they are letting the “expert” do it. “We have seen this same phenomenon at our church. People show up wondering where all the professionals are, then they have to decide whether they really want to do the job they have been assigned. Unfortunately, some are out the door before we can even help them with a cost-benefit analysis.”⁴⁴

⁴² Bill Monday, interviewed by author, Zoom, 11-3-2022. “It is interesting statistically. In marriage, as far as finances and careers, and I can't remember where I got the stat, but a man has a good relationship with his wife as long as he's earning at least 70% of the home income. When he is equal to his wife in providing there's often tension that develops for whatever reason. I think biblically we can say God made the man to be the provider.”

⁴³ Monday, interview.

⁴⁴ Baucham, Family Shepherd, 69.

Pastor Monday thinks that this mentality has trickled down into discipleship. If fathers and mothers do not have much biblical literacy, they look to the church to the expert pastor to disciple their children. “And so we can enroll our kids in youth programs or in our day school, which is kind of the crown jewel of youth programming, and they'll disciple our children for us. I think that's part of the problem. And I think our culture is just structured for that. I mean, we do it with everything else, sports, the arts, whatever we want to see our children excel in, we look to the professionals.”⁴⁵

We see that this sentiment was already being sounded by Charles Learman in his paper on confirmation syndrome in 1993. “One problem which seems to be of significant influence is a lack of commitment. This is not a lack of commitment which begins on the part of the confirmand, but rather on the part of the home and parents. We might characterize this home and the parents as being those similar to the members of the church in Laodicea as described by Jesus in John’s Revelation, those who are lukewarm.”⁴⁶

As we see families and fathers outsource, they can fall into the trap being “Sunday Christians.” “The other thing, and maybe this is a church culture issue, I think we unintentionally have fostered a mindset that you can pigeonhole faith, you can just leave faith matters, your beliefs to a Sunday morning thing, and then we kind of move on with the rest of our life. We don't see that every hour of every day is really to be worship and sharing the faith with our kids just in natural moments. That's how discipleship works.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Monday, interview.

⁴⁶ Learman, Charles. How Shall We combat the Confirmation/Graduation Syndrome? WLS Essay File, 1993. (This is found on page 5 of his paper, the paper does not have page numbers itself).

⁴⁷ Monday, interview.

I asked Pastor Monday if outsourcing was the same as a consumer mentality “I think that's probably an overarching theme, whereas if we come to the church to consume and the compartmentalizing of faith, I think suggests too that consumerism is just partial. It's really just seeing faith as an academic informed pursuit. And once I get enough, I'm good. I move on. And there's a major disconnect between daily life and faith practice. So yeah, I think the consumer mentality is huge.”

In connection with this Pastor Monday shares with us why we got into so much youth and family programming in the first place. “It was WELS President Brenner who kind of gave a caution that because of the war,⁴⁸ because men were going away and women were working and now the family was very much in need, the church was kind of supplementing discipleship from the home. And so creating, this is the advent of really intentionally creating youth programming. And President Brenner, almost like a prophet, said, if we program this too much, basically we might unintentionally usurp the authority of the home.”⁴⁹

Pastor Monday relays how we have gone into this ditch where we inform and teach, our youth in church programs, but it is the parents' role to impress that knowledge into practice, impressing it on their hearts.

So I think part of our culture is the way we think in terms of discipling youth. We think we can program youth discipleship and that really is what we do. We are excellent at programming, the informing of our young people in their minds. And I think one of the things we need to wrestle with too, and I think in this connection, Isaiah 55, the word of God, I mean, that's all you need. That is the means by which faith is formed. But I think that needs to be tempered with maybe the parable of the sower and the seed. There are things that are obstacles that get in the way or choke, if you will, choke the word out or choke faith out in the heart. I mean the Word's going to accomplish what it does. But I very much see that with children, we can inform the mind of children all day long, but

⁴⁸ World War II, I believe.

⁴⁹ Monday, interview.

God has designed the family. It is Mom and Dad that will impress that word on their hearts, in their living, in their modeling, or will become the birds that snatch up that seed, or we'll choke it out with the busyness of family schedules or scorch it by not addressing the true need that children have when they're anxious and they're worried.⁵⁰

Pastor Monday thinks there is an underlying problem that because we do not think parents are capable of teaching their kids we take the teaching out of their hands instead of training them to teach. "But look to big government and I think we could argue, we have big church which looks to do what fathers and mothers aren't doing. It's kind of a form of Romanism where it's like we don't think our fathers and mothers can actually do the work. And so in that sense, we kind of keep the Word of God out of their hands through programming."⁵¹

As a district chair of discipleship, Pastor Monday tried to raise awareness. He wrote a paper on Deuteronomy 6, the John 3:16 of the Old Testament, from which vocation flows. He presented his paper at two conferences. He was trying to get his fellow pastors to think. "Hey guys, are we truly doing what God has called and designed for us to disciple children? Or are we unintentionally usurping parental authority as they (parents) abdicate their responsibilities?"⁵²

Pastor Monday thinks that papers raise awareness but asks, "Where does the rubber meet the road? How do we do more than talk about excellence in Christian education?"⁵³

For example, you have a school, you have kids enrolled at a school. How do we as principals and teachers and pastors truly make it excellent by creating accountability of saying, in other words, parents, you've enrolled your child here, you may not have known this, but you then enrolled in this BIC class, if you will, for parents? It's really in Christian vocation, we're going to walk with you to open your eyes to family culture to see that Christ desires to fill that. And so often our family cultures are maybe empty pass down from our family of origin or influenced by culture, but it's maybe in many respects

⁵⁰ Monday, interview.

⁵¹ Monday, interview.

⁵² Monday, interview.

⁵³ Monday, interview.

empty of Christ. So we need to have this conversation about family culture because discipleship's a lifestyle. And let's talk about the building blocks of family culture. Let's talk about what Christian parenting really is.⁵⁴

Pastor Monday is by no means against the church interacting and training our youth, but he finds scriptural backing for primary spiritual training to happen and be reinforced in the home and then to be supplemented by the church.

We need to confess our shortcomings to our children and find this beautiful message of grace mutually given between family members. And then finally seeing that the church has its part, but it's not the greater partner in discipling kids, it's the lesser partner. We are the ones holding up the prophet's hands as a church and the hands are the fathers and mothers. So for me it's kind of instilling in parents, teaching parents, there's five key things we need to discuss as you look to serve your child best and partner with us, it's 1 family culture, it's 2 Christian parenting, it's 3 godly conversations and experiences. It's 4 modeling the faith and it's 5 understanding the proper place of church.⁵⁵

Pastor Monday has in mind Scripture like Ephesians 4:11-13, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (NASB).

After Pastor Monday shared what problems and possible programs for training parents and specifically men, I asked whether it is hard to get participation. Pastor Monday relayed that when he talks to parents about how discipleship is supposed to work, “It's like a cow looking at a new gate. What are you talking about? This isn't how I was raised. This is a new thing and if it's your thing, that's great, but I don't have time to show up for another class.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Monday, interview.

⁵⁵ Monday, interview.

⁵⁶ Monday, interview.

Pastor Monday mentioned how talking with Kurt Nitz helped him realize that changing culture must be done in manageable parts.

Kurt really raised my awareness of the fact that we're up against culture. So, if you're going to change it, it's got to be in manageable parts. So, I've reduced my five modules to a one-hour presentation, which kind of sums up the five pillars of family discipleship with an invitation to, if you can go online and you can go work through 40 videos, which will take you through the modules and the content at your own pace whenever you get around to it. Or you can do this in small groups or you can do it in a Bible study trying to make it as accessible as possible on demand independent learning or in group settings.^{57 58}

Pastor Monday produced efficacious content⁵⁹, but the problem is that he had a variety of friction points.⁶⁰ So, he had to reduce the ask of the parents and start small.⁶¹ As pastors start small and reduce friction points, where does one begin the process? Pastor Monday thinks that it can start with a home visit, where the pastor shares the model of discipleship, the enrichment program that is aimed at fostering it, and the biblical support behind it. At that point, the pastor

⁵⁷ Monday, interview.

⁵⁸ Berger, interview. “So the way Monday is doing that is they've actually put it in their handbooks. So they've got a really big church and a big school, and they're basically encouraging anybody that's enrolled in their day school, their Sunday school, catechism classes, or any other youth programming to create an expectation that parents will attend this Solid Ground workshop. And he's offering it in a number of ways, as I said, a workshop or a small group. And I think he's trying to get to the point where it's online as well. These are the ways we're trying to get down to the basic thought of how we train spiritual leaders in our homes.”

⁵⁹ Berger, interview. “Pastor Monday developed a systematic approach called Solid Ground. He did it last year with a small group of his own members, and he did it in a kind of seminar approach. And he also did it as a small group approach where they met every week, and they did smaller chunks on the front end. He does something called the Critical Hour, which is basically taking our liturgy, our order of service, and helping people realize that's a good format for home life.”

⁶⁰ Friction points will be discussed more in interview 4. Friction points are things that keep people from changing cultural habits, e.g. If you want the parent to start teaching catechism, one of the friction points is the parents “do not have time” to meet with you in person. To try and minimize that friction point, you create videos to teach the parents, so they do not have to physically come to church.

⁶¹ Berger, interview. “And Pastor Monday connected the details of our weekly worship service to the five components of his Solid Ground training material on the back end. He piloted something he calls Lead me Father, where he was inviting dads to come in for 15 minutes and basically create a customized personal plan for their home and devotion life with the permission again to have some accountability”

would ask the parents to give it some thought, “kind of little stone in the shoe.”⁶² The church should continue to make worship and Bible study a priority, but also “in milestone moments like, oh, you just had a child. Let's talk about baptism. And maybe while we talk about baptism too, we can just talk about family culture. What is your family all about? Let's celebrate what it is that God has given you in the context of your culture within which you enjoy life. And just with one last question now, how much is Christ claiming your family culture? What does that even mean?”⁶³

Pastor Monday admits that this is easier said than done. “The content is more and more readily available to do this. The structure can be in place. There are guys working on this How do we make it manageable and inviting for families? And I don't have the answer for that, but I think that's where we have to work toward.”⁶⁴

I asked Pastor Monday, “If you had a magic wand and could create what you think would be a good model of spiritual training of men in a congregation, what would you do?”

So if I could start from scratch, I don't know if I would offer youth programming. I don't know if I would offer Sunday school as we know it.⁶⁵ I don't think I would offer VBS. So what I would do is I would, I'd make worship the focal point and kind of like Moses

⁶² Monday, interview.

⁶³ Monday, interview.

⁶⁴ Monday, interview.

⁶⁵ Monday, interview. “The stats are already done by Ken Ham. It's a book that's been out almost 20 years now with research they did about Sunday school, Sunday school has a nominal to negative impact spiritually on kids the way we practice it today. What that means is if you as a child went through Sunday School and you no longer go to church as an adult, you are far less likely to return to church than somebody who's never been raised in the church. Adults who have never had contact with church are more likely to go to church as adults than children who have contact with it and leave. So it's interesting, even in conservative churches, that's what Sunday school can produce.” “We're just falling into that system where they're graduating from the faith. This is child's play, so it just doesn't have a lasting impact.”

and do Exodus 18, I would look to find men who are respectable and credible and would create a system where they're networking with other men and are mentoring them and they're going back home and then they're discipling their families. And as far as the greater church, I would look to see our schools like Seminary and MLC really training pastors to make that a priority that if you're going to disciple youth work through the fathers and mothers and where there's a single parent as the extended family of believers to become the fathers and mothers of that home spiritually alongside the parent. So yeah, that's what I would do. I probably would remove youth programming and make it just family discipleship.

In terms of Bible study Pastor Monday would use the same family-based approach that Pastor Berger outlined in his interview. He added “I would have a suggested reading list and resources through the week saying, okay, so Monday do this as a family, this story, and Tuesday to have a schedule like that and maybe take Saturday off or whatever, just give a little chance for accommodation of busy schedules. And that's the way I would look to train parents to disciple their kids.”⁶⁷

After encouraging and equipping parents, the second thing to do is find spiritual mentors in the congregation. This is a chance for youth programming to really shine. Pastor Monday is looking for “leaders who know their name, who are invested in their life in some way to a great extent or lesser extent, that children end up looking up to saying, ‘Wow, I really appreciated my sixth grade Sunday school teacher. He really loved Jesus. He really cared about me.’”⁶⁸ How many mentors is he looking for? “The goal is statistically getting five adults who can help as a team shape that faith of a child living out the gospel. After that, it's actually meaningful service, which assimilates the child into the adult life of the congregation.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Monday, interview.

⁶⁸ Monday, interview.

⁶⁹ Monday, interview.

At the end of the day, Pastor Monday wanted to be faithful. “And it may be the last thing is being faithful. I don't want to enable parents to shirk their responsibilities. I don't want to steal their blessings from them. I want them to see that some of the greatest joy that they're longing for is actually giving full focus on their kids in their spiritual development.”⁷⁰ He realizes that no matter what we do the weeds and wheat are going to grow together and some of the wheat is going to get choked out. “What I aim to do is honor the family because that is the greatest gift he's given to children. Work through the family and honor the system God made and just let it be. So have those conversations. And if some men show up, great, and if they don't, well that's between them and the Lord.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Monday, interview.

⁷¹ Monday, interview.

Interview 4 Kurt Nitz (Culture Change)

Pastor Monday mentioned Kurt Nitz, so I decided to interview him. Kurt Nitz is a layman who worked as an engineer with corporations like Kimberly-Clark to effect culture change in the work environment. At present, he is working with WELS Director of Evangelism Eric Roecker to develop the Everyone Evangelism program. By interviewing Mr. Nitz, I intentionally tapped into the thought process behind culture change as it pertains to discipleship.

First Mr. Nitz challenged my assertion that men who are not leading their family in home devotions are not spiritual leaders. He shared with me the definition of leadership that he uses which he got from John Maxwell. “The definition I use is influence, nothing more, nothing less.” So even if a father does nothing, he is still being a spiritual leader, but he is being a spiritual leader who is hurting faith whether it is intentional or not.

This is the negative example of spiritual leadership that Mr. Nitz gave. “The father who says, oh man, we went to church last month and I was out late last night, bowling with my buddies, the wife is ticked, she's like, I had to get the kids ready, and I had to try to drag you there too. And then they don't go, there was leadership there.”

Mr. Nitz explained why we are leading, exerting influence, even when we don't think we are.

“Whether we're trying to influence others or not there's actually neurons in our brains called mirror neurons. And based on research, it looks like the only reason those neurons exist are to notice others around us, what they're doing and mirror it back to them. So some examples are you yawn and what happens...once one guy goes there, everybody starts yawning. If you're feeding a baby and you got that spoon and you're holding up there and they're just looking at you, what do you do? You open your mouth big and

smile. And it goes right in. So those mirror neurons are there. So our interaction in groups and our ability to be influenced by others is something that God has put into our brain. We're just programmed that way. It's part of our biology, not merely this is what our society, I mean there's societal impact, but at the bottom line is God has built us to notice those around us and be influenced by others.”

One of the main things I wanted to get from interviewing Mr. Nitz was, we have all these “good” programs but how do we get participation? “Is a program good if it fails to get participation?”⁷² Kurt asked me to think about what my problem statement is. “What’s my problem statement? Because could my problem statement's going to dictate where I'm going to go as far as what I'm trying to do. I could say, oh these guys aren't being great spiritual leaders. I need to fix them, so they participate in this. So, they play in my awesome sandbox. Or I can ask, why don't these guys want to play in my sandbox?” Instead of looking at the person and saying they are the problem, maybe we look at the ways we are trying to engage them and see what problems our program itself has. We think it could be user error, but we should investigate if the product is not user friendly, even if it has good content.

Mr. Nitz showed why having home devotions is potentially even more impactful than putting kids in parochial school. “Put 'em in a parochial school, and the probability they'll still be active Christians at age 30 goes up 3-5%, something like that. But if you instead put 'em in a household that’s having home devotions, the percentage impact is like more than double. Wow, that sounds impactful, and it makes sense, right? Because train a child... but also think about what we are creating as far as their thought habits and what's important.”⁷³ But when we inform people of the benefits of home devotions in addition to parochial school it does not seem to get

⁷² Kurt Nitz, interviewed by author, Zoom, 10-31-2022.

⁷³ Nitz, interview.

traction. Telling people how to think and what to do is not the most effective means of doing it (culture change).⁷⁴

We can be miffed that we share statistics with parents about the importance of home devotion and discipleship in general only to find that they don't start to do them.

Why aren't they doing this? They don't have this habit. And it's easy to not do something when it's not habitual. Our subconscious mind is doing a lot more stuff than our conscious mind. What could I do to have some kind of trigger or such a slippery slope that this happened and they're having home Bible study?⁷⁵

The positive slippery slope that Mr. Nitz is talking about can be found by removing friction points from your programming or whatever you are trying to accomplish. For example, if you want your children to put their dirty clothes in a laundry basket, you might put the laundry basket right in their room or in their bathroom. You might have those laundry chutes that go right to a dirty laundry basket in the basement, or you might have a chore chart on the fridge every day to help remind them if they still forget, and a sibling accountability system to make sure the chart gets done. You might even have a tangible reward for continuing to complete the chart on a regular basis.

Then once the thought pattern is established you could tone back on the reward. Because now the machete path you blazed through the jungle has become a turnpike that will become a highway. When you are working on reducing friction points what you need to ponder is: "Is it culture or is it the design?"⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Nitz, interview.

⁷⁵ Nitz, interview.

⁷⁶ Nitz, interview.

As a pastor, one thing you could do is go to your church council or tap into the group of men that you think would get onboard with this. You can share your vision. Getting to critical mass is going to happen faster if other men/leaders start casting their shadow in addition to yours. When you talk with them, if they are not currently doing the things you think should be happening,

It's probably a reflection of their current thoughts and attitudes and that's going to require change. So one of the things I talk about with groups when I'm trying to go as a leader for a manufacturing plant or something like that is to be very conscious about the why for what we're doing, and maybe point them to a different future. My goal is we're starting this as a small group, but then I want each of you to pair up with a buddy to then really go and cascade this in phase two.⁷⁷

As you share the vision with those you think will get behind it you need to have a dynamic long-term vision “And having that dynamic of here's the long-term vision, here's the next step, here's why we're doing this, here's where I want us to go. And oh, by the way, along the way, if something's not working we can always go and stop.” If you do not have this in place it is hard to get buy in and reach critical mass because “it sounds like once we make that change, there's no going back right now.”⁷⁸

Culture shaping is very intentional “I always use the expression who we want to be when we grow up, which is funny cause I'm talking to 50-60-year-olds and then I'm still saying, who do you want to be when we grow up? The idea that there is this neuroplasticity that we have even as adults and what we're talking about is changing and being someone different at the end.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Nitz, interview.

⁷⁸ Nitz, interview.

⁷⁹ Nitz, interview.

As pastors or leaders in the congregation we want to continually show them and spoon feed them to the point that they ask you to do the program instead of you telling them what to do. Your goal “is not to manipulate them but share things with them to get them to the point where they want to do it.”⁸⁰

Mr. Nitz outlines what you are up against when trying to implement something like parent-led catechism.

When I want someone to change their behaviors, that means they have to change their thinking. If it's something that's autopilot behavior, which is I'm not teaching catechism. Cause that's pastor's job I mean they don't have to think about that. Now I have to do something new and it's not a habit yet. I have to consciously think about it. And teaching catechism sounds like a really heavy lift because I have to do prep. Whoa. So not only do I have to have the time doing the catechism, I have to go and do my prep time. Well, that's why we have pastor to do it because he understands original languages and he went to school for all these things—that's what's cascading through their mind.⁸¹

Mr. Nitz would have you start small. He suggested sending “a short text to parents at their child’s bedtime. Just to establish a habit.”⁸² This might be the first step into parents teaching catechism at home. It might be a 5-year plan and this is the first step toward creating a new thought habit. “Now look at how my role as a parent now includes a thought habit of going to look at God's word with this child every day. If you have that foundation, it seems like a more natural step to, oh, I'm going to lead catechism with my children... So when you're doing culture shaping it, it's small wins that trigger critical mass.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Nitz, interview.

⁸¹ Nitz, interview.

⁸² Nitz, interview.

⁸³ Nitz, interview.

Mr. Nitz had forty hours or more a week with individuals to influence them and promote culture change (in the business world) and get a corporation to a critical mass stage, but a pastor has much less time to influence people. The amount of time to reach a critical mass stage will take much longer than in a corporate world where the employer paying you is telling you to get coached on how to grow in a certain area.

When training pastors for the everyone outreach program, Mr. Nitz was thinking eighty hours of training, and Pastor Roecker was used to two hours and a binder. So they compromised with a three-day workshop.

Since we have limited hours of contact with our people in which to challenge and shape thought patterns, we need to keep putting basic biblical principles before our people. When trying to keep a program or thought going, look at friction points and ask the user what would help them keep up their daily devotion. For example, maybe bedtime is too hectic, and they could shift it to dinner time. In this process you may end up learning a thousand ways not to encourage home devotion, “but you got to have that approach of, so that didn't work. What's next?”⁸⁴ In this “what's next” process you want to have diversity of thought. When you do you can see what is holding people back, you can identify what the real friction points are and this leads to: What would be a good first step to help us move?⁸⁵

There is a challenge to acquire diversity of thought if you have limited “dwell time” with others. Pastors may need to create fellowship opportunities⁸⁶ so that they can informally ask

⁸⁴ Nitz, interview.

⁸⁵ Nitz, interview.

⁸⁶ Nitz, interview. “If you're in a congregation where it going to church is the spiritual equivalent of a Sunday brunch. That was nice. But I only do that once a week because Sunday brunch is Sunday brunch. That's a pretty substantial challenge as well.”

parents what it would take for them to do an in-home devotion. At these fellowship opportunities, parents may realize they have the same struggles and then pastors or other congregational leaders can bring these to a council meeting and potentially propose a first step.

And I'd like you to go and just brainstorm some things that might help. And then pick one or two that you think you'd like us to try. Man, if I have 15 people there, 20 people there, I break 'em into three groups and they come back with two ideas and two of the three groups said this is my top idea. And the other, we had that two, but we hadn't developed that much. We like that idea. Do you think they're excited? Do you think there's energy there for the next step?⁸⁷⁸⁸

Mr. Nitz warns against feeling pressure to do something. Sometimes you have to gather information for a long time before you start something. It's more important for pastors to get buy-in before they start a program than starting it and then trying to get buy-in. Things like every member visits might be the foundational groundwork pastors do to expose thought habits, promote new thought habits, and develop buy-in for the first step you are going to take. It also might dictate the first step that pastors come up with, based on the input they receive.

Mr. Nitz's final encouragement was to rely on the promises of God that the secular business world does not have. We need not treat the Church like a business, but we can take the principles of culture change and be a shrewd manager of the influence we have as pastors over the spiritual formation of men in our congregation.

⁸⁷ Nitz, interview.

⁸⁸ If you need some fellowship ideas take some cues from our Asian congregations in the United States who arrange for a fellowship meal, among other things, after nearly every service.

Interview 5 Amos Buelow (Man of Character)

Amos Buelow is a twenty-seven-year-old WELS member who can introduce himself and share with us the goal of his organization, Man of Character:

I run an organization called Man of Character and it took me some time to come to that name. But I really love it because the Bible does talk about character a decent amount in different ways, in different words. We have the example of what male and female roles are in the Bible that sometimes are not really taught from the perspective of family leadership and what it looks like in the church. As a lay person growing up in a pastoral household, I thought about being a pastor for ten years, just back and forth, going to our private schools. Then I went to school for exercise science to become a trainer, managed a gym, and trained people with their health.

I became a health and life coach, which basically means I want to treat and train the whole person. And then using my background growing up in a pastor's family and really having a strong biblical foundation and education all the way through college without the drug, sex and rock and roll phase so that I could actually be mature at 21 years old instead of 27. I was able to mature way faster just like in the 1940s when people would be fully adults working full-time jobs and taking care of their families as an 18-year-old. And now it takes us until we're 28 because that's what culture has deemed the appropriate way to train us to have fun in college.

First, I asked Mr. Buelow how culture is affecting men in a negative way with regard to spiritual leadership. Mr. Buelow thinks that culture is upside down in many respects. Character should start in the home and extend out to local, state, and federal levels of culture. Instead, there's a bad upside-down effect being pushed in culture where there's different cultures and you're talking about the culture at large, the culture in the church, the culture in your local community, and then the culture in your household. “So how it should be is it starts in your household and then it extends to your church, which extends to your community... You can in some capacity here in America, influence that level, but the space where you can influence the most is in your own household. So that's how it should be.”⁸⁹ Instead, American culture has

⁸⁹ Amos Buelow, interviewed by author, Zoom, 10-27-2022.

become the bigger influence “on how we act, think what's right, what's wrong, what is truth. There is no real truth. And then it trickles down to the local culture. And then the church and the family is kind of an afterthought at that point because we're so busy being inundated in life.”⁹⁰

This happens in part because we buy into the belief that we should be busy all the time.⁹¹ When we busy ourselves, it can play out with the following effects. We're so busy with technology, with news, with things that aren't even related to what actually is in our care, the garden that God has given us, our household, our families. This leads to a breakdown of spiritual leadership. In this fast pace setting we lack solitude. “Solitude is when you set aside time to feed and water and nourish your soul. To let it grow into health and maturity. Isolation is what you crave when you neglect the former.”⁹²

“It’s been proven by study after study: there is zero correlation between hurry and productivity. In fact, once you work a certain number of hours in a week, your productivity plummets. Wanna know what the number is? Fifty hours. Ironic: that’s about a six-day workweek. One study found that there was zero difference in productivity between workers who logged seventy hours and those who logged fifty-five.”⁹³ “Here’s my point: the solution to an over busy life is not more time. It’s to slow down and simplify our lives around what really matters.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Buelow, interview.

⁹¹ Comer, John Mark. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 111. This fundamental principle is brought out by Buelow. “We are so busy in the American culture. These false gods are presented to us all the time. Accomplishments and accumulation are really being pushed on us with marketing.” This is pushed on us primarily by marketing and consumerism. Be productive so that you can consume more. That is the goal of life: consumption.

⁹² Comer, 109.

⁹³ Comer, 73.

⁹⁴ Comer, 99.

We thought that technology would free us up so that we would be able to work half days, but Mr. Buelow shared why that is not the case and what he thinks would help us.

Even though we have all this technology, it's really just made us seek more and fill our lives in every second with information and with screens. And what's gone out the window is space. And what happens in space, the white space, the time that isn't planned for the time that isn't being sucked into a device is time with God. Naturally, when you are in a quiet space with nothing going on, that's when it's easiest to actually pray to God, to converse with him, to want to read the Bible in those moments, to actually meditate on the words of Scripture, to listen to someone else and actually hear where they are. If we're not able to slow down and stop and emotionally be able to read and read someone's language and emotion and body language and communicate with them, there's no way we're going to be able to share God's word in an effective way.

Mr. Buelow generalized what kind of man culture forms.

You see it resulting in the household as an apathetic man who fulfills his work duty, but then with all the extra time doesn't do anything more. He doesn't think long-term for the faith of his family, the maturity of his family. So, thinking ten years down the road for the sake of my child and their faith versus in the moment, Hey, I had a long day and I deserve to kick back, or fine, I'll do these chores or fine, I'll listen to my wife, but I won't be happy about it because I just want to watch my show or I want to eat my chips and then I want to go to sleep. Now I'm painting a broad stroke here, but that's the general feel that I see from the American culture.

How do we see this manifesting itself in our own churches. ELS and WELS members can be frustrated by the lack of maturity of fellow members, even seeing it as hypocrisy.⁹⁵

But you might see it in a Sunday where you go to church and then you quickly go home or go out to eat, fill yourself up, go home and sit back, kick back and watch football for five hours. I think that's not what the Sabbath is for. The Sabbath or a day of rest. A day with the family is meant to serve the Lord, meant to serve the people around you. And I'm not saying those things are all bad, but America's done a really good job of encouraging some of these pleasure sources like watching TV or news or football. And we as Americans are taught to take things to the extreme. And I think Christians are no exception. And I think the church hasn't really spoken to it very well. In our church we

⁹⁵ It is necessary to keep in mind that we have weak brothers committing sins of weakness, and also that their sins may not be our sins, and the church is for "sick" people. Nevertheless, there will always be hypocrisy in the church.

have wonderful Sunday services, but there really is no structure for mentoring young men. There are no real discipleship programs.

Mr. Buelow thinks that we have great content and biblical teaching available and taught well but giving people Bible knowledge does not directly correlate with discipleship.⁹⁶ “There's no structure to bring people along and really educate on how to raise your kids and how to be a strong male leader, what that looks like in Scripture, not that I've seen. We don't get it at our church.”⁹⁷

What can we do to combat this? Ideally the parents should be the ones fostering and nurturing discipleship, but if they are not fulfilling their God-given role the church can step in to first disciple the parents.

First and foremost, the parents need to build that foundation and instill those principles. And if they're not getting it from the household, then it's up to the elders of the church to put together discipleship programs and mentor these fathers in their congregation and along with the pastor. But the pastor has to shepherd the entire flock. He can't focus on each individual father, the elders, the men need to disciple the fathers of the church to show them how to lead in the household because that's the most important thing for a child. And that's a responsibility and a calling of every man.

Mr. Buelow referenced the book *Family Shepherds*, which is equipping men to lead their households. One thing called out in the book is the idea that we should have every single demographic in the church being served by the church in their own unique age or space.

It's like we need to have a teen group and we need to have a youth group and we need to have a women's group and we need to have all these different groups that we can just send people to when we get to church so that I can just focus on me and consuming my information without distractions, without having to handle my responsibilities, my children, my wife, and all those things.

⁹⁶ Buelow, interview. “I don't think people see it as valuable because it's not something that's taught to us as being valuable. It's not something that's being discussed regularly as a necessity.”

⁹⁷ Buelow, interview.

This kind of mentality unwittingly focuses on self instead of making sure that all God’s people are being fed. It also can lead to the compartmentalization of faith. “It re-energized me to become involved in a small WELS church where we don’t have all those different segments and fancy things for each individual. It’s like, no, we do it as a family, we talk about it as a family, and we learn as a family and we deal with each other in that process.”⁹⁸

Even small things like not ushering people out of church can change the atmosphere of a congregation. Mr. Buelow advocates for not ushering out, because it allows for people to talk and not feel like an event is over and on to the next thing to consume. “You usher out and then a lot of people go immediately to their breakfast or their brunch restaurant. So many people go to consume restaurant food and then they go home, and they consume entertainment, or they start cleaning or getting their chores and tasks done and it’s just another workday.”⁹⁹

Mr. Buelow talks about how organizations like Man of Character can help men and a church be the spiritual leaders that God has called them to be.

We need to be men of character, we need to be mature, and we need to be leaders as quickly as possible because if you’re not the one influencing your family and the people around you and leading in your church, then something else is something or someone else is always influencing and you want to be the higher percentage of that, especially when it comes to your kids. So instead of trying to work backwards and train kids after the fact, “Train a child up in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6 NASB).

Man of Character is an effort to combat the attacks we are under from our current culture, “which diminishes institutions like church and family by weakening the male role influences us

⁹⁸ Buelow, interview.

⁹⁹ Buelow, interview.

to see pleasure and ease over self-sacrificial service, which is uncomfortable, and it takes discipline.”¹⁰⁰

Man of Character is designed to create “the environment and structure for us to build connections and facilitate growth in each other. It does that by being challenged to a higher standard of biblical character as a disciple, warrior, worker, lover, and leader.”¹⁰¹ This network of brotherhood and continual training and encouraging and practiced righteousness leads to men around the world positively influencing their homes.

Mr. Buelow does this in a very practical way. He helps men think through these questions.

How can I structure my life and structure my actions, my thoughts, to positively lead my family in all of these different areas of health, physical health, spiritual maturity being a man who has integrity and actually works hard? Being someone who can communicate effectively to share the gospel or have great marriage, great relationships, and be a light to others. Be salt and light. And then how can I be a leader in a world that needs leaders to speak against the culture that more influence than us because we're not stepping up as leaders?¹⁰²

This is carried out by being a part of the Men of Character Brotherhood, which has groups of 10 guys have comradery with each other from around the country. This is coupled with a six-month strategic planner.

This is something that I believe the church should use and all men should use to be out of the moment to moment, day to day, busy type of mindset where it's hurry, it's unplanned, it's reactionary, and instead be proactive with planning for my future, my family's future,

¹⁰⁰ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰¹ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰² Buelow, interview.

my kids' future with how I present myself, how I have character and the actions that actions and disciplines that I have in place day to day, week to week.¹⁰³

In this strategic planner you create goals in each of these five characters (disciple, warrior, worker, lover, and leader). There are some communication templates “for weekly check-ins with your wife for being focused week to week and being more of a captain of your household as if it's a ship.”¹⁰⁴ There is a monthly action planner where you are able to reflect and assess and learn from the past from other people. It helps to plan “where you need to grow as a man and then you can execute on your core, make sure everything's lining up with your core values.”¹⁰⁵ All this helps a man intentionally work on keeping himself spiritually grounded, but it also helps him keep his vocational responsibilities before him. These are aided by “monthly, weekly, and daily action items and habits that will ultimately keep you and your household going in the right direction as Christians.”¹⁰⁶

What are the struggles to accomplishing this? “The struggles of this obviously is getting buy-in.”

You have to have the desire there, first of all. As Christians, we do have a natural desire to follow God's will to live a sanctified life because we have the Holy Spirit in us. So I do believe that most Christians, when they see this and are spoken to by someone that they respect, or someone that's willing to speak up to them and interrupt their patterns, their culture has kind of set in place for them.

¹⁰³ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰⁴ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰⁶ Buelow, interview.

“I can really get guys to buy into it when they're working with me. The biggest struggle to participation is just time and finances, the regular things that hold us back in life.”¹⁰⁷ “I like working with the busiest people because I can teach them how to become less busy by being more optimized, by eliminating things that are distractions and unuseful in life. And so working with me and giving me some of your time, we'll give you way more time back, way more structure and planning. But still busyness is the thing that pulls them away. It's just being too busy.”¹⁰⁸

Mr. Buelow thinks that improvement requires buy-in, but he thinks the real hold-up is capacity. People will be open to it. So, the struggle is capacity. He says that he needs more people like him to lead cohorts.

I asked what do you do to get and maintain traction with your men?

The most beneficial thing that every single man has said beyond the skills and the principles and the changes in life that they've been bringing about, they said the absolute best part of anything that they've gone through from me has been the brotherhood aspect, the community aspect. I even just tried to go through my Man of Character program with one guy. He wasn't held accountable, he said, Hey, can I do this more as an audit where I use it when I need to? That's what happens when you do it by yourself, it just kind of falls off. So you need more than one guy. I would say at least three because two people can fail each other. They can feel guilty towards each other. But if you got that third person, now you're a group now, you now have a core group of people.¹⁰⁹

Mr. Buelow arranges his groups his brotherhood with nine men so that it has three groups of three. He also has groups interchange people so it's not the same month after month. “And so every month you're getting new people that you have hold up to a higher standard. If you have

¹⁰⁷ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Buelow, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Buelow, interview.

responsibility as a man, typically guys, don't want to fail responsibilities. If you're responsible to another man, that is what needs to be in place in order for participation and follow through.”¹¹⁰

I asked Mr. Buelow if he sees this a church program (like St John’s Man of Character) or as a program alongside the church.

I have found it more effective to keep it separate and to reach out to Christian men in general. You're probably asking how I could see WELS use this. And what's so beautiful about what I do and also why it's effective. I'm having non-WELS people and WELS people in the same room talking about life principles and keeping each other accountable in their own areas of struggles. And what naturally happens in that situation is that there's more open communication. There's less of the same church culture and perspective that we've grown up in. And it's really cool the relationships that these guys build. I've even been able to connect pastors. I've been able to put myself in places where I'm able to share what the Bible actually says about topics that they weren't educated as much on which I love. And so I'm learning how to communicate God's Word in the process and opening up opportunities for further education in God's Word. For non-WELS people, I have them re-looking at what church you go to.

If nothing else Mr. Buelow would like to put his strategic planner into the hands of pastors as a resource for men. “An easy resource that doesn't have to be connected to the pastor. Look, this is going to help you understand what leadership looks like from a very basic level of taking care of yourself and your family and how you might organize your day to make sure you're always getting faith touches with your wife or having devotions.”¹¹¹

Mr. Buelow sees that some churches think that getting people involved will help them mature in their faith.

Helping them mature should be an extra step, which really specifically talks about living a sanctified life or living a life of biblical character through discipleship, through elder instruction, and through service opportunities. Probably because you learn the most when

¹¹⁰ Buelow, interview.

¹¹¹ Buelow, interview.

you're actually acting, when you're actually doing things, not just talking about it. I think we often miss a step, and that's what I'm trying to fill in.¹¹²

¹¹² Buelow, interview.

CONCLUSION

How do we get men to take up their roles and lead their families in God's Word? The task is colossal! We are fighting against consumerism, business, apathy, laziness, and many other sins. As we struggle to play the right tune to rouse the sleeping giants, we look to fellow brothers who have used the Word of God to compose a few new melodies and bang the gong.

Recommendations

I would start by reading Bill Monday's paper found in Appendix III. This will get you to reflect on what you are doing and why. Then I would read *Family Shepherds*. This book is found in the bibliography. In *Family Shepherds*, Baucham challenges us to think about what we are doing and gives practical Bible-based solutions.

After reading these two things, talk to your congregation members. At a certain point, brainstorm with your church leadership about how you can disciple the men in your congregation. It might begin with discipling your church leadership. To do this you might use things you learned in *Family Shepherds* or consider using a program like Man of Character. Some books to read with your church leadership or men's group would be

Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes;

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to stay emotionally healthy and spiritually alive in the chaos of the modern world; and

Family-Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God.

Once you have a core group of disciplined men you can go forward with a plan to disciple all the men in your congregation. At this point you will want to do copious amounts of planning and brainstorming. This will be a good place to stop and go through the thoughts presented in Mr. Nitz's interview. You may even want to contact him or consult with him. In this brainstorming process you want to input from as many members as possible. To do this you may have to plan many fellowship activities so you have time with your members and can informally get their thoughts on topics like parent-led catechism.

Parent-led catechism may become one of your ultimate goals. Remember that it may take you 5-10 years to get to the point where parent-led catechism is something the parents ask to do. While you could switch to that cold-turkey, I propose that you will have better and lasting results if you educate and promote such a thing and get critical mass over many years.

Some things that you could use to get to critical mass could include every family home visits in which you model devotions and set up accountability groups. Currently, I plan on recording home devotions and sharing them with families before bed. This would be the first step in a positive slippery slope. I would slowly give parents responsibilities like asking their children questions after the devotion instead of me doing it.

As part of these devotions, I would incorporate a Bible passage or piece of the catechism so that the children are being catechized without realizing it. I plan to do this in a story format so that kids are engaged in a story and invested in the characters and then learn with the characters what living a biblical life looks like. This would allow for catechism to take place from a young age, and any parent listening could also learn along with their kids. This would also be happening at home, which could reinforce the truths learned. This method utilizes indirect communication.

For example, when a character makes a bad decision and then pays the consequences in the story, the father can help the character learn from their sins. There can be lessons on how to set boundaries with bullies at school instead of seeking revenge. Right in the story the father can point the character to Romans 12:19-21, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (NASB). The challenge with this method would be good writing. If done well, it would pay dividends. This is a method I would pursue as a step to parent-led catechism or if I were trying to get families to do home devotions every night.

What about having a fellowship meal after every Sunday service? I think it's a fantastic idea that's been proven. I have heard of a church in Alaska that does exactly that. They do a meal after every service, and they have people from five different nationalities coming to their service, which is really neat. They love it and they're such a family. It works.

And the second thing as far as kids, my wife and I host brunch once a month for twenties to forties with kids. We host the kids, we host the parents together, everyone brings something to share. And we have a once-a-month brunch to make connections to say a prayer together before the meal and go around circle.

Pastors can actually do that in a group setting in a more time efficient way for themselves. So, I would love to see that once-a-month open discussion forum with one main topic or a set of questions that people are sending in throughout the month. People would be like, wow, that's cool. I want to go to that one. And that's a way to get them into the regular Bible study.

I recommend that every technology focused church use Subsplash as their web hosting and app hosting platform. It's used by churches to encourage and maintain a family atmosphere. They have capability of having Facebook group quality or Slack quality messaging groups and prayer request groups so that you can connect people in your congregation using technology. And then every celebration, every service opportunity, every prayer request, things like that are openly shared as if this is an extension of your family. It's like a group chat with your family members and it's different segments. And so if you start these groups of three guys, then they have their own little subgroup. You

don't have to text each other. You have these inside of a closed-door app just for your church.¹¹³

Closing Thoughts

As you seek to be faithful in your ministry, you are called to make disciples of all nations. You can be tempted to do all the discipling yourself instead of training the fathers who are called to be spiritual leaders. It is hard work! It is hard when you see fathers so far from where you would like them to be. It is their responsibility, and you can give them the training and encouragement to do it.

When you are intentionally trying to disciple fathers, you must be patient. The entire world seems to be against them at the moment. Proceed with the same grace that God shows to you.

Finally, as you go in His grace, do not neglect your own soul. Make yourself accountable to a group if you cannot hold yourself accountable, and if blessed with a family, model to your congregation what discipleship looks like. Speak the Word of God in the life of your children on a daily basis. Sing the blessing over them at night. Lead them to the font of forgiveness again and again. Be known as a gracious father, and let your shadow of influence point to Christ.

For Further Study

Certain opportunities for additional research fell outside the scope of this paper, including the following questions. They would be possible starting points for continuing this study.

¹¹³ Buelow, interview.

- How do we train single mothers¹¹⁴ to disciple their children.
- What about a synod wide discipleship push--every house a church (home devotions).
- An in-depth study of the effectiveness of our LES and high schools in accomplishing discipleship.
- Are pastors trained how to disciple their family and are they trained to disciple their members?
- An in-depth study of discipling your family while in the ministry.
- The effects of culture on the family unit.
- The effects of stay-at-home dads.
- The effects of daycare on discipleship.
- The effects of double income households and discipleship.
- Is parent-led catechism worth it?

¹¹⁴ Or a mother whose husband is unwilling to fulfill his role.

APPENDIX I (QUESTIONS)

1. How has the culture at large affected your training of men in your community and congregation to be spiritual leaders? (American culture)

2. How has the culture of your community affected your training of men in your congregation and community to be spiritual leaders?

(Local culture)

3. How has the culture of your congregation affected your training of men in your congregation and community to be spiritual leaders?

(Congregational culture)

4. What specific ministry do you do for men in your congregation and community?

(What do you have now?)

5. Why do you do it? (What does it seek to accomplish?)

6. If it were up to you and you could get any program or movement going, what would you put in place or establish to help and encourage men to be spiritual leaders?

(What's your dream?)

7. In your setting, what would be some of the first things you would want to add or augment in regard to ministry toward men?

(If you had to augment what you are doing, what would you do first?)

8. What else would you like to share on this topic?

(lay it on me!)

APPENDIX II (INTERVIEW PERMISSIONS FORM)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. My name is Isaac Pappenfuss, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I am conducting this study as part of my senior thesis project (TH3300) on the topic of ministry to men. This project is in partial fulfillment of my MDiv degree. You have been invited to participate in this research because I believe that you can provide valuable information on the topic. I will be asking you questions about how to best serve men in your specific setting. The interview will last approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

Your involvement in this research will be shared in my senior thesis.

If you agree to the audio/video recording of the interview, the recording will be deleted after the research project is completed.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any or all questions. You may fully withdraw from the interview at any time and information that you provided will not be reported in the research.

“By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions described.”

Name : _____ Date: _____

“I furthermore agree to the audio/video recording of this interview, and understand that the recording will be deleted upon completion of the research project.” _____ (initials)

APPENDIX III (SHEMA PAPER)

Here is a link to a PDF of the [SHEMA PAPER](#)

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