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### Developing a Congregational Committee on Communication

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DEVELOPING A CONGREGATIONAL COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATION

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FEBRUARY 3, 1999

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DEVELOPING A CONGREGATIONAL  
COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATION

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY  
MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT  
BY  
REV. MARK BANGERT

## ABSTRACT

This Major Applied Project had the purpose of examining the communication that happens in a congregation and the communication that comes from a Christian congregation. Emphasis in the paper is on how communication skills must be used in service of the Gospel.

Components of the paper include a theological and confessional examination of communication; a look at current communication theory; the development of a "Committee On Communication" in a local parish; and the specific results of that committee's work.

This paper is for anyone desiring to better develop the communication skills of their congregation in service of the Gospel.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Project Description

I have selected this project because a pastor's chief function is as a communicator. He communicates the love of Christ in worship through his preaching and leading of worship. He communicates the Good News as one who cares for souls at the hospital, home, nursing home, and any other place the Lord provides.

The Church is also a communicator. She communicates chiefly through her people and the ministry they are involved in. She also communicates through the image portrayed to the people of the community, through the care and appearance of the property, as well as through the newspaper, local radio, and television.

This project will seek to both identify many of communication resources and do a constructive critique of those resources at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Washington, Missouri. That examination and critique will examine the communication that happens within the congregation and that which is directed toward our community. It will also develop a job description for a Communications Committee that could focus its attention on how well the congregation is communicating inside and outside the congregation. The

intended result is to examine and refine the communication process of the church so that it will become a better channel through which the Holy Spirit might nurture the faith of its members as well as bring some to know Christ as Savior.

I am not aware of any congregation that has a committee that exclusively examines the communication of its congregation. This could be a valuable exercise for any congregation to go through to maximize the impact it has upon its community.

#### Some Communication Premises for the Project

Four key assumptions form the basis for the identification and critique of the congregation's communication resources. First, communication begins with those who are in leadership positions. If the leadership of a congregation assumes that healthy communication will simply happen within a church, it will soon find out that this communication will not happen. Instead, good communication is intentionally planned and practiced.

The pastor, as leader of the congregation, takes the lead in good communication skills. Not only is it important to communicate well from the pulpit and in teaching situations, but the pastor must also be able to communicate effectively with his staff and with his congregation. He needs to be willing to take the lead in communicating with

the community as well. Lay leaders in the congregation are also key players in the effective communication of a congregation.

Second, communication, by its very nature, affects people. The church needs to do what it does well. We seek to touch people's hearts, minds, bodies, and souls through an effective use of the means of grace. The correctness of the message is crucial. The church has the responsibility to see that that message is heard. We want the Spirit to be at work in our communications with each other and with our community.

Third, communication is people driven. We certainly have a message to proclaim, but that message is one that people need to hear. Is our style of communicating inviting and encouraging? Do we make people feel welcomed and interested in finding out what the church is all about? We are hearer oriented in communication so that the message proclaimed is actually heard.

Fourth, communication needs to be evaluated. It is a necessity that the church continue to evaluate what and how she is communicating. Is our message understandable? Is the Good News being constantly communicated? What can we do better? What can we do new? These are some typical evaluative questions. Communication that continually improves is effective communication. Constant review and evaluation of the communication of the church, within and

without, is the only way to ensure that communication does not become stale and ineffective.

#### Primary Theological Premise

On the other hand, there is a primary theological premise as well. This premise separates Lutherans from the rest of Christendom: the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Only the Gospel brings people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The Law's function is to prepare hearts of repentance to receive the Gospel. The power of the Spirit working in God's Law and Gospel, not our communication skills, is what changes people's lives. God uses his means of grace to accomplish his salvation in people's hearts.

At the same time we must not fall into the trap of apathy and indifference on how that Gospel is presented. The proper distinction between Law and Gospel demands that, on the one hand, good communication is not in a synergistic relationship with the Gospel, yet, on the other hand, we cannot be satisfied with a lazy and cold presentation of the Good News about Jesus Christ. Good communication should not be played against the Means of Grace. Good communication is not subversive to the Gospel. It is a faithful servant of the Gospel.

### Project Design

The objective of this Major Applied Project is to develop a Committee in Immanuel Lutheran Church, Washington, Missouri, that will examine the communication that happens in the congregation. There are many ways in which our communication in the community can be improved. A committee dedicated to that task can bring about some significant changes that will help our outreach with the Gospel.

The committee will identify those who are to be communicated with both within the congregation and outside of the congregation. They will also examine the channels of communication that exist and make recommendations on how our communication might be improved. Those channels of communication range from the sermon to the newsletter, to the radio broadcast, to the church's involvement in the community. The committee will also make suggestions on what new forms of communication might be helpful to the spreading of the Gospel in our community.

After this committee has functioned for a three month period, the committee and I will review and evaluate the changes we have made and the impact we have had upon the communication we have effected in the congregation. This evaluation will be part of the Major Applied Project.

The project will have four parts. They include:

- 1) Biblical and confessional perspectives on communication

- 2) Secular disciplines in conjunction with confessional theology
- 3) The Congregational Committee on Communication
- 4) A summary of results following a three month operation of the Communications Committee.

### Conclusion

Communication is the key function of the pastor and of Christ's Church. It is a dangerous proposition to assume that we are communicating well with ourselves and with our community. Respecting the work of the Spirit, as well as the gifts God gives us in communication, it is helpful to examine how we can be the best tools we can be in the hands of a loving God. This project's purpose is to develop further the communication possibilities of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Washington, Missouri.

## CHAPTER 1

### BIBLICAL AND CONFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION

#### Introduction

A certain tension arises when a Lutheran asks the question: "How can I, as an individual, more effectively communicate the Gospel to people?" The same tension exists when the Church asks the question: "How can we, as Christ's Church, more effectively communicate the Good News about Jesus Christ to our world?" The tension has to do with the role of the Spirit in relation to the responsibility of the church to effectively communicate to others.

It is the Holy Spirit alone who opens the heart and enables that unregenerate heart to look upon Jesus Christ in faith.

No one can say, "Jesus Christ is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1 Cor. 12:3 NIV.

<sup>2</sup>Luther's Small Catechism, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 15.

It is the Spirit's work alone that converts the heart and enables a person to receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

The tension arises when we realize that God has also given us gifts to use faithfully in the work of the kingdom. When Jesus tells the disciples a parable about a wise manager who faithfully uses the gifts his master provides, Jesus concludes that parable with the instructions:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.<sup>3</sup>

The demand of the Master is in proportion to the gifts He has bestowed, whether they be spiritual or temporal. Included in these gifts is the created ability to understand human beings, how they communicate, and how we communicate with them. Careful examination of the created world reveals certain truths about that created order. God has ordered creation not only in the physical sciences like biology and physics, but also in the science of communication theory. Faithfully using those gifts in service to the Word is not only a proper action of the Church, it is necessary if the Church is to be a good steward of the gifts God provides.

Therein lies the tension. God alone converts the heart to Christ, yet God has also given us tools to communicate with people. We are called to faithfully use those tools,

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<sup>3</sup>Luke 12:48b NIV.

but God alone works faith in the human heart. The following is a Biblical and confessional examination of that tension.

### Christ as Communicator

It is tempting to look through Scriptures with an eye to what they have to say about how we ought to communicate effectively. It is not difficult to find Jesus being very successful as a communicator. Jesus calls his disciples to leave their families, their livelihood, and their common sense behind and follow after Him. They do it.<sup>4</sup> Jesus has the nerve to stand up in the synagogue, read from the prophet Isaiah, and point to Himself as the fulfillment of God's promise. The listeners understood exactly what Jesus was saying. They took him out to the brow of a hill to throw him off.<sup>5</sup> Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well. He communicates with her so well that she in turn communicates the Good News to her entire community of Sychar.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus communicated non-verbally as well. He fed the crowds while he taught them. He touched people when he healed. He held babies. He overturned tables. Jesus appears to be the master communicator. The Father calls

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<sup>4</sup>Luke 5:1-11 NIV.

<sup>5</sup>Luke 4:16-30 NIV.

<sup>6</sup>John 4:1-42 NIV.

Jesus "The Word made flesh,"<sup>7</sup> the great Communication from God.

It seems as if we should be able to package and sell a Jesus-technique for communicating to a lost world, a technique that should never fail. Some might wonder, "If only we can pin down that technique of Jesus that so often worked, as in the case of the Samaritan woman, then we will know the secret of communicating the Gospel." That, however, is a gross oversimplification of the Jesus we find in God's Word.

Many times we are told that the people closest to Jesus did not understand what he was saying. They had not even understood fully who He was or what He had come to do. For example, Peter had made his bold confession of faith in Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,"<sup>8</sup> yet he still didn't fully understand. Even after explicit instruction about what was about to happen, Peter had to be rebuked by Jesus about his misunderstanding of Jesus:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block

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<sup>7</sup>John 1:14 NIV.

<sup>8</sup>Matt. 16:16 NIV.

to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."<sup>9</sup>

Jesus had told them over and over about his suffering and death, but they were unable to fully comprehend what Jesus was trying to communicate.

Jesus had an encounter with a rich young ruler. The young man went away sad. Jesus was unable to reach him with the Good News about a Savior. On one occasion, after Jesus had difficulty communicating with his own family, they tried to have him committed as insane!

Pilate asked Jesus the timeless question, "What is truth?" Jesus said absolutely nothing in response. Those whom Jesus had apparently reached with his preaching and miracles shouted their praises on Palm Sunday. Had they really understood it all? By Good Friday they, as well as each of the Twelve, had turned their backs on Jesus and His message. Even the great Spirit-filled preaching of Pentecost was followed by rejection and misunderstanding.

The problem with any venture to make a Jesus technique for communication is to make the technique the master instead of the servant. Communication theory would begin to dictate our theology and not the other way around because Scripture would be read from a communication, not a Law/Gospel, basis. To try to draw from Scripture the tools

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<sup>9</sup>Matt. 16:21-23 NIV.

necessary to be an effective witness is to distort the Word, and the primary reason the Word was made flesh.

John informs us that the Scriptures are written that:

You may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus himself tells us the real purpose of the Word made flesh:

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.<sup>11</sup>

The Scriptures were given to us as the Spirit inspired revelation from God regarding human nature, the nature of God, and how we can be reconciled in an eternal relationship through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures were not given as an exercise in communication theory. They were given as an exposition of God's rescue in Jesus Christ and in all things essential to that rescue.

Having said this, though, does not mean we can't learn from Jesus and the Scriptures. God's Word does inform us of good communication practice that we can incorporate into our own communication work. Further, just because the Scriptures do not give as the primary purpose a theology of communication--or a Jesus technique for communicating--does not mean we can ignore communication theory and practice.

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<sup>10</sup>John 20:31 NIV.

<sup>11</sup>Matt. 20:28 NIV.

Indeed, just the opposite is true. God has given us the ability to communicate. We must do it well.

Paul encourages exactly that kind of clear communication.

If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.<sup>12</sup>

Our words must be "clear" so that the people hear Law and Gospel and so can be brought into saving faith. The communication that comes from the church must be "intelligible" so that people hear what we are saying and the Spirit may do His work.

The objection is heard that Jesus told us to not worry about our clarity and how we communicate when he said:

Simply let your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "No" be "No"; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.<sup>13</sup>

The context of this verse makes it clear that Jesus is not speaking to the quality of our communication but to our truthfulness. When we speak we must speak understanding that we are in the presence of Almighty God. That realization demands not only truthfulness, but also that we speak clearly and intelligibly. The desire to speak clearly and faithfully are the result of our realization that we stand in the presence of our God.

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<sup>12</sup>1 Cor. 14:8,9 NIV.

<sup>13</sup>Matt. 5:37 NIV.

The Word *Ex Opere Operato*?

Speaking of the opponents of the Gospel, the Lutheran Confessions in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession state:

They imagine that the sacraments bestow the Holy Spirit *ex opere operato* without the proper attitude in the recipient, as though the gift of the Holy Spirit were a minor matter.<sup>14</sup>

It is not just the sacraments, but also the communication of the Gospel that cannot be reduced to simply "the mere performance" of speaking or writing. Indeed, if the Word operates *ex opere operato*, by the mere reading of it, then what is the necessity of preaching? What is the need of devotional material? What is the need of the Confessions? If the Word operated by its mere reading, then there is no benefit to expounding on that Word in clear and concise manner, then the Church's business should only be in the production of Bibles. Sermons would only need to be the reading of Scripture. Hymns that have beautifully and poetically proclaimed the truth of the Gospel for centuries would be superfluous.

Although the *ex opere operato* of the Confessions is reference to the mere outward use of the sacraments, there is a sense in which it is true that the Word does not operate only by the mere reading of it. That is not to say that the Spirit cannot or does not operate in the mere

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<sup>14</sup>The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 115.

reading of the Word. The Spirit works when and where He pleases. A proper question for us to ask, however, is this: "How can I best use the gifts God has given me to be a faithful instrument of the Holy Spirit to do His work?" A proper question by the Church is: "How can we best communicate to a dying world the life giving Good News about Jesus Christ?"

The Lutheran Church, on occasion, has been reluctant to ask these questions because of a fear to tread on the work of the Holy Spirit. But it is not treading on the work of the Spirit to properly prepare and deliver a sermon. It is not treading on the work of the Holy Spirit to have a hymn played to its very best by an organist. Rather, it is faithful stewardship of God's Word to communicate well to God's people so that the message is heard, understood, and remembered.

Although the Confessions speak less than directly to the role of the communicator in communicating, the following quotation from the Formula of Concord is helpful:

Neither the preacher nor the hearer should question this grace and operation of the Holy Spirit, but should be certain that, when the Word of God is preached, pure and unalloyed according to God's command and will, and *when the people diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate on it*, God is certainly present with his grace and gives what man is unable by his own powers to take or to give.<sup>15</sup> (emphasis is mine)

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<sup>15</sup>Tappert, 532.

Since it is necessary that "the people diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate" on what is being communicated, it follows that what is being communicated should be done in such a way that people will listen! Since this is true for the communication that happens in preaching, it follows that it is also true for the rest of the communicating that the Church should be doing.

After extensive review of appropriate sections of Pieper, I found one brief reference to effective preaching.

Let him (the preacher) not be content with merely enumerating the three Kingdoms and presenting a hasty sketch of them, but in describing them let him - as one of the fathers puts it - "pull out all the stops." He must not, of course, pull his own stops, but draw for his catechumens and hearers the rich diapason of Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

Notice that he is quick to "not pull out his own stops" so as not to walk on the work of the Spirit. But he still want to "pull out all the stops."

This quotation encourages faithful use of God's gifts to us, gifts which include our understanding of communication theory. Using those gifts from God is not "pulling out our own stops," unless we understand those communication gifts to be doing the converting, the real work that belongs to the Spirit.

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<sup>16</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, volume II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 386.

Walther in his Law and Gospel, prior to the heart of one particular lecture, addresses what makes an effective preacher. Being clear not to take over the work of the Spirit, he places great responsibility on the shoulders of a preacher to communicate well and have "creditable results."

The second requisite for effective preaching (the first was the pure Word of God) is that the preacher not only himself believe the things he preaches to others, but that his heart be full of the truths which he proclaims, so that he enters his pulpit with the ardent desire to pour out his heart to his hearers. He must have an enthusiastic grasp, in the right sense of that word, of his subject. Then his hearers get the impression that the words dropping from his lips are flames from a soul on fire. That does not mean that the Word of God must receive its power and life from the living faith of the preacher ... But when a preacher proclaims what he has ever so often experienced in his own heart, he easily finds the right words to speak convincingly to his hearers. Coming from the heart, his words, in turn, go to the hearts of his hearers, according to the good old saying: *Pectus disertum facit*, that is, it is from the heart that makes eloquent.<sup>17</sup>

Again, Walther is clear to point out that good communication skills do not bring the Word to life, but serve the Word to reach the hearts of the lost.

The Word does not work *ex opere operato*, otherwise monotonous, boring, unimaginative sermons would be perfectly acceptable as long as they were Scriptural. Homiletics classes would be unnecessary. Exegesis would be the only skill necessary for an effective preacher. It must also be

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<sup>17</sup>C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), 112.

said that communication theory absolutely does not work in the spiritual realm *ex opere operato*. The effectiveness of the Gospel is dependent upon the work of the Spirit through that Word. Yet, at the same time, good communication skills are a faithful servant of the Gospel, that the Word is heard by those listening.

#### A Law/Gospel Issue

One of the premier and unique doctrines of the Lutheran Church is captured in the title of C. F. W. Walther's classic book The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel. Understanding the proper relationship of communication and the work of the Spirit in the life of a faithful preacher and a faithful church is guided by understanding the proper relationship between the Law and the Gospel. Said another way, sanctification must not be confused with, nor separated from, justification. In the same way, good communication skills must not be confused with, nor separated from, the work of the Spirit.

The Confessions are crystal clear in the distinction between justification and sanctification. The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article III, 36, is one of many statements in the Confessions that make this distinction clear.

This is St. Paul's intention when in this article he so earnestly and diligently stresses such exclusive terms (that is, terms that exclude works from the article of justification by faith) as "without works," "without the law," "freely," "not of works," all of which

exclusive terms may be summarized in the assertion that we are justified before God and saved "through faith alone."<sup>18</sup>

This same distinction must be made between the works of the law found in communication theory and the grace of God found in the work of the Spirit. The most profound of good communication theory (good works) has no part in the conversion of the heart to faith in Christ. It is completely and totally the work of the Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

At the same time, because the Spirit operates fully and completely to bring about spiritual change in people that does not give excuse to be lazy and sloppy in communication, nor does it prohibit from developing the communication skills God has blessed us to understand. Again the Law/Gospel, Sanctification/Justification, analogy fits. From the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, 74:

Love and good works must also follow faith. So they are not excluded as though they did not follow, but trust in the merit of love or works is excluded from justification.<sup>19</sup>

Scripture is replete with such expectations for the faithful to be about good works:

*(Jesus speaking)* My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Tappert, 545.

<sup>19</sup>Tappert, 117.

<sup>20</sup>John 15:12 NIV.

Peter and the other disciples replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"<sup>21</sup>

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.<sup>22</sup> (emphases above are mine)

In the realm of sanctification, God expects good works. They have nothing to do with our being justified. Nonetheless, good works are the natural result of our justification. God also expects preachers and churches to be about good communication. Good communication skills have nothing to do with the effective work of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, our best efforts at communicating the Gospel are the natural result of our salvation. A confusion of Law and Gospel results not only when we make good works necessary to salvation, but also when we separate good works from our salvation, when we exclude good works as the natural response to the salvation we know in Jesus Christ. In the same way, it is a confusion of Law and Gospel not only when we make good communication necessary to conversion, but also when we separate our responsibility to communicate well from a faithful proclamation of the Gospel.

We must resist the temptation that, if we are to protect our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in our communication of the Gospel, we must somehow disassociate ourselves from good communication theory. Good

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<sup>21</sup>Acts 5:29 NIV.

<sup>22</sup>1 John 4:11 NIV.

communication skills are not subversive and in opposition to the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace. A re-writing of Romans 6:1-2 may be helpful.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on *communicating poorly* so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to *poor communication skills*; how can we live in them any longer?<sup>23</sup>

A comparison between poor communication skills and sin is not an unjust one. God has given us these gifts of communication. We have the clear responsibility to be good stewards of these gifts. Not only is communication theory a gift from God, but so is television, radio, newspaper, and the internet. Shall we go on sinning and not make the most of God's gifts to us? Paul's answer is evident. "By no means!" It may properly be said that our confession of the Gospel falls within the realm of sanctification. It is our cooperation with the Spirit in sanctification that forms the words we speak about Jesus. Yet, it is the Spirit who uses those words to convert the lost to Christ.

The Scripture goes on to say that we need to be prepared to communicate the hope we have in Christ.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Rom. 6:1-2 NIV.

<sup>24</sup>1 Pet. 3:15 NIV.

The Scripture also encourages us in the way that we are to communicate our hope in Christ. Gentleness and respect are Peter's direction in communication. This is but one example. But the point is clear. To fail to use all of God's gifts of communication is to separate the Law from the Gospel, and so to confuse them.

### Cheap Grace

Good communication skills need not be pitted against the means of grace. To pit one against the other is a deception of the evil one. Luke describes the efforts of Paul in Corinth to convert both Jews and Greeks.

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.<sup>25</sup>

Paul used his God given skill to his utmost so that He might convince unbelievers of the Christ. Paul himself speaks about the use of his skills in service of the Gospel.

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.<sup>26</sup>

In the book of Acts Luke reveals exactly how Paul operated in his work as an evangelist for Christ.

As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.<sup>27</sup>

Luke also writes about Apollos,

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<sup>25</sup>Acts 18:4 NIV.

<sup>26</sup>2 Cor. 5:11 NIV.

<sup>27</sup>Acts 17:2 NIV.

He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately ... He began to speak boldly in the synagogue ... He vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.<sup>28</sup>

Luke tells of Paul's work in Ephesus persuading and reasoning with people from the Scriptures. Paul had been well received in the Ephesian synagogue on his first visit. Upon his return there Paul picks up where he had left off.

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.<sup>29</sup>

Again, Paul speaks boldly concerning "the kingdom of God," the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and revealed in God's Word. He "argues persuasively" from the Scriptures the truths about Jesus Christ. Although some were "obstinate and refused to believe," there were many who did believe because the Spirit had worked through Paul's bold speaking.

Paul, Apollos, and certainly others used their best skills of communication, argued persuasively, spoke with great fervor, and then trusted in the work of the Spirit working in the Word to convert the hearts of his hearers to faith in Christ. Scripture supports this important thesis in communication of the Gospel: Good communication skill is

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<sup>28</sup>Acts 18:24-28 NIV.

<sup>29</sup>Acts 19:8 NIV.

an important servant of the Gospel used from the very beginning of the church until Christ comes again.

As soon as the church dwells solely upon the truth that the Spirit alone converts and that He uses the means of grace to accomplish that conversion, then the devil whispers in our ear, "Leave this work up to the Spirit. A little laziness on your part cannot hamper the work of an all powerful Spirit." Dietrich Bonhoeffer captures what the devil would say to us when we misapply the doctrine of conversion.

Relax, take it easy. Since salvation is by grace alone - the enemy is not adverse in using bits and pieces of truth for his own ends - then why trouble yourself with such things as techniques and strategies, with planning and programs for getting the Gospel out? Why give any thought to trying to meet people where they are? The Holy Spirit does it all, working through Word and Sacrament. Therefore, do nothing. Or do it the easy way or the way we have always done it. Indulge grace!<sup>30</sup>

Not understanding the proper distinction between communication skills and the work of the Spirit will result in misunderstanding in one of two extremes. Either we will give some credit to our efforts when some are won for Christ, or we may ignore our responsibility in communicating the Gospel well. Failing to understand the grace of God in the means of grace or the opposite extreme, to practice

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<sup>30</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), 35.

cheap grace in our communication of the Gospel, are both betrayals of the Gospel.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod details the proper way to evaluate evangelism programs and plans in the light of a proper understanding of the role of the Spirit and our role in the faithful use of God's gifts to us. Two questions were particularly applicable to this paper.

Does this program or technique create the illusion that the acceptance of the Gospel by sinners is attributable to the use of this program or technique? And,

Does this program or technique lead to the conclusion that the lack of positive results, when this occurs, is attributable solely to the way in which it was implemented?<sup>31</sup>

If these questions can be answered positively, then the Church has confused Law and Gospel by making the Spirit subject to good communication skills. Such a misunderstanding robs the Spirit of His work, and His work alone, in our lives.

The CTCR also posed questions that should be asked regarding the other side of this tension between the work of the Spirit and our good communication skills:

Is the lack of numerical growth in our congregation the result of a failure to prepare carefully and to execute a plan for reaching those people in our community who do not know Christ?

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<sup>31</sup>Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Evangelism and Church Growth (St. Louis, 1987), 48.

Have we made wise use of the resources and insights at our disposal - for example, the social sciences, the arts, etc. - in proclaiming the Gospel and in furthering Christian nurture?

Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to a failure to communicate the Gospel clearly?<sup>32</sup>

If these questions can be answered in the positive, then we may indeed be practicing "cheap grace" and succumbing to the temptations of the devil not to put our best efforts into the proclaiming of the Gospel.

Like so many of our doctrines drawn from God's Holy Word, our reason somehow does not match up to the wisdom of God. Tensions and mysteries exist when we look into our theology. There are tensions and mysteries in our understanding of election, that God would have all to be saved, and yet some are not. There are tensions and mysteries in our understanding of conversion in that no one decides to follow Christ, yet we have the free will to reject what Christ freely offers. There are tensions and mysteries in our understanding of Baptism, that God works salvation in the heart of an infant, yet Baptism is not magic that necessarily saves an infant for eternity. There are tensions and mysteries in our understanding of Holy Communion when we stand apart from the rest of the Christian Church and proclaim that what is bread is body, and what is wine is blood. So, too, there are tensions and mysteries in

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 49.

our understanding of the role of the Spirit as sole converter of the heart, and, at the same time, we are called to use God's gift of communication to the best of our abilities. Perhaps that tension can be stated this way: We communicate the Gospel knowing full well that it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes all spiritual change, but we act, speak, and communicate with great faithfulness and diligence so we might be effective tools of the Spirit.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOME COMMUNICATION COMPONENTS IN SERVICE OF THE GOSPEL

#### Introduction

Joseph Devito, Professor of Communication at Hunter College of the City University of New York, defines communication as follows:

*"Communication refers to the act, by one or more persons, of sending and receiving messages that are distorted by noise, occur within a context, have some effect, and provide some opportunity for feedback."*<sup>33</sup>

This chapter will examine this understanding of communication. It will also make some brief applications to the communication process of the church. At all times it is my purpose to use these secular disciplines in service of the Gospel. They do not add effectiveness to the Gospel. They do serve to remove human obstacles we put in the way of effective communication. Rightly understood, the Confessions speak to these matters:

All who would be saved must hear this preaching, for the preaching and the hearing of God's Word are the Holy Spirit's instrument in, with, and through which he

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<sup>33</sup>Joseph A. Devito, Human Communication - The Basic Course, Fourth Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 4.

wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to achieve. <sup>34</sup>

"They must hear this preaching." If, because of our shortcomings in communication, they do not hear our preaching, our communicating of the Gospel, the Spirit does not work. Further, the Confessions say:

The person who is not yet converted to God and regenerated can hear and read this Word externally because, as stated above, even after the Fall man still has something of a free will in these external matters, so that he can go to church, listen to a sermon, or not listen to it.<sup>35</sup>

Communication skill is one of those external matters over which we have free will. Skillful communication can enable an individual to give the Gospel a hearing so that the Spirit can do His work.

Finally, the Confessions state:

Neither the preacher nor the hearer should question this grace and operation of the Holy Spirit, but should be certain that, when the Word of God is preached, pure and unalloyed according to God's command and will, and when the people diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate on it, God is certainly present with his grace and gives what man is unable by his own powers to take or to give.<sup>36</sup>

The communicator's task is to engage his hearers so that people will "diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate on" the Good News about Jesus Christ. The faithful use of

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<sup>34</sup>Tappert, page 531.

<sup>35</sup>Tappert, page 531.

<sup>36</sup>Tappert, page 532.

good communication skills can be used by God to open the ears so that the heart may hear.

Studies in communication theory, including those used in service of the Gospel, focus on several components present in all forms of communication. Those components will be examined in the context of the four principles outlined at the beginning of this paper. Each of the four principles will be further examined in the light of communication theory and in service of the Gospel.

Principle One -  
Communication Begins With the Leadership

First, leaders in a congregation need to understand that communication includes sources and receivers. Sources are those who transmit information, and receivers are the recipients of such information. Sources will be treated here under leadership. Receivers will be treated in the next principle of communication, that it is people driven.

The message which a source communicates is a function of who it is. Messages are a function of what people know, what they believe in, value, and want. Who you are can never be separated from the messages you send. It is important for the church to understand exactly who it is. What we believe and what we value will determine what we communicate - and to an extent - how we do so. Among those key ingredients that make up who we are are the following:

We are a Christ-centered people, and since we are, then what we seek to communicate is Christ. Our material principle, that we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, will shape and form all that we communicate as a church.

We are a Law-Gospel people. Our understanding of the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel will guide and direct what we seek to share with the world. A message from the church that is absent of the Law does not represent who we are. A message that is thin on the Good News of Jesus Christ is not congruent with whom we are as Lutherans.

We are also a Sacramental people. Our understanding of God's use of means to deliver forgiveness, life, and salvation is clearly an important part of our character. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are central to our understanding of who we are before God. Armed with that understanding, we will be better able to communicate effectively to a needful world.

Only with this understanding of who we are, shared by clergy and laity alike, can we better understand what we must communicate. With anything less than a full understanding of who we are, we will not be able to effectively communicate, and honestly, we won't be able to communicate what we must.

Second, to better understand the role of a leader in communication, leaders must know that each person in the act

of communication acts as a whole human being. It is impossible for a human being to react solely on an intellectual or solely on an emotional level. We are not able to compartmentalize ourselves in such a fashion. A host of factors influence how we hear and interpret a message. Previous experiences, present emotions, knowledge, physical well-being, and much more, influence the level of communication.

If people communicate as whole beings, should we be afraid to use emotion to communicate? We understand as Lutherans that the zeal and passion of the speaker does not motivate hearers to faith. The Gospel motivates them.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for everyone who believes.<sup>37</sup>

No Lutheran should ever question the supreme role of God through the working of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace. However, the right understanding can never become an excuse for proclaiming the Word of God in a boring, lifeless, matter-of-fact fashion. It is possible for us to hinder the work of the Spirit. Many of the great preachers of our church, like Dr. Walter A. Maier and Dr. Oswald Hoffman, were men who spoke with great emotion and conviction. Their passion and their zeal came through their messages. God was not lifeless and boring when He

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<sup>37</sup>Rom. 1:16 NIV.

communicated to the world in His Son. Dare we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ with anything less than great zeal and passion? If we are to communicate to people who are communicating as whole human beings, to leave out any aspect of who they are as human beings--body, mind, or spirit--is to invite miscommunication with that human being.

Third, leaders need to understand that communication has both symmetrical and complementary transactions.

Symmetrical transactions occur when people in communication relationships mirror each other's behavior. A pastor with zeal for the Gospel may find that he inspires that kind of behavior in his people. The negative is also true. When a leader appears apathetic, he may also lead his people into an apathetic ministry.

If the Surgeon General had to report the leading cause of death in church, it would no doubt result in a new warning label being placed on some sermons: "Warning: this sermon may be hazardous to your spiritual health." Listening to some preachers should be outlawed as cruel and unusual punishment. Their preaching resembles winter. The congregation's eyes freeze over like the lakes, their heads go down as the birds fly south, and just like bears that hibernate, their minds enter a state of suspended animation for the duration of the message. Frozen preachers produce frozen people.<sup>38</sup>

Leadership, in terms of symmetrical transactions, is an important ingredient in effective communication by the church.

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<sup>38</sup>Timothy A. Turner, Preaching to Programmed People (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 1995), 89.

A complimentary transaction is when two people engage in different actions as a result of communication. A complimentary relationship exists between a pastor and his people. The pastor preaches. The people listen and respond. The pastor leads as the shepherd. His people follow as the sheep. Although that can be a healthy relationship of leaders and followers, it can also express itself negatively when the pastor is perceived as the only one capable of doing ministry and so freezes the laity in inaction. Anger can develop in such circumstances, because it limits people in the activities in which they would like to be involved.

Communication does begin with the leadership in a congregation. The leadership needs to not only teach effective communication skills, not only enable healthy communication in and out of the church, but the leadership also needs to exemplify effective communication in the church and community.

Principle Two -  
Communication is People Driven

One component of communication that is people driven is understanding that communication takes place within a context. The context of communication has three different dimensions. The first is physical. Obviously, communication is going to be different when the physical context is different. For example, communication that

happens in church will be greatly different from communication at a school basketball game. The communication when witnessing to someone in their home will be different from the communication that happens in a radio broadcast of a Sunday sermon. The physical context is the actual physical surroundings in which communication takes place.

The second dimension of the context is the social-psychological dimension. This facet of context includes the relationship between the people communicating. For example, there may be a different relationship between people of the congregation than between the people of the congregation and the pastor. There will be different relationships between the congregation and those outside of the church whom they know and whom they do not know. The culture in which we live is also included in this social-psychological dimension of the context. When the culture says that the church is outdated and no longer is relevant to the world in which we live, then that affects the communication between the church and the world. The social-psychological dimension of the context is the relationships between people communicating.

The third aspect of communication in context is the temporal dimension. Most importantly, this has to do with the time in history that communication is being offered. As many claim today, we are living in a post-Christian era when not only is Christianity no longer in the majority in this

country, it is also under increased attack from within and without. That context is destined to have great impact on the communication that the church seeks to have in the world. The temporal dimension of communication is the age in which we communicate and all that that means for our communication.

Communication is a dynamic process. The context is continually changing in each of its facets. Each change means an impact on other parts of the context. The church needs to be continually aware of the changing context in which it lives so that we might more effectively communicate the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Communication that is people driven will also benefit by our understanding that the way receivers of communication hear the message of the church also has much to do with who they are as receivers.

Who you are can never be divorced from the messages you send or the messages you perceive.<sup>39</sup>

Natural man, unaffected by the Spirit of God, will always remain natural man. The reception of the message will be impacted by who that person is.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Devito, 6.

<sup>40</sup>1 Cor. 2:14 NIV.

Only those who have the Spirit of God at work in them are able to receive from God what the Gospel seeks to communicate.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.<sup>41</sup>

A very important component of communication is our understanding of who we are as directed by God in His Word. Equally as important is our understanding of the recipients of our message, both inside and outside of the Church. The message of Law and Gospel shared outside of the congregation may, because of our audience, be of a simpler nature. Within the congregational context the church should be able to handle the more meaty of the Scriptures teachings.

Finally, when we know that communication is people driven we will pay attention to the culture in which we live. The culture has a great deal to do with what makes up the people with whom we are trying to communicate. The culture forms much of their thinking, their concerns, and even their communication skills.

A thorough understanding that communication is people driven will serve the church well in its ministry. Understanding who the people are we seek to communicate with, as well as understanding the context in which they

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<sup>41</sup>1 Thes. 2:14 NIV.

hear us, will go a long way in aiding the communication of the Gospel by the Church.

Principle Three -  
Communication is Intended to Affect People

First, if our communication is to affect people, it must be the right message. The pure message of Law and Gospel is of first importance in the communication done by the Church and its people. Without the right message communicated there will be no vehicle for the Spirit to do his work in touching lives with the love and forgiveness Christ won from his cross.

Second, competent communication involves the level of skill and knowledge one has in different areas of communication. The more a person knows about communication, the more choices he will have in seeking to communicate. The church that better understands communication in all its forms will better understand the many avenues and means of communication available to it. Most obvious are the verbal and written messages of communication.

However, communication is not only verbal, not only written or spoken. Communication is also non-verbal. Messages are sent in many different ways from a church. The kinds of clothes our members wear to church says something to our visitors. How our members treat new faces on a Sunday morning speaks volumes. How a worship service is organized and done speaks to our people the importance we

place on worship. In fact, everything about the church is a message to the outside world, whether we want it to be or not.

There are many different channels of communication functioning at the same time. Each member is a channel of communication to our own church members and to people outside the church. The sermon is a communication channel to the people in worship, members and non-members alike. A radio broadcast is a channel of communication to shut-ins and to a community. The church that is aware of and uses well these different channels for its message will be better able to communicate to others.

Third, there will be different levels of noise that can block the effect the Gospel might have on people. Noise is best described as a disturbance in the communication process. Anything that distorts or interferes with the message is noise. When noise is present in a communication system, the message sent will differ from the message received.

Noise may simply be physical noise. A poor public address system in church may contribute to noise. A church with no nursery facilities or no place to take an unhappy baby during the worship hour will most certainly experience noise. Physical noise may also include the quality of the bulletin and newsletter. Anything physically not measuring up to the necessary standards will contribute noise to the

communication process and will distract those who listen to the important message we have to share.

There may also be psychological noise. Preconceived notions about "Lutheran" churches, about close(d) communion, about Baptism, about Lutherans being so much like the Catholics, and many other issues may distort how the hearers perceive us and our message. Correcting these and other misconceptions is an important step in being the most effective communicator the church can be.

There is also semantic noise. Messages can be lost because the source of communication and the receiver are using unfamiliar vocabulary or phrases. Words rich in meaning for most Lutherans, words like justification, sanctification, and grace, may have no meaning to a person outside the Church. When the church uses language that only she understands, then she should not be surprised when those outside the church fail to get our message.

All communication has some degree of noise. The communicator's job is to reduce the level of noise as much as possible. Becoming skillful at sending verbal and non-verbal messages, improving feedback skills, and understanding the context of our communication will go a long way in reducing the noise associated with our proclamation of the Gospel.

Good communication has the intention of affecting people's lives. Good communication in the Church has the purpose of affecting people's lives in eternity.

Principle Four -  
Communication Needs to be Evaluated

Communication that is not evaluated on a regular basis can become lazy, out of touch, and ineffective. Since effective communication needs to be continually evaluated, then feedback is essential. Feedback is information that is sent back to the original source of the communication. Feedback can be positive or negative. It may be immediate or it may be delayed.

There are several sources of feedback. The first is self-feedback. The church that seeks to communicate well does self examination. What is there that we can do better? Are there new and different ways we may be able to get the message out? Regular self examination produces a healthy ongoing constructive criticism of a church and its ministry of the Gospel.

Feedback can also come from the outside. Visitors to church and new members are often excellent sources of "outside" criticism. Fresh eyes can often see things that eyes that have been looking at a church for a long time may fail to see. Community surveys may also identify what perceptions our community has of the church. They may also

identify areas that a church might focus on to serve its community with the Gospel.

Feedback may be a difficult thing for a pastor and a church to handle, especially if it is negative feedback. A church or pastor that is comfortable with the way things are done may not be willing to examine a possible change in the way we communicate. A church or pastor may take too personally a constructive criticism because it strikes too close to who they are as a person or as a church. Getting past that defensiveness may be an important step in receiving important insights into a church's communication, or lack thereof.

One important concept communicators must grasp if effective communication is to happen is to know that communication is irreversible. Some processes are reversible. Water can be frozen and then melted. Communication is not reversible. Something communicated is not retrievable. Like a bullet shot out of a gun, a message delivered is not able to be recalled. Understanding the irreversibility of communication puts the emphasis on the need for good communication technique. All of the verbal and non-verbal communication the church delivers must be messages for which we are not sorry later. Messages sent to a first time visitor are not retractable. Messages of commitment to new members, or to members in need, had better be meant and the church had better follow through. A church

is in a continual process of communicating to hundreds and even thousands of people on a regular basis. Careful scrutiny of those messages is crucial because of the irreversibility of our communications.

One type of irreversible communication is mixed messages. They are not productive communications. When we say to a visitor, "We are glad you are here," then we proceed to ignore that person, a mixed message is sent. When we profess to be a church that is zealous for the truth and then take no stand against things like abortion, pre-marital sex, pornography, and the like, a very unfortunate mixed message is sent to our listeners. Those types of irreversible messages are very difficult to undo.

Another important skill needing to be evaluated in communication is listening. If leaders are going to communicate effectively with the people in the church, and if the people are to communicate well with their leaders, then one critical component of communication is listening. Listening is a learned behavior. It is defined, in one sense at least, as follows:

An active process of receiving aural stimuli. Contrary to popular conception, listening is an active rather than a passive process. Listening does not just happen. Listening takes energy and commitment.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Devito, 62.

Listening can be listening/non-hearing. Much sermon listening may be of this type. No listening is really happening. Other thoughts fill the mind instead of what is being communicated.

Listening can also be listening/hearing. This type of listening enters the mind and even the memory, but is not struggled with and then applied to life. This, too, may be a frequent form of sermon listening where the listener applies the law to everyone else in attendance because he doesn't really need it, or he even fails to apply the Gospel to himself because he believes his sin has been too bad for God to forgive.

Finally, listening can also be listening/thinking. The listener not only hears but internalizes what is being said. Law and Gospel are actually applied to the hearer by the hearer of the sermon. Such effective listening skills must be taught to people. They do not happen in people by nature.

Listening can also be passive, as well as active. Passive listening has its place; for example, in the counseling session when trust and acceptance are being built. Also, before worship the passive listening to preservice music can be very helpful to place oneself in the proper state of mind for reverent worship.

Active listening is when people are engaged and growing from what is being communicated to them.

As listeners we need to enter the communication interaction - whether interpersonal, small group, or public speaking - as equal partners with the speakers, as persons emotionally and intellectually ready to engage in the sharing of meaning.<sup>43</sup>

Active listening is not only important in the pew, it is also important for the leaders of a congregation as well. To actively listen and respond to the concerns and ideas of the laity is a great asset for any pastor.

Finally, if evaluation is to take place, then it will benefit us to understand how communication flows through a congregation. Communication flows in various directions through an organization. Vertical communication in the church happens from the spiritual shepherd, the pastor, downward to the members of his church, the sheep. The proclamation of Law and Gospel in preaching, the opportunity to teach in Bible Class and adult instruction, counseling sessions, and the encouragement and direction that happen at Elders meetings or Board of Directors meetings are all examples of such "downward communication."<sup>44</sup> It is necessary that pastors and church leaders communicate in language that is clear and free of "technical (read theological) language" so that all may understand.

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<sup>43</sup>Devito, 65.

<sup>44</sup>Understand that assigning the direction "downward" to the communication from the pastor to the laity is not meant to describe a superior position of the pastor, or to negate his role as servant.

Upward communication happens when the laity communicate with the church leadership. This is critical to a healthy organization. Without the knowledge of trouble in families, hospitalization of church members, or information needed to effectively guide the ministry, there will be great gaps in the ministry of any congregation. Pastors need to be attentive to such messages. Even negative messages usually have some grain of truth, sometimes much more than that. Pastors that are very good at sending messages, preaching, teaching, counseling, must be equally adept at receiving them if the ministry is to be a healthy one.

The leadership of a congregation is responsible for healthy communication to happen in a congregation, upwards and downwards. It behooves a congregation to examine the vertical communication that is happening in a congregation and make appropriate adjustments to benefit the ministry of that church.

Lateral communication is also an important ingredient in a healthy ministry. Lateral communication is the communication that happens between staff members of the church. Communication between pastor, other pastoral staff, teachers, principals, and secretaries is critical. Communication within the Board of Directors would also fall into this category. Lateral communication enables the church to coordinate various activities, manage difficult

circumstances in ministry, and resolve any conflicts between staff before they get out of proportion.

Serial communication is the communication that happens along a chain of people. It might be referred to as the "grapevine." This type of communication flourishes in a church when there is great change or upheaval; when the information is new; when face to face communication is easy, e.g. after church in narthex; and when there are many different small groups in the church; choirs, ladies' groups, men's groups, Bible studies and the like.

The Church needs to continually evaluate the communication it is involved in if it is to continue to be effective. Self evaluation as well as evaluation from outside the church can be helpful tools in successful communication.

#### Other Important Items to Consider

Speaking down to someone is rarely an effective means of communication. Pastors can be guilty of this. Giving the impression that some theological thought is above the hearers' ability to grasp is not only insulting, it is also an effective way to halt further communication. This speaking down to our people must be distinguished from the authority that comes from the pastoral office. The authority of the pastoral office can be exercised without speaking down to the people we lead.

Likewise, upward talk can be just as problematic. This puts the listener on the spot and may hold out a false expectation of the insight the listener may have. Expecting the Pastor to be "The Answer Man" is an unfair and unreasonable expectation of the pastor.

A far better form of communication is equality. When communicating on an equal basis, a pastor isn't wiser than his parishioner, the Word is wiser than them both. A preacher who does not talk down to his people, but who identifies with their struggles and with the same forgiveness he desperately needs, is a preacher who is equipped to communicate to his people.

Criticism can be helpful and constructive. It is not always so. When criticism is used inappropriately or in excess then it puts up a blockade to effective communication.

Complimenting is not always positive. When it is overused it loses its value and is unheard. The overly critical and the overly complimentary usually lose their audiences very quickly.

When it comes to the proper balance between criticism and complimenting, the truth is usually the best guide. Telling the truth in love as Paul has urged in Eph. 4:15 remains the best directive.

Interestingly, communications theory regards gossip as inevitable.

Gossiping is an inevitable part of our daily interactions and to advise anyone to refrain from gossiping would be absurd.<sup>45</sup>

Christians would agree that gossiping may be "inevitable" because we are all sinful by nature. That must not stop us from growing in our obedience to Christ and putting aside the things of our sinful nature. Clearly lacking in the contemporary understanding of gossip is Luther's injunction in the 8th Commandment to:

Defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.<sup>46</sup>

Gossip is one of the most destructive tools of the devil to destroy the work of the Gospel. It is never constructive. It only prevents the guilty from having a chance to repent and it serves to destroy the reputations, and so the effectiveness in ministry, of God's people.

No more fiendish punishment could be devised, even were such thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof.<sup>47</sup>

That quote by psychologist William James sums up the definition of disconfirmation. Disconfirmation is the ignoring of a person's presence as well as what they are trying to communicate. Disconfirmation communicates that it is not worth bothering with this person or his ideas.

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<sup>45</sup>Devito, 112.

<sup>46</sup>Luther's Small Catechism, 11.

<sup>47</sup>William James as quoted in Devito, 114-115.

The church can be guilty of this when it fails to give fair hearing to certain segments of its population. Those groups of people include: newer members who can be discounted because they just don't understand how we do things; the older members because they just don't understand our new way of doing things; and the laity in general because they just don't understand theology like we pastors do.

On the other hand, confirmation is the genuine hearing of other's ideas and weighing them on their merits. Confirmation values the person, our relationship as brother and sister in Christ, as well as the content of what is being said.

### Conclusion

This chapter has sought to further define the four basic assumptions about communication:

- 1) That it begins with the leadership;
- 2) That it is people driven;
- 3) That it is intended to affect people; and
- 4) That it is continually evaluated.

The better a church, its leaders, and its people can understand the basic components of effective communication, the better a church can have its message heard. When the message, the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ, is heard, then the Spirit has his chance to bring saving faith into people's hearts. May the Church's faithful communication of

the Gospel always remain a faithful servant of that precious Gospel.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CONGREGATIONAL COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATION

#### Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to study the communication Immanuel Lutheran Church, Washington, Missouri, is doing within our church and with our community. The examination will include the identifying of our communication resources, but also a constructive critique of those resources. That examination and critique will involve communication that happens both within the congregation and communication that is directed toward our community. In this chapter, I will also develop a job description for a Communications Committee that could focus its attention on how well our congregation is communicating inside and outside our congregation. This chapter is intended to be a starting point for the Committee on Communication. The Committee will evaluate my perceptions of our communication and will also come up with its insights as to how we can better communicate the Gospel as a congregation.

#### Remember the Four Assumptions About Communication

Four key assumptions form the basis for the identification and critique of the congregation's

communication resources. First, communication begins with those who are in leadership positions. If the leadership of a congregation assumes that healthy communication will simply happen within a church, they will soon find out that they can assume communication will not happen well.

The pastor, as leader of the congregation, should take the lead in good communication skills. Not only is it important to communicate well from the pulpit and in teaching situations, but the pastor must also be able to communicate with his staff and with his congregation, and be willing to take the lead in communicating with the community.

Second, communication is people driven. We certainly have a message to proclaim, but is that message one that people are hearing? Thus our style of communicating needs to be inviting and encouraging. People should feel welcomed and interested in finding out what Immanuel is all about.

Third, communication is, by its very nature, intended to affect people. We need to do what we are doing well. We are to touch people's hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. The Spirit needs be evident in our communications with each other and with our community.

Fourth, communication needs to be continually evaluated. It is a constant necessity that the church evaluate what and how they are communicating. Some helpful questions are: Is our message understandable? Are there

clear goals in our communicating? Is the Good News being communicated? What can we do better? What can we do new?

Communication is constantly improving if it is effective communication. Constant review and evaluation of the communication of the church, within and without, ensures that communication does not become stale and ineffective. The Board of Evangelism or the Board of Elders might be used to do such regular evaluation. Better yet, a "Community Communications Committee" whose sole purpose is to evaluate and plan the Church's communications would be an excellent tool in a congregation. It might also be useful to have a third party provide helpful insights into what a church is doing poorly and what a church is doing well.

All of the assumptions we make about good communication have as their goal communicating with people. We now look towards communicating with people within the congregation. As the committee does its evaluation it should do so asking questions based on four assumptions.

- 1) Are the leaders communicating well?
- 2) Is our communication people driven?
- 3) Are we affecting people?
- 4) Are we continually evaluating our communication?

With Whom Do We Communicate  
Inside the Church?

Within the congregation there is a vast array of people with whom we must communicate effectively. Among those people are:

1) The Church Staff. Called co-workers like assistant pastors, Directors of Christian Education, Directors of Christian Outreach, Deaconesses and Parish workers must be at the top of the list of people with whom senior pastors effectively communicate. Good communication is particularly essential with church secretaries. They are key people who keep the church office operating on a daily basis.

One big improvement in staff relations at Immanuel Lutheran Church is our newly completed facility. Staff was scattered throughout our facility prior to this building project. The new facility has brought the entire staff into one interconnected office complex. Pastor, Director of Ministry, principal, church secretaries, and school secretary are now all within a few steps of each other. This will help a great deal in our staff communications. One area of improvement that is necessary is the setting of a regular meeting time to plan and discuss concerns. Currently we do that "on the fly." Regular meetings with the principal, Director of Ministry, and secretaries will make an already good team ministry better.

2) The Education Staff. Day school teachers, Sunday school teachers, Sunday Bible class leaders, small group

Bible study leaders, as well as Vacation Bible School leaders need to be in good communication patterns. Much communication will not be directed to all the people involved in the ministry. The educational staff is such an example. Most communication needs to happen between the pastor and those leading such efforts, such as the principal, Sunday school chairman, Vacation Bible School Leader, and the like.

Most of this communication at Immanuel happens through others on my staff. Obviously, the principal is the chief communicator with the day school staff. As the pastor, I try to be visible and available to teachers and to their classrooms. One area of improvement is that I need to voice more of my support for and encouragement of our dedicated teaching staff.

3) The People Educated. We need to communicate the Gospel effectively with those we teach in all of the church's educational agencies and in public worship. The curriculum of our Sunday school needs to be continually monitored so that it is the best for our situation.

Those who are in Sunday school and adult Bible classes are somewhat effectively communicated with. The problem lies in the number of people availing themselves of the opportunity to be in the Word. We are a worshipping body of about 400 souls on a weekend. Our average attendance at Sunday school and adult Bible class during the 'active' nine

months of the year is about 80 - 100 individuals in each. There are several reasons for the lack of attendance. One reason many of our children are not in Sunday school is that they are in our Christian day school and see Sunday school as repetitive and unnecessary. The remedy to the situation may lie in changing people's perceptions by changing the whole "school" atmosphere of Sunday School. St. John's Lutheran Church in Arnold, Missouri, is experimenting with just such a format. Follow-up on their success is certainly warranted.

Being very pragmatic people, the low attendance in adult Bible class perhaps stems from a perception that we do not offer anything that people can use. Although I believe that to be far from the truth, perception is people's reality. A possible solution to that communication problem would be to offer more classes on Sunday mornings. More classes, however, means training more people to lead those classes.

4) The Lay Leaders. The key lay leaders in a congregation need to have good habits of communication to function effectively. Elders, the Board of Directors, as well as the members of the different boards have to be tuned into the goals and objectives of the congregation. That happens through productive communication between pastor and leader.

At Immanuel all boards of the congregation are represented at the Board of Directors meeting each month. Adequate communication happens there as each chairperson reports on the activity of their boards. Mutual support and encouragement is the rule of the day. Pastoral communication is focused on trying to get the boards to set and accomplish goals for each calendar year.

5) The Service Organizations. Lutheran Layman's League, Lutheran Women's Missionary League, youth, altar guild, ushers, and choirs all serve the church faithfully. Good avenues of communication are important here as well.

The organizations at Immanuel operate rather independently. I belong to and attend only "The Men's Club." Communication with the other organizations in the church is on an 'as needed' basis. Immanuel's service organizations understand well that they need to be self-sufficient organizations that will function without the work of the pastor.

6) The People of the Parish. They come to church each week with as many different needs as different names. There need to be opportunities not only for the pastor to speak to them, but for them to speak to the pastor or elder, if necessary. A pastor needs to know their needs, their hurts, and their temptations. We have tried things like making available an "Ask the Pastor" column in the newsletter, but have seen limited responses.

It is imperative that good communication is happening not only from the pulpit, but also through other channels as well. Bulletins and newsletters should be well done and worth reading. Other means of communication should be explored and used effectively.

With Whom Do We Communicate  
Outside the Church?

Communicating well within the congregation is a means to an end. That end is so that we might communicate the Gospel well outside of the congregation. Communicating well inside the congregation facilitates the reaching of the following people with the Good News of Jesus Christ:

1) The Unchurched. People who are living their lives outside Christ's Church, away from Word and Sacraments, and, in all likelihood, outside of the saving grace of Jesus Christ are especially targeted in all our communications. There are countless people in our community whose lives could be changed if we could reach them with the Gospel. Those unchurched people are in our extended families, in our neighborhoods, at our work, and where we recreate.

2) The Churches of Other Denominations. We have an important message to share with them. The Lutheran Church is a unique voice in the Christian world. It needs to be heard.

3) The Community Businesses. A healthy relationship with the businesses and with the people who run those

businesses will be a continual blessing to the Church. A good reputation in the community among businesses may open a door to the Gospel with someone in one of those businesses.

4) The Community Civic Organizations. The pastor and the leadership of the congregation need to have a civic presence in the community. If they do, that communicates effectively to the community the care and concern of our church for community matters.

5) The School Families. Forty percent of the families in our school are not from our church. Communicating effectively with those families may open doors to the Gospel in families whose spiritual base is weak. We may be able to help them to nurture and train their children in the Lord beyond the walls of our school.

6) The Media Audiences. Newspaper, radio, and television provide wide opportunity to communicate the Gospel to a world in deep need of it. We need to effectively use those means. If there is more to be done, we need to examine that. Other new communication tools, like the internet, need to be explored for their possible use.

#### An Examination of our Internal Channels of Communication

For the most part, the people of Immanuel Lutheran Church are people who love their Lord and desire to be faithful to Him and to grow in their faith and service to

Him. Communication with the people in the pews, when in the pews, in their homes, and in their lives, is very, very important.

Communicating well to Christ's Church in this place is critical if the work of the Gospel is to happen in people's hearts and in the hearts of those to whom God calls them to testify. The internal channels of communication are the means through which such communication happens. Those internal channels of communication at Immanuel include:

- 1) The Sunday Morning Sermon. In recent months I have consciously been moving away from my dependence on the manuscript. I recently have freed myself completely from using a manuscript, and I believe that my preaching is the better for it. I have, on occasion, sought out evaluations of my sermons. Congregation-wide surveys have been very positive when done. I am not certain about doing something on a more regular basis.

- 2) Our Sunday Bulletin. We have been printing out the services, except for most hymns, for about five years. Our bulletin could use a new look, however. With a new secretary on board this summer, I intend to do just that. We need to organize our bulletin in a new way so that it is more attractive to the eye. That may mean a new bulletin cover, a new format for church news, and a new machine to duplicate the bulletins. The current print quality of our bulletin is poor. We also need a communion statement

printed in our bulletin rather than just on our communion cards. A regular 'guest' section of the bulletin would be a good place to include such a communion statement as well as information on nursery care available, new member classes coming up, and other information.

3) Pew Cards. Immanuel's pew cards are simple and effective. Basic information is gathered, most of it useful. There are letters at the bottom of the card allowing people to indicate their desire to attend or participate in different ministries mentioned in that morning's bulletin. Many churches use a "fellowship" pew book to indicate attendance or need. I am not certain of any advantage of pew books over pew cards. There may be ways to improve our current system, however. Those possibilities should be investigated.

4) Bulletin Boards. Currently all bulletin boards are in the hallway of the school, some distance from the narthex. The narthex is brand new. Putting up bulletin boards on the walls would be equal to false doctrine in some eyes. We will gradually move people from such a misunderstanding and help them to see our new building as a means to an end and not the end in itself. I envision having a "School Board," a "Mission Board," and other bulletin boards to communicate to our members particular aspects of our ministry and the ministry of the larger church.

5) Announcements. Announcements are made prior to worship on Sunday mornings and on Saturday evenings. I try to keep announcements brief and generally only make announcements that apply to the vast majority of people. An announcement, for example, that a committee is meeting to clean the flower vases will not make it into my announcements. Announcements regarding upcoming work days, Bible classes, or special worship opportunities are often mentioned prior to worship because they can apply to most people.

6) Annual Stewardship Presentation. Each fall, as many Lutheran congregations do, Immanuel has a stewardship emphasis and an opportunity for members to plan (we no longer use the word "pledge") for the coming year. In the past, I have preached a sermon series, held Bible classes, and offered a "Night with the Pastor" on seven consecutive nights so everyone could attend one. I have freely talked about my family's commitment to sacrifice for Christ by tithing of our annual income. My feeling is that I have done too much of the talking. My intentions are to allow others to speak this fall, if I can find some who are willing. Perhaps I will have a moment in the service where people can share a prepared statement about their faith and their strong desire to be faithful stewards.

7) New Member Orientation. Converts to the Lutheran faith at Immanuel are well instructed in the Christian

faith. This instruction includes an opportunity for me to speak to them about what it means to be a member of a Lutheran Church: participating in the privileges of Word and Sacrament and picking up the responsibilities of membership in worship, stewardship, and service. The area in which Immanuel is weak is in offering an orientation to transfer members. They join and are sometimes never seen again. I am currently considering "requiring" transfers to attend an orientation meeting where I can communicate to them the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

8) Pictures. All new members to Immanuel have their pictures taken and placed on a bulletin board (in the school). We produce a pictorial directory about every three years. Pictorial directories are not always good experiences because of the pressure put on our members, spoken or not. Some churches are now using the new digital cameras to produce their own directories. The congregation could explore that possibility to reduce pressure and perhaps have a higher participation by our members.

9) Congregational Meetings. Just like our monthly Board of Directors meeting, our quarterly congregational Meetings usually last less than ninety minutes. Agendas and reports by all boards are prepared in advance and handed out on the Sunday morning before the meeting. This has developed a high level of trust within the congregation. We have not had one single "bad" congregational meeting in the

5 years of my tenure. Those five years include a 1.5 million dollar building program.

10) Recognizing Members. Currently we recognize members when they are installed for service at the beginning of each calendar year. What we do not do well is recognize and thank those who are going out of office. That could be changed. We do an adequate job at recognizing the milestones in the ministries of our staff by recognizing each year the staff members who reach five year anniversaries of service. One of our secretaries just retired after twenty-four years of service. Two hundred people attended a potluck dinner and gave over \$1000 to buy gifts and say thank you for her service. We have done such things half a dozen times in my six years here.

#### An Examination of our External Channels of Communication

The goal of all our communication is that we might reach the unchurched. External communication, the Word and all other information shared from the church to the community, is a vital part of our communication. The church seeks to make disciples of all people, and communication to those outside the church is essential in carrying out that task. Below is a list of some of the communication we are doing, and are not doing, at Immanuel.

1) The most effective communication of the love of Christ to the unchurched is through our current members. As

in most Lutheran churches, we have plenty of room to grow in this area. Currently, we don't train our people to do this. There are several means to that end. At the recent Great Commission Convocation in St. Louis, I was introduced to a program that may help us to move in that direction. It is entitled Care Ministry. Its purpose is to train 20% of our worshipping community (about 100 people) to be proactive in meeting and caring for the people who come and visit our church. Here is an excellent possibility for better communication to the community.

2) The external appearance of a church's property speaks volumes to a community. The Trustees of our congregation do an excellent job of maintaining the property of our church. A new building has enabled new landscaping that is a beautiful complement to our neighborhood.

3) Community use of our facilities is another way to say to people outside our church, "We are here to serve you." Unfortunately, the history of this church has been one that has viewed our property as being for our use and benefit only. That is slowly changing, as groups like Al-anon, 4-H, deaf classes, and others have begun to be allowed to use our facilities. Those kind of open-door policies need to continue, and even be encouraged, in our community.

4) On a weekly basis, each church in the community is given space in the newspaper to tell what is happening in their church. I suspect this is largely unread by our

community. Perhaps something else more creative could be done with that column that would communicate better with our community. Immanuel has developed a good relationship with the photographer from the newspaper. She is called frequently to come and photograph special events at church and school. Almost all those events make it into the paper. For example, for the dedication of our new addition to our facility on September 7, 1997, we had a feature story on the entire "People" page of the newspaper. We also had a half-page ad in that edition inviting and welcoming people to our dedication service. We could seek out and take advantage of more of these opportunities.

5) The mail that comes out of our office says something to our community about the professional level of service we render. The style of our stationery has not changed for many years. Something a bit more contemporary would probably be in order. A new format for our newsletter would also help bring more attention to that important piece of communication with our people. A Communication Committee could investigate these possibilities.

6) We have a church brochure that was given to us by Olan Mills when they prepared our last pictorial directory. It is simple, but too limited in information about our church and school. A better brochure and packet of information for prospective members is certainly in order.

7) Perhaps Immanuel could produce a community newsletter. It could be a one-page piece that would go out before Christmas and Easter with a Gospel message and an invitation to worship opportunities during the holiday seasons.

8) Immanuel does a half-hour weekly radio broadcast of the Sunday sermon and some CD music we have provided the radio station. We have a rather large listening audience. They are mostly people who are home bound and also those who work on Sunday. The audience is much more broad than just our membership. It is an effortless broadcast, since we send it over the phone lines to the station on Sunday morning. We have the time slot from 9-9:30 a.m., right before the Christian Science time slot. I have for some time thought that pre-recording the sermon would allow me to also make announcements to our listening community about upcoming events and opportunities. This would mean the pastor would have to do two things: have his sermon done early and take the hour on Friday afternoon to go to the radio station to tape the message and announcements. As promising as I believe this opportunity is, it may involve more effort and time than is now possible.

9) Television has also been a resource for communication. With the Synod's production of a commercial broadcast nationally last September and October, we did some experimenting. The Synod placed our 'tag' on the commercial

and we contracted with the local cable station to run two thirty-second spots a day for four weeks in September and October. The advertisements ran locally on CNN, ESPN and similar cable programs. We are uncertain as to the impact of that advertising.

10) Last spring, we sent out a one page communication on our school. We purchased a list of families who have children between 0-10 years of age in our ZIP code and mailed out about 800 pieces on our school. We also invited them to our open house. About ten families came to our open house. We will probably try to do something similar again.

11) Welcoming newcomers to our community used to be done rather effectively, until the water department stopped giving us the names of all people with new water startups. Recently the Evangelism Committee began discussions on trying to get that information from our members when new people moved into their neighborhoods. That needs to be pursued so that we can be more aggressive in reaching out to new people in our community.

12) Welcoming newcomers to church is somewhat effective. The evangelism committee makes first contact with Sunday guests by mail and then with a phone call during the week. We could be far more effective in communicating to our guests on Sunday morning. We currently have a 'greeting' program that amounts to two people at the door shaking hands. We can do much better than that. We can

have people away from the front door, in the parking lot, welcoming people other than at the required place of the front door. With the addition of our new narthex, it is also now possible to have a Visitors' Center. At the Visitors' Center would be located a smiling face, our guest register, a packet of information on church and school, as well as other pertinent information. This visitor's center is going to be one of the committee's main goals in the coming year.

13) Immanuel needs to be involved in community activities. Our lay people do this very well. They are active in service organizations like Rotary and Optimist; they serve on the Fair Board; and they work for the United Fund Drive for local charity, as well as other civic-minded activities. Staff, none of whom are native to Washington, have not been as active in civic roles. If more staff were to join a service organization in the near future, that action will communicate to our community not only who we are, but also our commitment to the well-being of Washington.

14) Immanuel also sponsors a couple of annual events that attract community attention. The first is our annual Pork Sausage Dinner. On the first Sunday afternoon in November, Immanuel serves a homemade pork sausage dinner with all the trimmings. Nearly 2000 people from our community come to our facilities for that dinner! For 50

years we did nothing but feed them. Last year, for the first time, we put a Christian tract with each ticket sale. We could take advantage of the hour or so that most people wait in our gym for their turn to eat in our cafeteria. Several hundred people are in our cafeteria several times during the afternoon. What an opportunity to get our choir, or our children's choir, to communicate the Gospel to them in song! The one sticking point is that many of our people are in service at the dinner. Another is that "we've never done it that way before."

The second activity that attracts community attention is the annual School Dinner Auction. Hundreds of local businesses donate items for auction. Three hundred people from our community attend and generously support our school. We have the opportunity to open the evening with a bit of fun and use some time for a brief devotion and prayer. This is a high quality evening that represents our church and school very well.

Job Description for  
the Committee on Communication

There are many opportunities at Immanuel to more effectively reach out with Jesus Christ to our community. The task of the Committee on Communication is an important one. The Committee on Communication shall strive to lead the congregation in maintaining good public relations in the community and within the congregation. It will concern

itself with the presentation to the community of a positive image of Jesus Christ and of the Church as His instrument. It will also concern itself with holding before the congregation in a positive way the mission of the congregation. The following points are the goals and purposes of the Committee on Communication.

1) Plan, implement, and evaluate the various publicity programs of the parish.

2) See to it that the congregation is represented at community activities and kept informed on social, political or economic developments in the community.

3) See that the image of the church is enhanced in the community through the use of various publications within the community.

4) Monitor the content of all communications of the congregation to make sure that the good Word gets out into the community.

5) Conduct regular surveys to evaluate the ongoing programs of the parish, especially the worship program, and work on developing the best possible program for our congregation.

6) Work with the Board of Elders to make sure that visitors feel welcome in the congregation.

7) Maintain the proper signs or stations for information so that guests can find their way in and around.

8) Work with the other churches in the community, in acceptable ways, to present to the community a united Christian front.

9) See that the various boards and groups of the congregation understand good communication skills, so that they can coordinate their emphasis with that of the greater church and with each other.

10) Maintain the church bulletin boards, indoors and outdoors, keeping them up to date and coordinated with current goals of the congregation.

11) Investigate the channels of communication available in the community so that the quality of communications can continually be improving.

12) Continually remind the members that their words and deeds are the best possible means of impressing our community with the Gospel. Whenever possible, involve as many people as possible in the promotion of congregational programs.

13) Cultivate community awareness in our members through a broad program of "Friendship Evangelism " (pre-evangelism).

14) Tie in wherever possible with parish planning so that effective communication is lived out inside and outside our congregation!

Conclusion

Actions taken to accomplish the purposes of this paper were as follows: First, I established a Committee on Communications as a non-elected committee serving under the Board of Elders. Second, I let them read this paper and make their own observations. Third, I met with them, and together we developed a plan of action. Fourth, each member of the Communications Committee met with one of the boards in the church, enabling them to think through the communications they are doing. Fifth, they continued to work with the boards to enable them to accomplish the goals they set.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Make-up of the Communications Committee

A total of eight people sat on the Communications Committee. The following is a brief description of the people who made up the committee.

Steve Schoolcraft is thirty-nine years old and a six year member of Immanuel Lutheran. He is an executive for Union Electric. He has children and step children who are not in our day school. He has not served on any boards at Immanuel.

Terry Witthaus is forty-six years old and a member at Immanuel for eleven years. He is an electrical engineer who works in management for a large corporation. He has three children who are in our school or have graduated from the school. Terry has served in many capacities at Immanuel. He has headed up stewardship and property committees, chaired our recent building committee, and has also been chairman of the congregation.

Dave Reifschneider is thirty-five years old and has been a member of Immanuel for just over one year. He works as an investment advisor for Edward D. Jones in Washington. He has three children who attend public school. He has not

been on any boards or committees at church, but is very active in the community.

Kevin Lang is thirty-six years old and has been a member at Immanuel for two years. He works as an investment advisor for a small firm. He has three children who are or will be enrolled in our school. He has just been elected as chairman of the Board of Finance at Immanuel.

Steve and Debbie Ciegel are husband and wife (both forty-four years old) who have been members at Immanuel for eighteen years. Steve works as a pharmacist, Debbie as a dental assistant. They have two children who have gone through our school. Steve has served as the secretary of the congregation. Debbie has served as acolyte organizer and has been very active in committees and organizations of the school.

Paul and Janet Kellough are forty and thirty-six years old respectively and have been members at Immanuel for eleven years. Paul is a machinist for a large company in Washington. Janet is a medical transcriber at home and has served as a part-time secretary in our church. They have two boys, both of which are enrolled in our school. Neither has served as leaders of boards or committees at Immanuel, but both have always been eager workers in ministry.

The members of the committee were positive about the opportunity to serve and saw potential in their contribution to the task.

Meetings

Meetings were once a month or so during the fall months. We met five times in all. The first meeting was mostly about my paper and the purpose of the Committee on Communication. The other meetings were mostly brainstorming sessions. We addressed all of the categories of communication that were outlined in the paper and each member offered their input in addition to my ideas. The results of that input follow.

- The staff at Immanuel is continuing to grow. In 1999 we will, God willing, add a second pastor to our staff. The staff, (senior pastor, associate pastor, principal, director of ministry) could meet regularly with a rolling agenda. Items shared could include upcoming plans for the coming week and long term visions and goals. The church secretary could take minutes and develop a rolling agenda.

- The Sunday school and its teachers need a boost. Sunday school teachers are not currently meeting for support, direction, and instruction. The new pastor could take on that responsibility.

- The boards are doing a good job, but they could be more proactive in their efforts. Board members could be challenged to set three goals for the coming year, publish those goals, and then set out to accomplish them.

- The ushers organization is in a bit of disrepair. Ushers could meet annually for planning and training. The

meeting could include a thank you dinner for their service throughout the year.

- Church leadership needs to be more available to our congregational members so that we are aware of their needs. After each worship service an elder could be available to listen, pray with, or encourage members who come forward with needs. There would have to be a place dedicated to this purpose and elders would have to be trained in listening, public praying, and the like.

- Our newsletter needs a new look. Suggestions include a glossy cover that could be produced on a yearly basis. Business sponsors could be sought out to offset new costs. Newsletter features could include columns by the chairman of the congregation, the head elder, and others.

- Immanuel needs to be online with a homepage where newsletter articles and the like could be continually updated.

- Immanuel needs to have the Synod's logo cross on everything it produces. The more we use it the more it will be recognized in our community.

- Friendship Sundays need to be reintroduced to the congregation. There are many opportunities for us to reach out to unchurched friends. We need to take advantage of those opportunities.

- The Washington Town and Country Fair attracts tens of thousands of people to our community. We need to take

that opportunity to be a more visible part of that event. Suggestions included wearing T-shirts tied to the theme of the fair that would identify the wearer as an Immanuel member.

- Several times a year we have hundreds and even thousands of visitors from our community that come to our facility. They include the annual Pork Sausage Dinner, a spring rummage sale, and a March School Dinner Auction. We could offer ten minute walking tours of our facility. During the tour, perhaps at the baptismal font we could offer a brief presentation of the Law and Gospel. Along the way could be a photo montage of events that happen at Immanuel. A Gospel tract and a tract on the church could be given at the end of the tour.

- Our School Dinner Auction receives wide support from our community. Each business that supports our Dinner Auction could receive a decal to place in their business window that simply said, "This business proudly supported the Immanuel Lutheran Dinner Auction" (This decal would include our cross logo).

- Immanuel could have more special Sundays and develop other children's choirs, like pre-schoolers and kindergartners, or our public school children.

- Immanuel could develop a stronger ministry to families. We could train parents to be the spiritual formers of their children.

- Drive by broadcasting is a new media resource. For about \$2500 a church can purchase a low powered FM broadcasting radio that will allow people coming or going to church to hear a message each week from the pastor. Each day after school parents can be reminded of important deadlines, etc., by simply tuning to their car's radio.

- The Washington Missourian, our local newspaper, provides free space to our local churches each week. A different format using bullets might be more eye catching. A simple Gospel message could be included in each article.

- People might be open and receptive to the suggesting of topics for upcoming sermons. Sermons could be outlined and available in the bulletin or in the back of church. Sermons could be recorded and logged in the library.

- Our nursery during the late service is doing well. It would be easy and inexpensive to broadcast the video of the service into the nursery.

- A limited number of bulletin boards need to go up in our new narthex. Perhaps begin on the outer boundaries of the narthex to ease the introduction of them. A church calendar posted might be helpful. Reports of the Board of Directors could be posted also.

- Sponsor families for new members at Immanuel has worked well. The pastor could offer a follow up class six months into their membership where they could be allowed input regarding concerns, etc.

- Congregational meetings are large enough that not everyone can always hear. A hand held wireless microphone could help in that shortcoming.

- We could recognize children and adults for their "faithful" attendance at Bible Class and Sunday School.

- When new officers are installed each January the pastor could recognize outgoing board members by simply asking them to stand.

- Greeters should be organized and trained to do more than stand at the door with a handshake. They could be enabled to be a welcoming committee for all our guests each Sunday morning.

- The congregation could be "trained" to better care for our fellow members through a series of sermons. Those sermons could be based upon some material from our Stephen Ministry Program.

- During special times of the year like Christmas, Lent, and Easter our properties could be enhanced more for the season. Christmas cards made from 4x8 sheets of plywood could carry a Christmas message, for example. Certainly there are other ideas we could use to set our facility apart during the holidays.

- The entrances to our parking lots on 5th street need to be better signed.

- Two parking spots could be set aside and designated by a sign as "Guest Parking Only."

- Our facility needs to be used more by the public. We could be used as a polling place, used for blood drives, sports nights, and Fair Boards could use our facilities for example. We could make our congregation aware that our building is available for civic use.

- The Washington Missourian does an annual section on what all the local businesses did in the previous year. Why not the churches? Each church could reflect on God's blessings in the previous year. Many people would be interested in such reading.

- Get a budget for advertizing on television, radio, and in the newspaper.

- Urge members of our congregation to watch their neighborhoods for newcomers and deliver to them a packet of information on our church and school. Inform the evangelism committee of that newcomer.

- The inside of our building needs to be better signed. Inside the elevator is very confusing regarding where each button on the elevator will take you. The levels need to be better identified.

### Actions Taken

After these brainstorming sessions, each of the ideas was presented to the appropriate board, committee, or individual. Most of the ideas were received very warmly. Many have been acted upon already. The Evangelism Committee has been most responsive. They have put together a packet

of information on our church and have encouraged members to take them to prospects and newcomers to their neighborhoods. They have made plans to have a Friendship Sunday this Fall. The Evangelism Committee has implemented plans for a Visitor's Center in our narthex where our Sunday guests will be warmly welcomed and introduced to our church and its people.

Other ideas accomplished or in the process include the church secretaries addressing the transformation of the look of our newsletter and Immanuel going online. The chairman of our congregation has secured the Synod's hot air balloon at the 1999 Washington Town and Country Fair. That event will be an outreach event where 40 members of our congregation are trained in outreach to the 100,000 people who will come to Washington's Town and Country Fair. The suggestion was made to develop "Family Ministry." The idea is to equip parents to better communicate the Gospel to their children. Several of our staff members recently attended a seminar at Concordia Lutheran Church, Kirkwood, which was very helpful in beginning a move into greater "Family Ministry."

Immanuel's Board of Properties took on several projects including broadcasting the video of our worship service into our nursery; placing of one bulletin board on the outskirts of our new narthex where different ministries can be regularly highlighted; better signing inside and outside our

facility for the sake of people visiting our church and school; designating two parking spots for Sunday guests; and the Board of Properties recently opened our facility to Alateen's use.

Recently on a Sunday morning we recognized outgoing board chairman during the preservice announcements. The Long Range Planning Committee began making plans about a Wednesday evening dinner and education time. The idea is going to be introduced this summer with Wednesday evening Family Dinners and Family Vacation Bible School. The Stewardship Committee has begun investigating plans for a new congregational pictorial directory. Our Pork Sausage Dinner Committee has in place plans for a guided tour of our facility during the dinners where we will take the opportunity to share the Gospel and to highlight some of the ministry of Immanuel.

Most suggestions that came out of the Committee on Communications were well received. Since I worked with the Committee I was able to screen ideas that were "less valuable" than others. The only idea communicated that was received with reluctance was from the Board of Elders in regards to having an elder meet with people in need after our worship services. Their reaction was that they didn't feel they were confident enough to do that. I assured them that confidence can be acquired. I have hope that we can attempt this sometime soon. No ideas submitted to boards

were outright rejected. That does not mean all will be implemented, however.

From the response I have received back from boards, committees, and individuals, and since all the initiative to accomplish these ideas must come from individual boards, all ideas will not be followed through on. I would estimate that two-thirds of the suggestions will be implemented some time this year.

### Conclusion

Six months ago, I organized a group of people I felt had some unique vision for the possibilities of communicating the Gospel at Immanuel. Most of the people of the Committee on Communication caught the excitement of what they could accomplish. The brainstorming sessions were filled with great ideas and discussion. Although not all of the ideas were good ones, most were excellent.

At the conclusion of our last brainstorming session, the committee discussed how these ideas would be implemented. The overwhelming conviction of the committee was that the work of implementation belonged to the individual boards of the congregation. Although my original intent was for the Committee on Communication to do that work, I became convinced that that work did belong to the individual boards.

All ideas were communicated to the church boards in writing and followed up with personal communications when

necessary. All of the boards received the input with enthusiasm and for the most part accepted the challenges set before them.

After working through this process for the past six months or so, I would recommend that a committee on communication be an ad hoc committee from the Board of Evangelism and contain several other members of the congregation. It would not have to be a committee that continually meets. The evangelism chairman, who is elected every two years, could form a committee of Evangelism Board members and congregational members in general. That process would completely change the makeup of the committee every two years. After reading the material in this paper, then brainstorming with the committee, they would have plenty of tasks to work on for their two year term of office.

Many positive things have come from this investment of time and energy. The boards of the congregation have in many ways received encouragement to grow in their ministry of the Gospel in new and exciting ways. These ideas have sparked a unique excitement on many of Immanuel's boards. Many of the ideas are interesting and valuable insights into our communication of the Gospel. Beyond that there is in general a renewed excitement and focus upon communicating the Gospel through the various agencies of our church. Surprisingly, I have not once heard any board member say, "We've never done it that way before." From every

perspective this has been a very positive experience for Immanuel Lutheran Church. I would recommend it to any congregation that is interested in improving its ministry of communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Not only have we surfaced many interesting and positive ideas, I believe I also have a greater understanding and a greater respect for the communication that happens at Immanuel. I expect the communication that happens at Immanuel to be impacted by this Communication Committee and future ones for years to come.

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