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ASSIMILATION: IT'S ROLE IN CHURCH GROWTH

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective
P-200

by

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years many books have been written on the subject of church growth, calling the church to action. While the church growth movement is still rather new, its goal is not new. It acknowledges the fact that God is in control, yet at the same time, emphasizes the role in which the church has to play in fulfilling God's plan. A plan stated by Christ: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."¹

This plan is referred to as the "Great Commission". This plan is also often misunderstood by the church. This is not just an order to "go" but is also a plan calling the individual's who are "going" to action. The action being that of "making disciples" as the "good news" of the Gospel impels those who receive it to share their experience with others.

Church growth deals with the problem of making disciples. This is evident by the definition most commonly used for describing church growth. It says that "church growth" is "all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership."²

¹Matthew 28:19-21.

²C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Ventura, CA : Regal Books, 1976) p. 12.

Today the major church bodies are plagued with tremendous annual membership losses. This situation seems to indicate that the church is not taking serious the command of our Lord to "make disciples." For there is more to accepting Christ than signing a card, being baptized, joining a church or shaking hands with the pastor. The cost of following Christ is measured in terms of total surrender to Christ as Lord and Master of Life./

It is self-evident that large majorities of our church members are then spiritually immature. They are ignorant of the basic doctrines of the Bible, and what doctrine they do know they are unable to apply to their own experience. They equate Christianity with Sunday church attendance; in other words they are spiritual babies that need to grow up before they are lost.

The church then faces the problem of "making disciples." The paper will focus on how "making disciples" requires assimilation to occur. Assimilation is more than just out reach. This paper therefore is directed to pastors and church members to be aware of their role in assimilating members into the life and fellowship of a worshipping congregation.

What is assimilation? It is all that is necessary in involving members to be active, responsible, reproducing members of the body of Christ. Based on this definition we therefore can say that assimilation plays a major role in church growth. Without assimilation, new members are often lost as quickly as they have become a part of the church./

The purpose of the paper is to help the reader examine and evaluate the importance and the process of assimilation of members into the congregation. This will be accomplished by evaluation of Scripture on

such topics as man's condition, discipleship and the body of Christ. Also included will be, the importance of assimilation in fulfilling the command of our Lord in the "Great Commission"; with a look at the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Finally the paper will look at the role the pastor and congregation play in the process of assimilation.

It is the prayer of the writer that this paper may assist in the complex ministry of the church in our day so that under the guidance and blessing of the Holy Spirit, the church may better equip the members of its congregation for Christian service in building the church, the body of Christ.

CHAPTER I

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES; A GUIDE TO ASSIMILATION

The Christian church is the fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ. Each congregation is made up of individuals who are the object of God's grace and mercy, and who are members of the fellowship of believers only because of their relationship with Him. In this church the Word of God is taught in all its truth and purity and the sacraments are rightly administered as this church seeks to be the servant of God to His holy people. The mission of this church rests upon the fact that all men are by nature sinners, cut off from God eternally and subject to both temporal and eternal punishment.¹ Believers, even though they are a part of the church, are in a relative state of incompleteness, since the Scriptures affirm that man is not perfect.² Furthermore, every believer in Christ is in need of renewal as the Formula of Concord states,

Since, however, believers are not fully renewed in this life but the Old Adam clings to them down to the grave, the conflict between spirit and flesh continues in them.

¹Romans 5:12.

²Romans 3:10ff.; Matthew 5:48.

Accordingly to the inmost self they delight in the law of God, but the law in their members is at war against the law in their mind.³

Thus it can be said that every believer is in a state of becoming,⁴ since he still possesses the Old Adam which seeks to serve the law of sin. Each believer, therefore, needs the constant dependence upon the Word of God which assures of strength and grace to live in accord with the plan of God for his life. This indicates that man is in constant need of hearing God's Word, this calls the church to action, as being one of God's instruments in proclaiming His Word. The church then takes upon the responsibility of assimilating God's people into itself. The term assimilation refers to making active, responsible, reproducing members and is usually associated with new-members of a congregation. However, assimilation can also be seen as a continuous effort of making members active, responsible and reproducing. This statement is true when looking at the condition of man. Since man is by nature sinful.

What has made man the way he is, and how is man able to become a believing member of the holy Christian church? And furthermore, what are his needs, in relation to God, after he becomes part of Christ's Church? This chapter will examine the evidence of Scripture and other relevant writings to determine the answers to these questions.

³Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VI "Third use of the Law," The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappart and others (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, c1959), p. 567, 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 568, 24,

Man as a Creature of God

The Bible unconditionally states that God created the world and all that it contains.⁵ Man in the beginning was created as the crown and glory of God's new world.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion ..." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.⁶

Man then was created to live in fellowship with God. This fellowship necessarily presupposes that man possessed freedom to exercise his will in relation to God. Man in the freedom of choice, chose to love God. He possessed not only the capacity for love to God, but he really loved God out of free choice to do so.⁷

Man in Rebellion

Man, in an act of independent self-assertion, chose to be disobedient to the command of God.⁸ This action was a deliberate rejection of the fellowship with God which man had been privileged to enjoy. Scriptures, therefore, speak of sin as lawlessness,⁹ and rebellion.¹⁰ Ever since this

⁵Genesis 1:1ff. ; Exodus 20:11 ; Nehemiah 9:6 ; Psalm 33:6.

⁶Genesis 1:26-27.

⁷Cf. "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Article II, Original Sin," The Book of Concord, p. 102,15ff.

⁸Genesis 3:5ff.

⁹1 John 3:4.

¹⁰Deuteronomy 9:23-24.

original rebellion against God, man has asserted his position of independence by refusing to live as a creature of God.¹¹

Man today continues to assert himself in independent pride and self-will against God's law, which constitutes sin against God. It does not matter if these violations take the form of evil deeds,¹² or evil thoughts and desires,¹³ they still constitute sin against God.¹⁴ The lack of intent or awareness of the sinful act, thought, or word does not make it less sinful for the person involved.¹⁵

Man in rebellion lost the original image and likeness of God and today lives as one who has been separated from his original and intended fellowship with God. He has lost that which God gave and which God intended for him to keep and enjoy throughout his life in this world.

Man Under Sin

The condition of natural man is described by the Apostle Paul when he says,

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.¹⁶

St. Paul here affirms what other writers of the Holy Scriptures teach.

¹¹Romans 1:18-32.

¹²2 Samuel 12:13.

¹³James 1:15 ; 1 John 2:16 ; Ephesians 2:3.

¹⁴Proverbs 21:11 ; 1 Corinthians 10:6.

¹⁵Romans 7:19 ; 1 Timothy 1:13 ; Acts 3:17ff.

¹⁶Ephesians 2:1-2.

namely, that man apart from God is spiritually dead,¹⁷ and spiritually asleep.¹⁸ The Bible further describes the condition of natural man as spiritual darkness,¹⁹ blindness,²⁰ poor hearing,²¹ a lack of understanding of the things of God,²² disobedience,²³ and sinfulness.²⁴ The Apostle Paul describes man as he lives apart from God.²⁵ According to the evidence of Scripture natural man is alienated from God, without hope and without God in the world.

Man is Rescued

Man is in need of a new relationship which God has made possible through Jesus Christ. Man himself, is impotent in relation to his spiritual condition.²⁶ He has absolutely no power, within himself, either to alter or change this spiritual condition of his life, nor is he able to cooperate with God to effect such change or improvement.²⁷ Any change

¹⁷Cf. The warning of God, Genesis 2:17 ; also Ezekial 18:20 ; Romans 6:23 ; 8:6.

¹⁸Isaiah 56:10 ; Romans 11:8 ; 13:11 ; Ephesians 5:14 ; 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

¹⁹Matthew 6:23 ; John 1:5 ; Psalm 82:5 ; Romans 3:12.

²⁰Matthew 15:14 ; 2 Corinthians 3:14 ; 4:4.

²¹John 8:43 ; Hebrews 5:11.

²²1 Corinthians 2:14 ; Ephesians 4:18.

²³Ephesians 5:6.

²⁴Genesis 6:5 ; Psalm 14:3 ; 53:3 ; 130:3 ; Isaiah 53:6 ; Romans 3:23 ; 1 John 1:8 ; 5:19.

²⁵Romans 1:18-32 ; 2 Timothy 3:1ff.

²⁶Ephesians 2:1 ; 5:14 ; Colossians 2:13.

²⁷Matthew 7:17-18 ; John 3:16 ; 15:5.

or alteration which takes place in man is solely the work of God. The Formula of Concord is very explicit,

man's conversion is not only in part, but entirely, the operation, gift, endowment, and work of the Holy Spirit alone, who accomplishes and performs it by his power and might through the Word in the intellect, will, and heart of man ... Man does or works nothing.²⁸

Natural man needs to be rescued. Christ did rescue man when He died on the cross and rose again. But there is more to man's rescue than just this. Jesus provided the means. But the rescue must take place from outside of man, and enter into his life as an invasion, since he is absolutely unable to assist in it. The rescue is effected, by the Holy Spirit, as He brings man into confrontation with the Word of God. In this confrontation man is given the ability to receive the Word of God, which offers the gracious gift of God, namely, life and salvation.

This justified sinner cannot remain in this fellowship of God without the continual return to the Word of God as the place of forgiveness and grace. An examination then of the new man's need for assimilation becomes evident.

God's Word a Necessity

The Bible affirms that the Christian is a living battleground. The devil, world, and flesh are seeking to overcome the life of faith which the Christian possesses by virtue of fellowship with Jesus Christ. The battle is fought inwardly against invisible foes who seek to destroy the life of faith.²⁹

²⁸"Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration," Article III, "Righteousness," The Book of Concord p. 538,89.

²⁹Cf. Romans 7:15ff. ; Ephesians 6:12 ; 1 Timothy 6:12 ; 2 Timothy 2:4.

The Christian is not unaware of this struggle which takes place within his life. The Apostle Paul says,

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death.³⁰

Intuitive judgement of Christian man, in relation to himself, brings the conclusion that there are two forces within him battling for his attention and allegiance.

Christian man is in need of a continuing dependence upon God in His Word, which brings renewal.

Call To Discipleship

The Gospels do not teach that salvation and discipleship are two distinct things, but that they are two parts of a single experience which involves one's relationship to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is clear that Jesus taught that when one is saved he becomes a disciple. As it has been said; "A decision for Christ is the doorway to discipleship and effective service. Conversion is more than a one-time affair -- it is the love link to a life of commitment to Christ."³¹ The New Testament reinforces this when it presents Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord and requires that He be accepted and followed.

The business of making disciples throughout the world is the primary task of the church. For Christianity without discipleship is always

³⁰ Romans 7:21-24.

³¹ Hollis L. Green, Why Churches Die (Minneapolis : Minneapolis Bethany Fellowship, 1972) p. 70.

Christianity without Christ. When the Christian life is begun, the believer understands very little and has only a vague concept of God. He must increase in the knowledge of God and of his Lord and Savior.^{32/} The process of making disciples requires that individual converts be nurtured into disciples and equipped as apostles to go forth with the message to everyone they meet.

The church is not likely to make new Christian disciples unless:

1. We achieve a loving presence among the new members.
2. They discover the Spirit of God intersecting their lives or approaching them.
3. They must hear the Gospel.
4. They must make important decisions for their new life in Christ.³³

As stated earlier, man was made for God -- made to love God, made to serve God, made to praise God, made to live in fellowship with God, made to do His will on earth. Priority of man then is kingdom work and right living and all the other things God will provide. By putting Christ and the kingdom of God first and seeking after His righteous,³⁴ men lay the foundation for success in all areas of human endeavor. Without this priority, no congregation of people can be adequate as a church or effective in performing the spiritual ministry in the world. To be preoccupied with secondary things in a time of desperate need is utterly futile for the church and the world. /As followers of Christ the church needs to recognize its purpose of disciple making, and its role of assimilating members.

³² Colossians 1:10 ; 2 Peter 3:18.

³³ George G. Hunter III, The Contagious Congregation (Nashville : Abingdon, 1979) p. 25.

³⁴ Matthew 6:33.

to actively proclaim Jesus Christ. / As Hollis L. Green states: "The church was not born to be a hospital for saints or a social club for sinners. It's very existence indicates God's purpose: to evangelize the world."³⁵

The Body of Christ

For the most effective means of disciple making, Christ's church needs to function properly. To do this we must instruct believers that the church is not a building occasionally inhabited by people. Rather, the members of the church are the building of God, and they are constantly inhabited by His Spirit.

The church appears in the New Testament as Christ's living body of called servants. "It existed, not out of the world shielding by four walls and stained glass windows, but in the world as a witnessing community sharing in love with every man the message of Christ."³⁶

The body of Christ is Paul's most-used description of the church. The Bible teaches that Christ is the head of the body which is the church. Paul's writings to the church at Ephesus and Colassae often refer to this picture. God has made Christ the head over all things.³⁷ We the members of His body are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head.^{38/}

The husband/wife relationship is also used in the Bible to show that

³⁵ Green, Why Churches Die, p. 43.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁷ Ephesians 1:22.

³⁸ Ephesians 4:15.

Christ is the head of the church.³⁹ It can thus be said that Christ is to be first in all things because He is the head of the body. Paul as we know rejoiced in his sufferings for the Colossian Christians because he was doing it on behalf of Christ's body, the church.⁴⁰ We also see that Christ being the head is also the source and supplier of all growth to the entire body.⁴¹

The priority for every church and for every Christian is to give Christ first place in everything! From Colossians 1:16-18 there are four reasons for this priority. First, Christ produced all things; second, He preceded all things; third, He preserves all things; and fourth, He purposes to be first in all things. As the head is the center of our lives, so Christ must be given preeminence.⁴²

The head is always the one who gives direction; the body or members are those who must willingly receive the orders. Therefore, the growing church today must know how to listen to her head and how to respond when direction is given. "It seems reasonable and biblical to assume that if the church would only follow her Lord's instructions, both quantitative and qualitative growth would follow."⁴³

Early in the history of the church, in Corinth, trouble arose when members began following men rather than the Lord. They were good men

³⁹Ephesians 5:23.

⁴⁰Colossians 1:24.

⁴¹Colossians 2:19.

⁴²Elmer L. Towns, The Complete Book of Church Growth (Wheaton, IL : Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 1981) p. 226.

⁴³Ibid., p.226.

with great ability, but in no way could they avoid the problems of human headship.⁴⁴ The result being that they were no longer a body united, but members divided.

Today, the same occurs, to avoid this each member of Christ's body, beginning with the pastor, must acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and must rely on daily dependence upon the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. If this occurs there will be no division or conflict within the body.

Growth occurs when the body functions together. If the membership of any body is to be successful in accomplishing the goals of our Lord as given in the Great Commission, each part must be available and obedient. Therefore we must trust the Lord's direction given through His Spirit by His Word.

Assimilation the Work of the Body

The truth is that the Body of Christ is designed to teach us that we need one another and that we must care for one another. To the world we must show ourselves as one in Christ, united in love. Such a unity is not uniformity or conformity. It is rather a Spirit-given sense of our mutual needs and the recognition that our diversity is both God-given and essential to maturity and health. "Unity, diversity, interdependence." This is not to be just the motto of the local congregation, but its experience under God.⁴⁵ This can be summed up in the word assimilation.

Assimilation is not something new in church growth. Paul wrote to the Christians at Galatia, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass,

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

⁴⁵ Elmer L. Towns, p. 228.

you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look at yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."⁴⁶ This is a serious exhortation to active Christians to be concerned in aiding new members to become active in the church and to also be concerned over any ruptured relations between faltering church members and their Savior and his church./

Today there are thousands of members in the body of Christ who are weak, lethargic, stumbling, slow to believe, little interested in growing in the grace of God. They do not accept the gifts of the Holy Spirit which could transform them into active, dynamic Christians. Such people need the ministry of their fellow members, and the church must bring this ministry to them through assimilation.

It is God's will for all sincere Christians that they should be their brother's keeper in matters of faith and life. For only a heartless person would sit and watch a drowning man without trying to save him. Christian love demands action when any member of a congregation becomes spiritually delinquent and deny themselves the means of grace.⁴⁷ In 1 Corinthians 12:14-26, Paul uses the picture of the members of the body of Christ serving one another to show how Christians serve one another.

God's imperative to us is to build up others in the faith. This is outlined in Colossians: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you in all its richness. Instruct and admonish each other with the utmost wisdom.

⁴⁶Galatians 6:1-2.

⁴⁷Waldo J. Werning, Winning Them Back (Minneapolis : Augsburg Publishing House, 1963) p. 14.

Sing thankfully in your hearts to God, with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."⁴⁸ Our call into the church involves us in brotherly sharing and mutual encouragement and helpfulness; for all Christians are to teach and admonish other Christians in their homes and at church.

In summary, the church not only gives its witness to the world, but witnesses to itself as well; that is, each member gives his witness to other members. With our witness we are to edify or build up one another in faith. We are to help deepen the spiritual lives of others in the church. This is what assimilation is all about, not only calling its members to action but also into conservation of members. The life to which God calls us is to be lived in fellowship, not only with Jesus, but also with all those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. This witness in the church creates a "God-ordained people to people influence or a people-affecting people situation."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Colossians 3:16.

⁴⁹ Waldo J. Werning, p. 18.

CHAPTER II

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD "She ain't what she use to be"

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has for years enjoyed a very rapid growth in church membership. Today, however, the phrase "She ain't what she use to be" adequately describes the situation confronting her. The LC-MS is not alone, many other mainline churches are experiencing this same problem. This chapter will look closely at the problem facing the LC-MS, and try to give some reasons for its decline in membership.

Church Membership Trends

Churches were spiritually, emotionally, and physically unprepared for the roller coaster curves of church membership that occurred after the end of World War II. Membership growth in the 1950's caught churches by surprise. These were the glory years for most churches. It was a time when sanctuaries seemed to^o small, Christian education buildings seemed inadequate. It was a time when construction could not keep up with membership increases in existing congregations and it was also a time of establishing new congregations in the developing suburbs.¹

The 1950's and 60's were a time for the American people to celebrate. The great depression of the 1930's was now long gone. World War II had brought prosperity to America and within our country there was a new wave of optimism.

¹Carl S. Dudley Where Have All Our People Gone? (New York : The Pilgrim Press, 1979), p.4.

With this new wave of optimism also came immigrants pouring into the United States. Immigrants who came to this country to find wealth and freedom. With this influx of immigrants, came people searching for their God. Many of the immigrants found sister religions within this country. This caused many of the mainline churches to experience a rapid growth. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was one of the churches that enjoyed this growth. Recently however, the mood of the country has shifted and there now seems to be a decline in membership in many denominations. This has never before occurred in American history, indicating that something basic is happening in the churches and the American society today.²

LC-MS - Discipling in the '50's, '60's and '70's

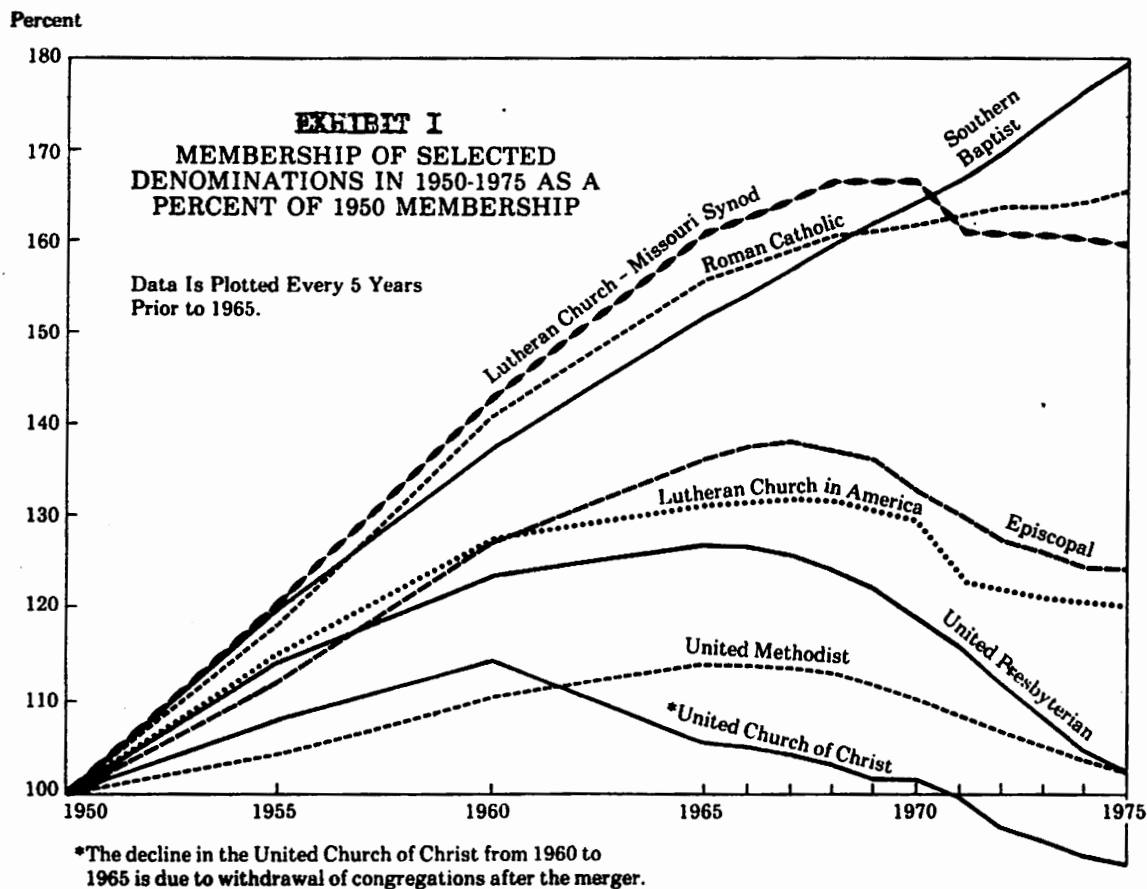
Before we can look at the condition of the LC-MS today we need to look at how the church has been discipling in the past few decades. As mentioned above, most churches enjoyed a growth in membership during these years. As a matter of fact, the Missouri Synod has shown a steady increase in membership since its very beginning in 1847.

John Savage described the growth of the LC-MS in the 1950's and 60's by saying: "Among the branches of Lutheranism, the Missouri Synod which is counted as the most conservative, grew 49% in the past 20 years, while the United States population increased 35%."³ This growth can be attributed mainly to the assimilation of immigrants into the church. This growth however, leveled off in the 1970's and membership began to decline.

²Dean R. Hoge, "Why Are Churches Declining," Theology Today Vol. XXXVI no. 1 (April 1979). p. 48.

³John S. Savage The Apathetic and Bored Church Member (Pittsford, NY : Lead Consultants, Inc., 1976) p. 15.

This followed the trend of practically all mainline denominations in America. This is shown in Exhibit I.⁴



The question is always asked why did the churches grow in the 1950's and 60's? One answer has already been indicated, namely the rise in immigrants who were often assimilated quite easily into existing church bodies.

Another theory that needs to be looked at is Dean Kelley's as presented in his book Why Conservative Churches Are Growing. In this book Kelley basically is saying that a church with high integrity will grow.

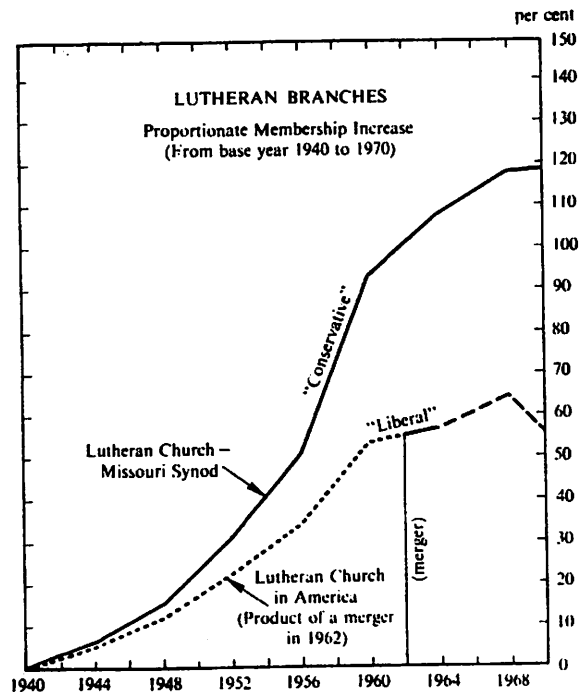
⁴Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds. Understanding Church Growth And Decline 1950-1978. (New York : The Pilgrim Press, 1979) p. 25.

While a weak church which doesn't really know what it stands for or what it believes, will decline.

Kelley characterized strong churches as being those who (1) demand a high commitment from their members, including total loyalty and social solidarity. They (2) exact discipline over both beliefs and life-style. They (3) have missionary zeal with an eagerness to tell the good news to all persons. They (4) are absolute about beliefs. Their beliefs are a total, closed system, sufficient for all purposes, needing no revision and permitting none. They (5) require conformity in life-style often involving certain voidances of non-members or use of distinctive visible marks or uniforms.⁵

Kelley identified the LC-MS as being a conservative church body and gave this as being one of the reasons for its success in membership growth. See Exhibit II.⁶

EXHIBIT II



⁵Dean M. Kelley Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York : Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972) p. 84-95.

⁶Ibid., p. 28.

It can be said then that those churches experiencing the greatest degree of growth are those who hold to the evangelical conservative position concerning the Bible, that is the Bible is God's Word, and that the purpose and message of today's church is clearly taught within it.

Has the LC-MS's integrity changed? This question needs to be asked when looking at its membership decline in the 1970's. As mentioned, the stop of immigrants from Europe with a Lutheran background caused some decline. In addition the LC-MS experienced internal problems, largely doctrinal, which led to an exodus of some members. But neither of these situations indicated that the Missouri Synod's integrity was lost. A closer look will show that the church's problems began already in the days of rapid growth.

Since 1960 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has been faced with a large number of communicant members being lost each year as defections. These "back door" losses are communicant members who are removed from the membership lists, not because they died, or transferred, but because they stopped going to church. Many of them moved but did not transfer. Some join other churches, some just stop coming. In 1950, the figure was 18,729 ; 1960, 29,554 ; 1970, 50,282. During this period of time we see a church that experienced a decade growth of over 400,000 communicant members in the 1950's and 1960's, go to a church body with a decade growth of only around 53,000 members in the 1970's.⁷ To get a better understanding please see Exhibit III, IV & V on the following page.

⁷Convention Workbook "Evangelism" (50th Regular Convention, LC-MS ; New Orleans ; July 6-13, 1973) p. 309.

EXHIBIT III

Communicant Membership Gains and Losses from Outside

Year	(North American Districts)						(7) Decade Gains or Losses
	(1) Communicant Members	(2) Adults Confirmed or Bapt.	(3) Non-Init. Juniors Confirmed	(4) Reinstated	(5) Defections	(6) Net Outreach	
1950.....	1,165,482	25,256	3,865	15,133	18,729	25,525	
1960.....	1,571,641	35,570	5,604	10,194	29,554	21,814	+ 412,159
1970.....	1,980,925	26,074	4,865	9,511	50,282	- 9,832	+ 409,284
1979.....	2,034,248	26,454	3,056	9,326	49,573	- 10,737	+ 53,323

EXHIBIT IV

Gains and Losses in Baptized Membership

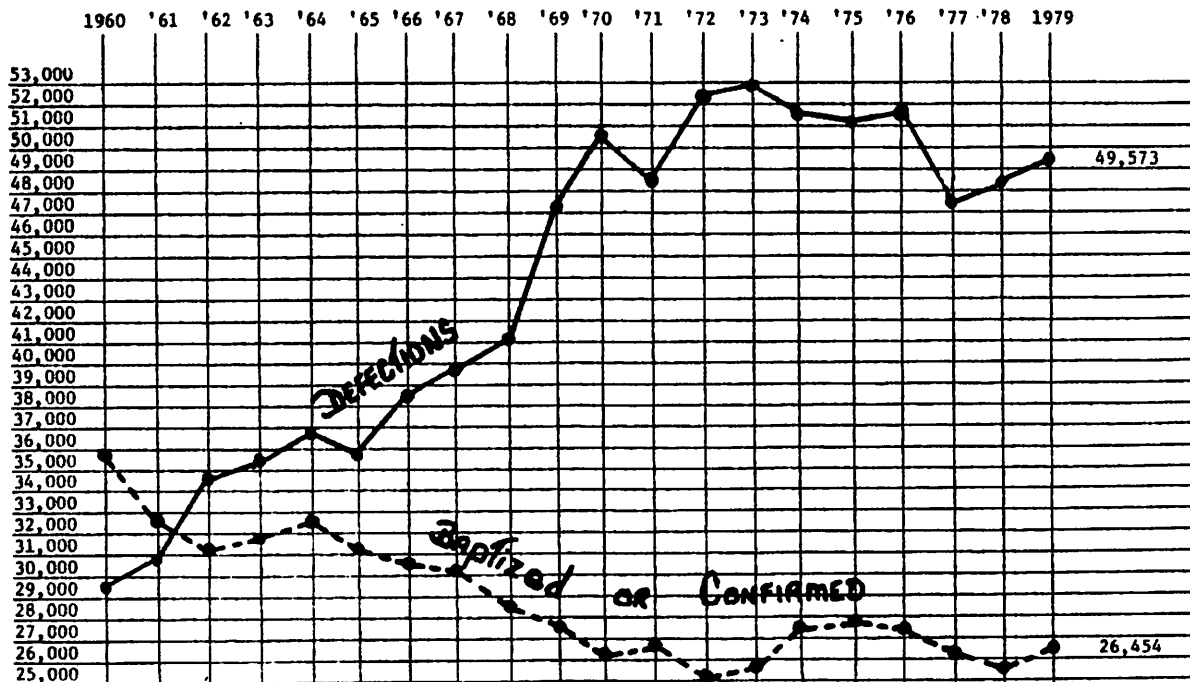
Year	(North American Districts)						(6) Decade Gains or Losses
	(1) Baptized Members	(2) Children Baptized	(3) Juniors Confirmed	(4) Adults Conf. or Baptized	(5) Deaths of Conf. Memb.		
1950.....	1,728,186	62,465	27,743	25,301	16,926		
1960.....	2,469,036	85,976	47,176	35,570	15,865	+ 740,850	
1970.....	2,877,291	68,289	58,490	26,074	18,578	+ 408,255	
1979.....	2,717,996	57,506	43,715	26,454	19,143	- 159,295	

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EXHIBIT V

Adults Gained and Lost

North America—1979



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⁸ Convention Workbook "Board of Missions" (54th Regular Convention, LC-MS ; St. Louis ; July 3-10, 1981) p. 22.

⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

The LC-MS while losing an average of 50,000 people each year in defections, it is only gaining an average of 25,000 to 30,000 a year in adult baptism and confirmation. This indicates a church that is not meeting the challenge given it by our Lord in the Great Commission. It also shows a church body that is failing to assimilate its members into active church membership.

One alarming figure provided by the Board of Parish Education, is that only 50 percent of the children who are baptized in the church will ever attend one of our Sunday Schools, only 13 percent will attend one of our Lutheran elementary schools, and only 58 percent will be confirmed. These figures strongly suggest the need for assimilation. For there is a need for strict soul accounting and development of the kinds of programs to develop these children into growing disciples of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

How are LC-MS congregations doing in terms of making disciples? The previous exhibits indicate, not well at all. A closer look at the 6,043 congregations of Synod in 1979, reveals that 1,630, or 27 percent, gained no adults by Baptism or Confirmation.¹¹

Another view points out that it takes 76 members one year to gain one new member. Twenty years ago it took only 25 members to win one new member. Also in 1979 there were only 42 congregations that added 30 or more adults by Baptism or Confirmation. This has added significance when we realize that the average size of a Missouri Synod congregation in the United States is 450 baptized members and 337 communicant members. These

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

¹¹ Ibid., p.23.

statistics show that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod sure "ain't what she use to be". In fact these statistics present a church that is not growing.¹²

Are we not growing because of our theology? Not hardly! For the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has indeed a lot to offer. Donald A. McGavran, the father of the church growth movement, has described the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as having "a theological position which enables it to take full advantage of the Church Growth Movement."¹³ Therefore we need to re-evaluate our programs and work harder in discipleship.

Discipling in the '80's

The theme "Discipling in the '80's" has become the Missouri Synod's battle cry. On November 6, 1980 the first Great Commission Convocation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was held. At this convocation emphasis was placed both on being disciples and making new disciples. More than 6,000 people attended the three day event which produced a new kind of enthusiasm within the Synod.

During the three days speakers, and workshops stressed the importance of discipleship. Discipleship that calls the church to imitate her Head, Jesus Christ. People left the convocation with an understanding that Christ's church is a living organism, it is then in the continuing process of expansion. Results of the convocation indicate that Lutherans are beginning to gain a better understanding of mission and ministry.

¹² Ibid., p. 23.

¹³ Elmer W. Matthias "I Will Build My Church" Concordia Journal (Vol. 5, Number 6, November 1979) p. 202.

In 1972 Merton P. Strommen and others compiled a book entitled A Study of Generations. In this book they looked at how the religious attitudes of people changed through the generations. The following observations were made in this book concerning Lutherans and their view of mission and ministry:

Lutherans today are confused about this issue. It appears that many have compartmentalized their faith, on the one hand claiming the necessity of the Christian faith for them, but on the other hand accepting the validity of other religions for other people. This may be called relativism or synergism. Whatever it is called Lutherans are not likely to respond enthusiastically to the rallying cry "Evangelize the world!"¹⁴

This observation describes the condition of our members at the time membership began to decline. This book also pointed out, that Lutherans do not have a clear conception of the nature or reason for mission work. Lutherans need from their theologians a clarification of the relationship between the truth claim of the Christian faith and the other religions of men.¹⁵

This clarification of the role of discipleship among our church members receive a great boost with the Great Commission Convocation. Since that time additional convocations have been held on the district level to show the importance and need of all people to be involved in evangelism.

Prior to this time evangelism, was considered to be done by only the 10 percent of those members who received the gift of evangelist. This, however, has changed with the Great Commission Convocation. Here it was shown that all members are responsible for church growth.

¹⁴Merton P. Strommen and others A Study of Generations (Minneapolis : Augsburg Publishing House, 1972) p. 172.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 303.

Just because people don't have the gift of evangelist, they should not be allowed to forget that they do have some spiritual gift that needs to be used. The nurture of new converts and the process of assimilating them into the body is equally as important as their conversion as far as church growth is concerned.

To change the downward trend and to continue with the enthusiasm of the Great Commission Convocation, the synodical convention of 1981 stated that attention needed to be given to two areas ; adults from the outside and "back door" losses. To do this the convention adopted resolution 1-06, (see Appendix A) which calls for a 10 percent reduction in defections a year and to increase gains by 10 percent a year, with each District adopting a similar goal. Included in this resolution is the suggested goals to encourage congregations to provide two types of equipping for evangelism : one for those who may have the gift of evangelism, who should receive intensive training for evangelism calling, and the other for all members, so they can witness in their daily contacts with other people.¹⁶

It should also be mentioned that the Synod has recognized the importance of the church growth movement. Within recent years church growth seminars have been held at all levels within Synod and the seminary's now provide witnessing and church growth courses.

You've Come a Long Way Baby

While the phrase "she ain't what she use to be" describes the present condition of the LC-MS. Programs are being developed and hopefully

¹⁶ Convention Proceedings (54th Regular Convention, LC-MS ; St. Louis ; July 3-10, 1981) p. 131.

with God's blessings we can all join in with a new battle cry of "you've come a long way baby."

Indeed the LC-MS has come a long way in the past few years in showing its members the importance of being and making disciples. The work has begun but it will never be over. We need to continue to impress upon our members that our Lord, while He could have chosen other means of proclaiming the Gospel to man, has chosen believers to be His disciples. They are to be His instruments for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Considering the human dimension does not in any way imply that we have in us the power to make disciples or that we cooperate in this process in any sense. The power is only in the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit works effectively. Yet there is a burden upon us as members of the body of Christ and instruments of the Holy Spirit. If believers do not carry out the command to make disciples, the job will not get done./

This understanding must be implanted into the hearts of each member of the LC-MS. We need to encourage each one of their importance. Those who have the gift of evangelist must be encouraged to do so. Those with other gifts, need to be aware of their gifts and shown how to use them to build up the body of Christ.

Evangelism is indeed today becoming a battle cry among our members, a cry not evident 10 years ago. Included in this cry is assimilation. The need and importance of members in making new converts feel apart of the body. If these two things occur within the LC-MS, the statistics of the 1970's will change and defections will decline and adult baptism and confirmation will arise. We are on the move, lets continue.

CHAPTER III

OUTREACH + ASSIMILATION = GROWTH

In Chapter One we looked at man's condition of being a sinner, yet at the same time being God's instrument of proclaiming His message. This proclamation takes on various degrees within the congregation with assimilation being very important in making disciples. This evidence combined with Chapter Two, the condition of membership in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, indicates that often outreach or assimilation or both are sometimes overlooked in the church today.

As Robert Schuller says, "The secret of success is to find a need and fill it."¹ The need is for the body of Christ to be aware of their specific roles in outreach and assimilation if we are to fulfill our Lord's command in the Great Commission.

The Passive Congregation

One problem facing the growth of the body of Christ is the passive attitude found in most congregations. It is assumed that most Christian congregations in the United States and Canada have the potential for a net growth of at least 5 percent per year. The rate of growth would mean doubling the size of a congregation every 14 years, since the rate of growth would be compounded annually.² Statistics show that this is not the

¹Towns, The Complete Book of Church Growth, p. 190.

²Lyle E. Schaller, Assimilating New Members, "Creative Leadership Series" (Nashville : Parthenon Press, 1978) p. 14.

case in most congregations. In fact most congregations are very passive in the work of outreach and assimilation and as a result the opposite occurs, with a decline in membership.

A passive church usually has some of these characteristics. The physical care of the building is below average. There is a heavy dependency on the pastor to take the initiative and give direction. More than one-half of the members have been members of this congregation for 12 years or longer. Spontaneous suggestions from enthusiastic new members tend to be ignored. And a general lack of enthusiasm for outreach and mission.³ These are only a few characteristics that have been compiled into a check list to determine if a congregation is passive. This list was developed by Lyle E. Schaller. For the complete check list please refer to Appendix B.

Dr. Roland Q. Leavell has studied the make up of congregations. Below is a list he has compiled in round percentages of the status of members of the average church.

20% never pray
 25% never read the Bible
 30% never attend church
 40% never give to any cause
 50% never go to Sunday School
 60% never attend evening services
 70% never give to missions
 80% never go to prayer meetings
 90% never have family worship
 95% never win a soul to Christ
 99% never spend time following up the souls they have won to the Lord.⁴

³Lyle E. Schaller Activating the Passive Church (Nashville : Abingdon, 1981) p. 66-70.

⁴Romance of Evangelism p. 89, quoted in Waylon B. Moore, New Testament Follow-up (Grand Rapids, Michigan : Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1963) p. 19.

The statistics previously mentioned indicate that most church members are passive. This passiveness may, and probably is the result of they themselves never having been assimilated into the body of Christ.

Among the subjects most frequently discussed at church meetings are the matters of stewardship, evangelism, and delinquent church members. It appears that at least twenty-five percent of the members of most churches must be classified as "inactive" - that is habitually neglecting the means of grace and as weak in church attendance and stewardship. In active or delinquent members are found in all congregations. The problem lies heavily upon the hearts of pastors and church leaders. It is evident that help is needed now to deal with the situation more effectively than in the past.

In fact the greatest disservice we can do to inactive Christians is to let them drift away from Christ, unaware of the spiritual tragedy taking place in their lives. These indifferent members must not think of the church as being a gathering place for a few "perfect" people, but a group of ordinary people on a spiritual pilgrimage, all moving toward the goal of "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,"⁵

To prevent a church from becoming passive in nature, with the result being inactive members, a number of things need to be done. First; the leaders of the church must lead. Second; the New Testament definition of a Christian Fellowship does not support the contention that if members are content, that the congregation is fulfilling its place in God's plan. Third; members of the congregation must become aware of how important their relationship can be with potential members. A common

⁵Phillipians 3:4.

occurrence is that visitors see the social needs of the members being fulfilled, but often leave feeling his or her religious needs have not been met.⁶

The passive church usually can be diagnosed as a church that offers less than is required in the area of evangelistic outreach. In this church the Great Commission rarely receives the endorsement it requires to "make disciples."

Churches have something very special to offer if they would only offer it. The one acute human need that churches and only churches can meet is the desire to relate to the ultimate, to know God personally. In plainer biblical language, churches are places where people can be saved. No other social institution can match that claim.⁷

Studies also have shown that many people who have personal, psychological, and spiritual needs seek out the church for assistance. There is even further evidence that members of churches claim to be slightly happier than the general population.⁸

Therefore, to prevent passive churches, members must be involved in assimilation. It is not Christian to invite a person to unite with a specific congregation and then not accept that person into the fellowship of that congregation. It is common knowledge that it is much easier for a person to join a church than it is to be accepted and to be assimilated into the fellowship of that congregation.⁹

⁶ Lyle E. Schaller Activating the Passive Church p. 13-14.

⁷ C. Peter Wagner Your Church Can Grow p. 148.

⁸ Carl S. Dudley Where Have All Our People Gone? p. 21.

⁹ Lyle E. Schaller Assimilating New Members p. 126.

All evidence points then to the fact that for growth to occur, a congregation must be willing to be active. Being active means they have such attitudes as wanting to grow, enthusiasm about their faith as Christians and have a call to reach the unchurched people. With this commitment they are accepting the challenge of assimilation.

Folding and Feeding

Within the church there then is two major emphasis, evangelism and education. This procedure calls for faithfulness in proclaiming Christ and followed by persuasion. Donald A. McGavran describes this action by saying:

Church growth follows where Christians show faithfulness in finding the lost. It is not enough to search for lost sheep. The Master Shepherd is not pleased with a token search; He wants His sheep found. The purpose is not to search, but to find. He also recognizes the important element of "feeding" and draws both evangelism and edification together.¹⁰

Church growth follows where the lost are not merely found but restored to normal life in the body of Christ. "Faithfulness in folding and feeding"- which unfortunately has come to be called by such a dry superficial term as follow-up - is essential to lasting church expansion.¹¹

Christians are given the example of the seeking Savior in three parables found in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, a chapter which should encourage members of the body of Christ on the importance of "folding and feeding."

¹⁰ Understanding Church Growth 1970, p. 15, quoted in Elmer L. Towns, The Complete Book of Church Growth p. 198.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 198.

The first parable concerns the lost sheep. Even though only one of one hundred is lost the Lord isn't happy. He wants it back where it belongs. People who are with the flock, that is in the body of Christ are, according to Christ, alright. Rev. O.A. Waech describes this parable saying:

The parable of the lost sheep typifies those who are straying from the fold. Lost in the wilderness of sin, separated from the Great Shepherd and the flock, they must be found and brought back - Even if only one percent.¹²

Rev. O.A. Waech describes the second parable saying:

The parable of the lost coin typifies those who are still in the church but out of circulation. Use the broom! Sweep - not to sweep anyone out but to find him and make him serviceable to the Lord and His kingdom.¹³

The third parable he describes saying:

The parable of the lost son typifies those who have wilfully left their father's house. They must be reminded that they are wasting their substance and that an anxious father is eagerly awaiting their return.¹⁴

In these three parables folding and feeding are related first to the unchurched, second to the inactive and third to the back door defectors. In all three cases the Lord wants these people to be a part of His church. In all three cases He is relying on active church members to be His ambassadors. Evangelism and education or, also referred to as folding and feeding, are necessary in making disciples, and in assimilation.

¹²Waldo J. Werning Winning Them Back (Minneapolis : Augsburg Publishing House, 1963) p. 15.

¹³Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

ating a person into the body of Christ. In doing so the church is intentionally offering what it supremely has to offer - the opportunity to follow Jesus Christ within the life, fellowship, and ministries of a congregation.

Kerygma (message), Koinonia (fellowship),
and Diakonia (service)

Assimilation is then what Jesus Christ does through the church's kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia to set people free. The Christian mission is to find and disciple lost people. This mission as stated previously is originally and primarily Christ's mission. That is why the Lord says "Lo I will be with you always." Christ is constantly working within the church to set people free from sins, fears, hang-ups, depression and whatever else that confines them. Christ does His evangelistic work through the church's kerygma, koinonia and diakonia.

Kerygma entails sharing the content of the Gospel. This element is indispensable in evangelizing. By the Gospel story people are informed of and taught a new possibility for life. So God uses our proclaiming and teaching sacramentally to speak his living Word to receptive people and so awakens a faith response to His grace.

Koinonia is not widely perceived to be basic to evangelizing, but it is as intrinsic and indispensable as kerygma. Within the koinonia is found the setting in which the contagion of the Christian possibility is communicated. It is within the koinonia that assimilation occurs. Lord Soper exclaims, "If it is from kerygma that the Christian faith is taught, it is within koinonia that the Christian faith is caught."¹⁵

¹⁵George G. Hunter III The Contagious Congregation (Nashville : Abingdon, 1979) p. 29.

Diakonia is also basic to effective evangelism. The serving church provides credibility for the message it announces and the fellowship which people are being invited to join. It is also stressed that not until seekers themselves begin following Jesus Christ in loving, serving ministry, does the discipleship option become reality.

A summary statement of how kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia work together in evangelism might be the following: "If it is by kerygma that the Christian faith is taught, and by koinonia that it is caught, then it is as a by-product of diakonia that the Christian faith is bought."¹⁶

The New Member

It has been said that for church growth to occur converts must be used to lead their family and friends into a saving knowledge of Christ.¹⁷ These new believers must be encouraged to break out of the encirclement and the protection of the church before it becomes binding. Converts must be involved while their enthusiasm for Christ remains intact and before they become significantly influenced by a lazy and lethargic congregation.

A flood of new members can be the most effective route to church renewal. The larger the number of new members, the more innovations they introduce, the more influential they are in changing the congregational life style from passive to active. With this influx of new members there usually comes a redefining of the congregation's role in ministry resulting in the development of new programs.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., p. 29

¹⁷Hollis L. Green Why Churches Die p. 153.

¹⁸Lyle E. Schaller Activating the Passive Church p. 122.

With a flood of new members one must realize a confrontation may occur between the long-time members and the new members. It should be noted that the reason a substantial number of present long-time members originally joined the church is not the same reason they continue as members today. The reason they stay members is that they have built up a deep relationship with the people of the congregation and also have become attached to the church itself as being a sacred place.¹⁹

Most new adult members join a church and become active in that congregation because it offers a meaningful response to their personal and spiritual needs and those of the members of their family. This is usually accomplished through functional programming, including corporate worship. In that same congregation the religious and spiritual needs of many of the long-time members are met through relationships with other long-time members and with that sacred place.²⁰

New members are indeed important to the church as mentioned. For their total effectiveness they must be assimilated into the congregation. Surveys show that most congregations draw a disproportionately large number of Sunday School teachers, youth counselors, and other workers from the new adult members - as a result of the new ones desire to be assimilated. The long-time members feel they have already been assimilated and therefore have fulfilled their worker obligation.

This attitude is one of concern. While new members need to be assimilated the role of the long-time member in assimilation is a must. This area will be discussed at great length in Chapter V.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

In conclusion, it can be said that outreach and assimilation are necessary for church growth. This is accomplished by activating the passive church; by folding and feeding the flock; by kerygma, koinonia, and diakonia, and by using the new member.

New members are different! When those different can be made felt a part of the body of Christ and perceived as a creative and productive resource, rather than a threat or liability, they can be a very significant factor in responding to passivity, in developing and implementing a church growth strategy, and in preparing for a new era in the church's future.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

A view of leadership which conforms with the New Testament pattern must be a view which focuses attention upon the nature of the church. To exercise saving faith was to become automatically a member of the redeemed community, and therefore also of the redemptive community. As Caemmerer says, the task of a member of the church is to "serve the world with a message of life, to live and die for the sake of saving its people one by one."¹

The early verses of the eighth chapter of Acts indicate that everyone in the church was involved in evangelism and that membership and service were almost synonymous. Crossland makes a point of this in Better Leaders for Your Church.

What qualities should a Christian leader possess? Because the policies, program, and well-being of the Church are largely in their hands, all officials and leaders should be chosen with the utmost care. Each is more than an executive chosen to perform an assigned task. He is also a public relations representative of the church, a spokesman for the Christ-like life, an exhibit of the Christ-like way, and an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Because his neighbors and friends think of him as the church incarnate, his personal, social, and religious life should be of a high order.²

¹Richard R. Caemmerer. Feeding and Leading (St. Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1962). p. 92.

²Weldon Frank Crossland. Better Leaders for Your Church (Nashville : Abingdon Press, 1955). p. 22.

Crossland further indicates several qualities which he thinks every Christian leader ought to be expected to possess, including "loyalty to Christ, love of Christ's church, devotion to the work of the church, and regular attendance at church." The emphasis is clear. Christian leadership is inseparably related to the local church.

In the New Testament whenever the exercise of Christian leadership is under consideration it is almost always in the direction of plurality. A classic example of this concept would be in the book of I Peter where Peter writes to the elders of the churches admonishing them to "feed the flock of God."³ Peter here and in other passages in his general epistles, seems to be constantly reminiscent of the words of his Lord relative to the kind of leadership he was to offer. The passage speaks of a responsibility and of authority, but the exercise of the authority is done in willingness and from pure motives. The feeding here is for growth and this growth comes through the process of assimilation. Caemmerer goes on to illustrate this saying:

The pastor leads as he feeds. He leads so that the feeding is more efficient; he leads to where the feeding is going on; he leads so that others feed. The test of his work is not just how many come to listen to him, but what they do when they go into their own calling of life again.⁴

The emphasis here as presented by Caemmerer is on the biblical concept of nurture. The administrative tasks of the pastor and other Christian leaders serving the church all lend themselves to providing a satisfactory atmosphere for the people of God to grow more like the Son of God and as a result be assimilated into the church. This results in them be-

³1 Peter 5:2.

⁴Richard R. Caemmerer Feeding and Leading, p. 49.

ing able to demonstrate Christ's message in the world by their lives.

To be the church is to represent Jesus Christ in the world. There is no limitation here to particular office nor even to special gift, though a recognition of a gift is basic to the ministry of all Christians. Christian leadership is involved with bringing about a genuine life ministry of the part of God's people.

This chapter will look at the role of leadership in the growth of the church. Special emphasis will be placed on Pastoral leadership.

Leadership: Key to Growth

If any principle is common at least in theory among all that is written concerning church growth, it is that strong leadership is an important element in building the local church. As Robert Schuller writes in his book Your Church Has Real Possibilities:

Leadership is the key to church growth. If the church is to really succeed in its mission of witnessing effectively to the non-churched world in the 21st Century, we must develop dynamic, aggressive and inspiring leaders.⁵

What is leadership? Leadership is thinking ahead planning for the future, exhausting all possibilities, envisioning problems and dreaming up solutions to them, and then communicating the possibilities and the problem solving ideas to the decision makers.

For leadership to be effective it must be local and fulltime. In the congregation leadership basically then is in the hands of the pastor. He is to be constantly thinking, planning and selling ideas to effectively carry out our Lord's command.

⁵Robert H. Schuller Your Church Has Real Possibilities (Glendale, CA : Regal Books, 1974) p. 49.

What is leadership?

Leadership is responsibility!

Leadership is thinking big!

Leadership is organization!

Leadership is leading!

Robert Schuller stresses the importance of leadership. He has said that if you set successful goals you will succeed. If you fail to set successful goals, you can be assured of failure.⁶ He is promoting "Possibility thinking." In the church possibility thinking requires the maximum utilization of the God-given powers of imagination exercised in dreaming up possible ways by which a desired objective can be attained.

Possibility thinking is very important in the role of assimilating new members into the church. It requires the pastor to be interested in growth, in dreaming and conveying these thoughts and ideas to the members of the congregation. Possibility thinking aids the pastor in developing church growth eyes.

Pastoral Leadership

Leadership has been defined as "the work a person does to enable people to work most effectively together."⁷ If a congregation is to fulfill its God-given purpose, the edification of Christ's church through the gospel, then the effective working together of its members is vital.

⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

⁷ The Management Profession as quoted in Armin W. Schuetze and Irwin J. Habeck. The Shepherd Under Christ (Milwaukee : Northwestern Publishing House, 1974) p. 324.

This must be a working together that is not merely an end in itself, but a working together aimed at the purpose, objectives, and goals the congregation recognizes as its own. Pastoral leadership is to help attain such purposeful working together.

The qualifications and duties of the pastor are spoken of in the New Testament at considerable length, and they go beyond the qualifications and duties demanded by any other office. A pastor is to be able to preach and teach the Word of God, to divide the Word of truth rightly, to do the work of an evangelist, by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the lost, and to feed the church of God, over which the Holy Ghost has made him overseer.⁸ These all have a part in making the pastor a good leader of God's people.

Some other qualifications that have a rather direct bearing on the pastor's leadership role follow.

1. A spirit of service on the part of the pastor will inspire others to serve. This does not imply that the pastor should do everything himself, but that he knows and shows that he is there to serve the congregation beyond the requirements spelled out in the call.

2. The pastor's love for people will promote good leadership. This idea promotes "universal priesthood" and prevents him placing himself on a pedestal.

3. The pastor's own well-disciplined life will promote good organization and purposeful activity within the congregation. This is a call for the pastor to practice self discipline.

⁸Cf. Acts 20:28 ; 1 Timothy 3:1-7 ; 4:12-15 ; 5:21 ; 2 Timothy 1:8 ; 2:3,15 ; 4:2, 5 ; Titus 1:7-9.

4. An open objectivity will prevent the pastor's being overly critical of what others propose and overly proud of his own ideas. The pastor is a true leader when he can get the members to work together toward finding the best way to attain the goals established.

5. A spirit of urgency but not impatience on his part will lead a congregation to recognize that the Lord's work requires haste.⁹

The pastor must then be well prepared, deeply committed, hard working, clear in vision, and capable of arousing enthusiasm in the congregation.

It has been noted that gifted pastors have accomplished miracles, by the grace of God, in reviving congregations that have shown no vital signs and were presumed dead. When churches come alive, the pastor also is empowered. He reflects the prayers and trust that have been bestowed by a responsible congregation.¹⁰ These pastors are men of God, who work hard but realize they are only God's instruments.

To be effective the pastor must not neglect personal study. This is accomplished through daily Bible study other than preparing for sermons or Bible classes within the church. A pastor must also be a man who responds to God's message through prayer. While prayer is not a means of grace it is an acknowledgment of dependence upon God.

The pastor then as a leader should be doing the following.

1. He should build up a spirit of genuine concern among the whole congregation. This can be effectively accomplished through sermons and Bible classes. For we know that whenever the Bible is preached and Christ

⁹This list was adapted from the Chapter "The Shepherd's Involvement in Administration" Schuetze and Habeck The Shepherd Under Christ p. 293-331.

¹⁰Carl S. Dudley Where Have All Our People Gone.

is exalted, church growth naturally occurs.

Hollis Green warns that this is the reason why churches are dying and lays the blame on the pastor.

Preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God to man by man anointed of God. Yet proclamation is being downgraded even though the people are still willing to listen. Much of the fault is in the sender and not in the receiver. The problem is not to get the hungry to eat. The problem is to provide sufficient food nutritious enough to meet his needs.¹¹

2. The pastor must always make a distinction between Law and Gospel.

3. Emphasis needs to be placed on Sunday Worship. For Sunday is the first day of the week and sets the pattern for the rest. Hollis Green states:

An easy going leisurely approach to Sunday causes Christians to be indifferent about their worship and witness all week. Consequently, they have no daily devotional life and little or no personal witness. Accepting Monday as the psychological beginning of the week makes one materialistic and pre-occupied with the problems of life.¹²

These worship services should be celebrations, because as redeemed people of the Lord we have reason to celebrate.

4. The pastor should be available at all times for his members. He should also provide opportunities for his members to get to know him better. This could be accomplished through such events as nights with the pastor.

¹¹Hollis L. Green Why Churches Die p. 55.

¹²Ibid., p. 15.

Pastors Role In Assimilation

The Bible reveals the pastor as a many-sided man. He becomes at the same time a teacher, a preacher, and overseer, a shepherd, and a parent. His life in Christ determines the emphasis and content of his varied ministries.

Today however a gap exists in some churches between the pulpit and the pew because the work of equipping the saints is neglected. The special gifts of ministry were given to men that they may in turn equip others for Christian service and the building up of the body of Christ. The task of church leadership is simply one of equipping the saints for an effective ministry.

With this understanding it can be said that the basic concept of assimilation of people into the body of Christ is placed upon the shoulders of the pastor. The pastor usually makes the follow-up contacts with potential members. The pastor is often the one who ministers to peoples needs. The pastor is also the one who teaches God's Word through preaching and adult instruction./ As Peter Wagner and Clark Roof - both agree that the pastor's energetic and enthusiastic support of church ministry has a strong positive correlation with the appeal for and assimilation of new members into a growing church.¹³

It needs to be pointed out that the pastor cannot care for the new converts by himself, because the result would be an orphanage situation. This is the situation found in many churches, where converts are simply added to the body and then expected to look after themselves spiritually.

¹³Carl S. Dudley Where Have All Our People Gone? p. 106.

The typical pastor, then, will be careful to make sure that the people of the congregation are well aware of his dependence on them, and he will remind them of it as often as possible. So as not to jeopardize the spiritual dynamic already at work among the people. He should also be very hesitant to accept public credit for the growth of the church.

It is true then, that no pastor, regardless of how gifted he is, can make a church grow alone. The body of Christ was not designed to function that way. From just the practical point of view, anyone could deduce that the only pastor who could possibly do all the work would be the pastor of a small church, but if that small church is growing it soon will be a church too big for anyone person to do all the work involved. The larger a church grows, the less a share of the total work load the pastor himself can assume.

Pastors of growing churches, whether they be large or small, know how to motivate their lay people, how to create structure which permit them to be active and productive and how to guide them into meaningful avenues of Christian service.¹⁴

✓The key function of the pastor, then is not that he evangelize, but that he lead his people into discovering, developing, and using their God-given spiritual gifts to aid him in assimilating new members.}... This is the subject of Chapter V. ✓He must be concerned with helping members to relate their faith to their daily lives in their homes, their work, and their communities - not just with matters of church attendance and financial support but of being active members of the body.

¹⁴C. Peter Wagner Your Church Can Grow p.69.

In summary, the primary task of leadership is creating a church climate conducive to spiritual experience and growth. Three things are a prerequisite to a New Testament atmosphere in which growth can take place. The New Testament means must be used to produce New Testament men who feel at home with New Testament methods. Means, men and methods in that order will produce a church that is actively assimilating their members into the body of Christ.

CHAPTER V

THE CONGREGATIONS' ROLE IN ASSIMILATION

The saddest figures in all the statistics of American churches are those which tell that of every two persons received on profession of faith, one has dropped as a failure.¹ This figure tells us that the today's church is not dedicated to assimilating new members into the body of Christ.

God intends that people should be together on this earth. He urges us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. God wants His church to be a mutual edification society. He structures the church as a body and a family. As a responsible member of this body each member should exemplify how Christ functions in the world. This Chapter deals with the functions necessary to assimilate new members into the church so they don't become another statistic. This requires the whole body working together to save the lost.

Need for Responsible Layity

A local church may experience growth for a while without sophisticated organizing and planning if something contagious is spontaneously occurring in its ministry or outreach. This of course will be only temporary. For effective year-by-year outreach and growth a congregation must

¹Guido Merkins Living Lutheran Leadership, (San Antonio : Clarence E. Saegert Publishing, 1969). Section II, p. 1.

have responsible members organized for programmatic outreach.

People are both the object of the evangelistic goal and the agent of evangelistic strategy as indicated in Scripture.² This same principle is true today in that lay involvement is necessary to fulfill our Lords command to go. Win Arn writes:

One thing is certain - if a church is serious about the Great Commission, the involvement of the layity is of utmost importance. The growth of a church is uniquely dependent on the layity. The pastor who sees his role as enabler to help the layity discover and utilize their gifts is far ahead of the pastor who tries to run the whole show.³

The greatest potential for evangelistic effectiveness in a church comes from a combination of the 10 percent of the mature Christians who have the gift of evangelist with those recent converts of less than three years in the Lord in a program planned and designed for church growth. Put this together with the 90 percent who know and are using their spiritual gifts and you have developed a church with an extremely high growth potential.⁴

Incorporating new converts immediately in the program of evangelism is a necessity. Since being a witness is living a life in contrast to one's contemporaries, it is obvious that the new convert can be the greater witness because of the immediate change in his life.

²Vergil Gerber God's Way to Keep a Church Going and Growing (Glendale, CA : Regal Books, 1973) p. 23.

³"Let My People Grow," an article in Eternity, May 1975, as quoted in Elmer L. Towns The Complete Book of Church Growth p. 203.

⁴C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p. 83.

The church to be effective ought to demonstrate a concern for the whole world, but a concern for individuals is essential. Men are born one at a time and lost individually. They must then be saved one at a time. They must be assimilated into the body of Christ one at a time. To be effective the church must know the community surrounding it and structure a program to reach the individuals within it.

The major consideration in the program of evangelism then must be the laity. To neglect the priesthood of all believers is to disregard one of the distinct tenants of the Christian church. While each man may have a different work on earth, each individual stands immediately before the throne of God as a priest and is under an obligation to minister.

A spiritual congregation true to the Bible is: "a visible fellowship of people in a given locality who band themselves together because of mutual faith and trust in God. This band of believers is committed to sharing salvation with all men everywhere."⁵

Each and every member of the church must be equipped and inspired to carry out the vital message of Christ to all whom they meet. They must become responsible, reproducing members. To do this they must:

1. Have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the Head of the Body.
2. Be willing to share in the life and work of the church.
3. Consciously discovering and using the gifts God gives him to aid the church in growth.
4. Has desire to change what is displeasing to God and seeks

⁵Hollis L. Green, Why Churches Die p. 186.

to bring peace, justice, love and brotherhood into the world.

The Love Factor

A responsible member then is one who continually shows the love of Christ in all that he does. This love must especially be shown to the new convert. If the convert doesn't feel loved he becomes a weak link in the chain of evangelism because he fails to develop the capacity to love. As a result he fails to grow in grace and knowledge.

It is difficult if not impossible for an unloved person to love others. Part of the reason for a failure as a Christian to love others is that the believer himself does not feel loved. When an individual understands that he is loved, it is the most natural thing in the world for love to be shared.⁶

True fellowship is characterized by an atmosphere of love and forgiveness. Men forgive because God forgives. Men forget because God does not remember their wrong doings.

In assimilating new members love becomes a very important factor. Christian fellowship requires mutual love.⁷ Loving one another is the foundation of fellowship and without mutual love there can be no fellowship. Love is necessary for fellowship because only when one is loved can he open himself to others. When a person does open himself up to others exciting things occur including the telling of problems and bearing one another's burdens. /

The love factor in assimilation leads the person to be true to his conversion. For the Christian is never true to his conversion when he lives for himself. Each man is saved that he may serve Christ and be-

⁶Ibid., p. 72.

⁷John 15:12-17.

cause he is saved, he does serve the right cause of sharing Christ's love with others.

Importance of Small Groups

In order to accomodate everyone who might be interested in being a member of a congregation, and to effectively assimilate them into the congregation small groups need to be developed. This in itself is not an easy task for people's life styles and interest constantly change. Therefore, for small groups to be effective a variety of choices need to be offered to people. It is said that it is usually necessary to have six or seven small groups for each one hundred members who are 13 or 14 years of age or older.⁸

What is far more difficult is to maintain sixty to seventy small groups in the 1000 member congregation. But without these small groups a substantial number of members would become drop outs or fall into the category of inactive.

Small groups are especially important in assimilating new members who come from a background not identical with that of other members. It should also be recognized that just having small groups does not mean you will assimilate new members easliy. Since new members are constantly joining, the development of new small groups then is a constant endeavor for the church. A standard procedure would be for the necessity of six to seven new small groups a year in the average congregation while maintaining most of the groups already in existence.

⁸Lyle E. Schaller Assimilating New Members p. 95.

Lyle Schaller also states that there are four caution signs in developing and maintaining small groups. These four cautions are found below.

1. Avoid a forced division of any existing class, group, choir or circle. Create a new group.
2. An annual review of the group life of the congregation should be conducted to evaluate the balance.
3. Recognize and affirm the fact that some groups become closed fellowship circles.
4. View with great skepticism any proposal for creating new groups on a functional or geographical basis or in response to the institutional needs of the church.⁹

Follow-up: Spiritual Pediatrics

Follow-up is the conservation, maturation and multiplication of the fruit of evangelism. This winning and building are inseparably linked together in the Scriptures. It can therefore be said that assimilation does not occur without follow-up.¹

"No other subject is more widely taught and illustrated in the New Testament than, personal, consistent, church-integrated follow-up." Most of the letters of Paul, Peter, and John were written for the purpose of follow-up to those new in the faith.¹⁰

The spread of the gospel in the 1st century was amazing. The reason being that the early disciples obeyed their Lord's command to go into all the world. These disciples exalted a living Savior and implanted

⁹Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰Waylon B. Moore, New Testament Follow-up (Grand Rapids : Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1963) p. 17.

into their converts, truth from God which made them life changers. To them being a Christian meant having a vital relationship with a risen Christ.

If one would look closely, all follow-up in the New Testament is directed toward the needs of the individual. This is still the situation today. Our message and programs of the church must be at all times exalting a living Savior that is interested in the needs of the individual.

A new convert is like a child, they need to be led into a life of maturity over a period of time by careful and loving discipline. If we don't show care for the new convert we have failed, as Guido Merkins writes:

If we treated newborn babies as carelessly as we treat newborn Christians, the infant mortality rate would equal the appalling mortality of church members. The obstetrician must be followed by the pediatrician. As William J. McCullough sagely says, "I never saw a bassinet without sides."¹¹

Dr. Merkins here is stressing the fact that God always intended that His work should be carried on by the individual Christians. Assimilating new members into the body of Christ involves all Christians working together. A term this author came upon in his research describing this action was "spiritual pediatrics."¹² Spiritual pediatrics is the parental care given to new believers to bring them to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness.

Unfortunately, few people demonstrate Christ-like love for others and few understand the great and limitless field of ministry available

¹¹Guido Merkins, Living Lutheran Leadership Section II, p. 2.

¹²Waylon B. Moore, New Testament Follow-up p. 23.

through the individual approach. Within our churches we find too many members who are not willing to give the parental care which keeps the new convert from becoming a spiritual orphan.

To be effective we need to follow the example of Paul who considered himself a parent to those he won to Christ. To the Corinthians he wrote, "For though ye have ten thousand instructions in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel."¹³ Paul also used such terms as "you are my children" when addressing the churches and he called Timothy and Titus his "sons in the faith."

/Are we parents then for those who are new in the faith? This is what assimilation calls for! Parents as we know are responsible for loving, feeding, protecting and training their children until they reach maturity. In the church, spiritually speaking, every soul-winner has this same four-fold responsibility./

1. Loving: Jesus said, "This is my command, that you love one another, as I have loved you."¹⁴ As earlier stated the love factor is important in assimilation. The love that members show to new converts is the basic necessity for successful spiritual parenthood but is usually missing and causes assimilation to fail.

To be effective in showing love to new converts we must always have a Christ-like love as our foundation. Such a love may even involve laying down one's life for another, if necessary.¹⁵

¹³₁ Corinthians 4:15.

¹⁴₁ John 15:12.

¹⁵₁ John 3:16.

2. Feeding: The new convert in Christ also needs to be fed regularly with the right kind of food. As Jesus commanded Peter to feed His sheep, He commands us to provide that same opportunity. We need to make sure that we then have the right spiritual formula for infant feeding; the only right food for the new babe (convert) in Christ is the "Milk of the Word."¹⁶ Absolutely nothing must take the place of the Bible in the daily spiritual diet of every believer. As Waylon Moore writes:

Maturity in spiritual things enables a church member to be self-sustaining from the Word of God and to share his abundance with others. A mature Christian, living "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4), is able to project the Christian doctrine and the program of the church into the whole world.¹⁷

3. Protecting: A new convert needs to be protected to ensure his spiritual growth. For Satan still is alive and well. He considers no prey more tempting than the spiritual life of a new believer. The newborn child of God is Satan's prime target for he knows he can be crippled spiritually for life.

The lack of Christian care and discipline has ruined thousands of Christian lives, causing the gospel message not to be spread and making walls out of those people who should be doors. Parental protection by instruction, example, rebuke and discipline prepares the convert for a useful, balanced, victorious Christian life.

4. Training: Parental care always involves training the baby; beginning with simple things when young, and intensifying the program

¹⁶ Peter 2:2.

¹⁷ Waylon B. Moore, New Testament Follow-up p. 25.

as he grows up. The main factor spiritual parents must remember when training their children is that Jesus Christ is the foundation and all things are built upon him.

The building materials for the new convert are the basic doctrines of the Bible. In order to fully assimilate the new believer, he needs to be taught the doctrines of assurance, prayer, and victory over sin. The training however doesn't stop there! They must also be trained in applying these doctrines in their daily lives and also trained in how they can teach this to others.

All this, loving, feeding, protecting and training then are part of assimilating the believer into becoming spiritually mature and Christ-like. Therefore, members must adopt new converts in order to have an effective program of assimilation.

To "adopt", says Webster, "is to take by choice into some relationship." Each new member in the church should be adopted by an older Christian and helped to grow through a personalized program of Bible study, prayer and service. This can be done through a committee which seeks to personally visit and teach each new convert, new member, or new family joining the church. This adoption plan must however, be continued beyond the converts initial introduction to the congregation. It should be continued for as long as it takes the convert to become spiritually mature.

What "spiritual pediatrics" says is that/there is no short-cut or no quick and easy method of assimilating new members into the church. Christian lives are never mass produced. A great number of personal, caring encounters are required. When a church cannot get a good many of its members to give time for the various phases of its new member program,

you will find a church that is failing in evangelism, nurture and growth./

Reaching the Church Shopper

Part of assimilation is to make the church shopper feel welcome. This requires the pastor and congregational members to do all that is necessary in making the visitor feel comfortable.

Below are some things a congregation can do in providing visitors with a feeling that they are indeed welcome.

1. When visitors attend your church for the first time, ushers or designated greeters should welcome them to the service.
2. In addition to the bulletin, it is a good idea to specially prepare a visitor's information brochure. This brochure should introduce the church and its various programs of ministry.
3. Also helpful would be an easy-to-read floor plan of the churches facilities, and signs should be posted around the church to help direct first-time visitors to appropriate places.
4. Pastor and members should extend a warm welcome and demonstrate personal attention to the new comers.

This is just the beginning of making a visitor feel needed. To just stop here would mean failure. Assimilating the church member means going the second mile.

Going the second mile means doing the following: WEEK ONE: On Monday morning the pastor should write a letter to each new comer from the

day before. This letter should express the delight of having them in the worship service and also mention that during this week he or some members will be by to visit them. Also included in the letter should be a list of events occurring at the church and a schedule of the regular worship services.

On Wednesday or Thursday an appointment should be made for a personal visit of the family. With the visit happening, if possible, before the end of the week. In the visit the pastor should let the people know that he is genuinely concerned about them - personally - not as statistics on a roll. The visit should help explain the programs going on at the church and a chance to answer any questions they might have.

WEEK TWO: During the second week a second letter should be sent from the pastor. In the letter reference should be made to the previous visit and time of fellowship together. The letter should contain any special interest that was discussed during the visit, and reference made to relevant ministries, or activities the church has to offer.

In the second week other individuals from the congregation should visit the newcomer. These visitors should be those who might have common interests with these people. WEEKS THREE AND FOUR: During this period personal visits by members of the church should be continued. The Sunday School teacher especially should make contact to break down the barrier or reluctance of participating in the Sunday School hour.

The pastor too has to be active during this third and fourth week of follow-up. The pastor is the key figure for the newcomer and anything he does to show his love and concern to them is a positive stroke.¹⁸

¹⁸The above was adapted from: Edgar M. Davis, "Reaching the Church Shopper" Church Growth America (September-October 1981) p. 6-8.

By no means is this a plan for assimilating members into the body of Christ. These are just the first steps. In them we see the beginning of love being shared and the start of spiritual parenthood taking place.

Parish Programs
for Attaining Good Assimilation and Edification

Dr. Guido Merkins in his book Living Lutheran Leadership, specifies ten programs that are effective in attaining good assimilation within the church. They are:

1. Faithful Use of the Means of Grace
2. Orientation for All New Members
3. Vigourous Bible Class Promotion
4. Thorough Talent Enlistment
5. The Securing of Proportionate Pledges
6. The Adult Sponsor Program
7. The Night With the Pastor Program
8. The Ambassadors' Program
9. The Bible Breakfast
10. The Diversified Athletic Program.¹⁹

The faithful use of the means of grace refers to the use of God's Word, for the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It also refers to the proper administering of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. /If the congregation is to be effective in assimilating, all its activities must find their origin and orientation in the means of grace. By the Word and Sacraments men come to faith, remain in faith, and live their lives dedicated to Christ.

¹⁹Guido Merkins, Living Lutheran Leadership Section II, p. 4.

Outside of God's grace in Christ there is no salvation. Outside of God's means there is no power for the church. If the church takes its ministry of service under Christ seriously it will provide many opportunities for members to receive and share the means of grace./

Orientation is necessary to fulfill the process of assimilation. Assimilation means "making one alike". When a person becomes a member of a congregation he is in a sense a stranger. This orientation could take on various forms but the result is to make these new members a part of the church.

"Most churchmen are agreed today that the first six to nine months are crucial in the congregational life of a new member. Within that period of time he will establish habits and practices of the stewardship of life that will be relatively permanent."²⁰

Bible classes are especially effective in assimilating new members. As Jesus says: "If you continue in My Word, then you are My disciples indeed."²¹ Any congregation that wants its members to be disciples must then provide Bible classes for them so they can be in the Word. If they are in the Word they are then people who will be equipped to provide spiritual service.

Corresponding with Bible classes is the necessity of getting the new member involved in activities of the church. To do this it is necessary to find the talents an individual has and provide an opportunity for him to serve. This enlistment could take place already in the first week and

²⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

²¹ John 8:31.

must take place within the first 6-12 months. If this does not happen, it is very likely the person will never be assimilated into the church.

It is also important to realize that as individuals grow in skills and abilities their role in the church could change. To keep people assimilated means to keep them happy. They need to feel needed and wanted. So the pastor and leaders of the church need to constantly review the areas people are involved in and periodically they may need to move people to a new area.

To be an active member of the church, requires the individual to also be willing to support the church through pledges. In assimilating the member this area is often overlooked because we are afraid of scaring them off.

Guido Merkins stresses the importance of pledging. He writes:

Experience reveals that people who have invested themselves materially are by and large the most active members of a congregation. As someone has put it so well; "Spiritual interest follows spiritual dollars." God wants us to give because we love Him. God always wants to heighten our love for Him by sharing with Him.²²

The adult sponsor program is designed to aid the new member to feel at home. The importance of this was discussed in the section of "Spiritual pediatrics."

A sample plan of sponsor program follows:

When a new member joins, the church office sends a letter to a responsible couple (or individual if the new member is single) in which the couple or individual is asked to do the following:

1. Pray for the new member(s)

²² Guido Merkins, Living Lutheran Leadership Section II, p. 7.

2. Get to know them as soon as possible, by phone call and personally, after the service in which they are received.
3. Invite them within the first two weeks for dinner in the home or for a full evenings visit.
4. Bring them to the appropriate organization meetings for which they are eligible, if possible, bring them to Bible class.
5. Be alert for other opportunities for friendly service.²³

The nights with the pastor are also important in assimilation. In the growing - larger parish the pastor often finds it impossible to reach each home, in the so-called "yearly pastoral call." This problem can be successfully met and solved with this program.

This plan would be to divide the members into groups and invite a certain number over each week for an informal evening with devotion and fellowship. These meetings could be either in the pastors home or at the church. This would also provide an opportunity for the new members to be acquainted with more members in a different setting.

Dr. Merkins ambassador program serves the purpose as an every-member calling program. This again provides opportunity for members to meet one another as well as strengthens the spiritual life of the entire congregation.

Bible Breakfast aids assimilation in offering another opportunity for getting together to study God's Word. Some values of the Bible Breakfast according to Dr. Merkins are:

1. Increased Bible Knowledge and skills
2. Teaching skills are acquired

²³Ibid., p. 8.

3. Real learning takes place in an informal atmosphere
4. Future Sunday School teachers are "born."
5. Spiritual gifts are increased and enlarged
6. A warm fellowship spirit is engendered
7. The church is "the Church"²⁴

Finally, a diversified program aids in assimilation. This cannot take the place of the means of grace but the emphasis here is placed on fellowship. Here are a few of the benefits derived from church athletics:

1. A large segment of the congregation is drawn together in happy leisure hours for closer companionship.
2. Many people are enlisted for service in this program, as group leaders, coaches, and the like, who after their coaching experience go on to more vital kingdom work.
3. The adult converts are made "to feel at home" and are assimilated in a good "get-to-know-another" program.
4. Many boys and girls have been won for Sunday School through their initial contacts with the church in the sports and fellowship program.
5. The people of the community acquire a positive and inquiring attitude about a congregation that is evidently interested in the "whole man."²⁵

Through the work of God's disciples and the offering of such programs assimilation can effectively take place. If we can make people a part of the body of Christ through such programs hopefully we can cut down the back door losses that are occurring. In doing so we are getting organized for action and by the power of the Gospel we can assimilate our new members into active parish life.

²⁴Ibid., p. 10.

²⁵Ibid., p. 11.

CONCLUSION

As the Lord Jesus Christ disciplined man, so in our total ministry there must be true discipling. To disciple a man is to lead the convert to experience Jesus as Lord of all his life. Being a disciple involves an act of surrender and a process of obedience. This is what assimilation is all about.

A good program of assimilation does not come about accidentally. It can come only through the prayerful concern of pastor and people. Just having the program does not mean that assimilation will happen automatically. The results rest with the church. In the church everyone has a role which reminds them that God has given them the gift and the responsibility to be his brother's keeper.

The process of assimilation begins before membership and continues for assimilation is an ongoing process, not here today and gone tomorrow. It takes time, money, effort and people.

Assimilation is a must! Without an effective program and the efforts of everyone the continued back door losses will not decline but rather increase. Assimilation demands that every congregation seek to be a better community, to have more biblical teaching, warmer fellowship, more Christian love, more concern for social justice, and more effective evangelism of the lost.

The congregation that does not assimilate its new members risks the chance of losing them or providing a circumstance in which the new member never becomes a reproducing member of the body. They could be described as follows:

A lone
S cared
S eparated
I nactive
M ilitant
I ncompetent
L ethargic
A lienated
T ense
I ndignant
O bstinate
N egllected

Instead assimilation is to make responsible members out of new converts. Members that can be described as being:

A ctive
S incere
S erving
I nvolved
M inistering
I nnovative
L oving
A ccountable
T eamwork
I mmortal
O utgoing
N ourished

Characteristics of an assimilated member include:

1. Having friends within the congregation.
2. Has been given a task or role that is appropriate for his spiritual gifts.
3. He is a member of a fellowship group.
4. Is one who practices stewardship.
5. He identifies with the goals of the congregation and can verbalize them.
6. He regularly attends worship services.
7. He continues to grow daily in God's Word and grace.
8. Has identified the body of Christ and has joined the church.
9. He can express what he believes.
10. Is a responsible, reproducing member of the church.

If we assimilate members to be responsible reproducing church members, we will naturally be taking the first step in stopping back door losses while producing an army dedicated in fulfilling Jesus' command found in the Great Commission.

Assimilation then does play an important role in church growth. In fact assimilation is church growth. For assimilation is the program of bringing men and women into responsible membership.

APPENDIX-A**To Intensify Membership
Conservation Program****RESOLUTION 1-06****Overture 1-32 (CW, p. 38)**

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continues to lose, on an average over the past 10 years, 50,000 members a year by defections (removed from the membership list because of lack of participation or because they moved away and did not transfer or because they were excommunicated); and

WHEREAS, The various programs that have been developed by the Synod and the Districts to decrease this figure have in the long term had little effect; and

WHEREAS, None of the departments of the Synod have found the time nor have the staff to do the necessary research to develop new approaches to the problem; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board for Evangelism intensify its efforts to develop a membership conservation program; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Directors of the Synod be encouraged to fund a staff person to serve as Secretary for Membership Conservation on a four-year appointment to the evangelism staff of the Synod; and be it further

Resolved, That the Department of Research and Planning assist the Evangelism Department in conducting the kind of studies needed to determine the effectiveness of such present programs as the Membership Referral System, the transfer procedures, the soul-accounting systems, and so forth; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary for Membership Conservation, on the basis of the research done in conjunction with the Department of Research and Planning, develop programs that can be implemented by both Districts and congregations; and be it finally

Resolved, That the goal for the program be to reduce the defections by 10 percent each year.

Action: Adopted (14).

APPENDIX B

Check List That Marks The Passive Church

1. A low level of congregational self-esteem is a major factor behind the lack of enthusiasm and the apparent complacency. (10)
2. Physical care of the building is below average (We don't care attitude) (4)
3. Heavy dependance on the pastor and/or paid staff to take initiative and give direction. (5)
4. Strong past-orientation - feeling that the best days of this congregation are clearly past. (8)
5. More than $\frac{1}{2}$ of today's members have been members of this congregation for 12 years or longer. (5)
6. A lack of anything resembling evangelical fervor. (10)
7. Today's congregation is smaller than it was at its peak. (4)
8. Policy-makers tend to be drawn from those people who were members when congregation at peak. (7)
9. A comparatively large proportion of today's members are relatively inactive. (8)
10. The focus of the program is largely on music, children and youth - therefore most adults remain in a relatively passive role. (7)
11. When leaders discuss priorities in the allocation of resources, there is a widespread tendency to emphasize the conservation of time, energy, money and physical facilities and to talk in terms of either or rather than both and. (5)
12. "Efficiency & economy" are more important consideration in decision-making than performance and relationships. (5)
13. The quality of internal communication between congregation as a whole and the individual members is usually less than adequate and is often inaccurate, confusing and incomplete. (6)
14. There is a very low level of concern for saying thank you to lay volunteer workers, especially those with responsibilities of limited visibility. (5)
15. The minister now sees his or her career as almost completely in the past rather than in the future. (8)
16. The congregation is convinced that if they can find a "super-preacher" to replace the departing minister, "all of our problems will be behind us." (10)
17. The leaders are unusually critical about what is or is not happening. (7)
18. One aggressive, domineering, and intimidating lay leader is allowed to exert a disproportionately large amount of power within the congregation. (8)
19. The governing body of the congregation tends to see its primary role as a permission-withholding body set apart to tell the members, groups, classes, and other organizations what they cannot do. (By contrast, in the active church the governing body tends to see its role as encouraging creativity, a prophetic imagination, innovation, and whenever possible, giving permission rather than withholding it.) (7)

APPENDIX B (cont.)

20. Spontaneous suggestions from enthusiastic new members tend to be ignored. (7)
21. Many of the members feel there is a perpetual financial crisis. (4)
22. New members find it difficult to gain a sense of belonging and to feel needed. (5)
23. There is a general lack of enthusiasm for outreach and mission. (6)
24. There is high level of competence in developing arguments why "That won't work here." (9)
25. The emphasis in teaching ministry is on learning content, not on experiences or events. (7)
26. Congregational victories, such as doubling the level of member contributions, renovating an old building, sending a mission team to work in a mission project in some other part of the world, expanding the program, enlarging the evangelistic outreach, or purchasing a new organ are not celebrated and sometimes not even acknowledged. (8)
27. There is a great ability and a widespread tendency to turn victories into defeats. (Significant accomplishments are evaluated as "Pretty good, but not as good as what we did back in 1958" or "I was hoping it would turn out better.") (9)
28. There are limited opportunities for people to express their Christian commitment in ways that are satisfying and that provide meaningful growth experiences for the participants. (8)
29. Seniority and tenure tend to be more influential criteria in selecting leaders than competence, skill, or experience in other congregations. (7)
30. Less than one-tenth of the members are able to call more than fifty to sixty persons in that congregation by name. The typical member encounters a large number of familiar, but anonymous, faces whenever he or she attends a meeting or worship service that includes as many as one hundred persons. (6)

If the total score for your congregation adds up to more than 160 points, this probably means you are a member of a passive church. If that total is between 120 and 160 points, this may mean the amber light should be flashing and the psychological and spiritual slump that is both a cause and a product of passivity may be just ahead. If that total is between 55 and 120 points, this probably suggests some dangers of complacency, but the level of enthusiasm and optimism is sufficient to reverse the drift toward passivity. If you report a score of 30 to 55 points, you probably are a member of a comparatively healthy congregation, and you may be wasting your time reading this book. If the score totals less than 30 points, one of four conditions probably applies; (a) this is a relatively new congregation; (b) the ideal "superpreacher" arrived on the scene very recently, and the congregation is still enjoying the euphoria of that honeymoon era; (c) you use a different system for describing reality and for adding numbers than is used by some the the rest of us. (d) you have just transferred your membership from a congregation that would have scored 180 on this test.

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