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A MODEL FOR TRANSITION OF MINISTRY IN DECLINING CONGREGATIONS

A Major Applied Project
presented to the faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry

by

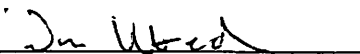
Charles M. Snow

March, 1998



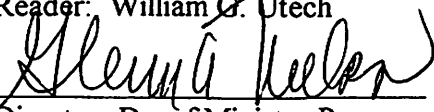
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ABSTRACT

A model for transition of ministry in declining congregations: There are many congregations in changing communities that are declining in membership, resources, and ministry. I propose that a congregation that places priority on fulfilling the Great Commission, Prayer, Biblical Stewardship and the Means of Grace can stop the decline and transition ministry to an emphasis on discipleship and outreach to the local community. I will present a discussion of the understanding of the "Missio Dei," the role of the pastor, the struggle between ministry versus numerical membership, and the use of community resources. I will give the transitional history of one such congregation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In our communities today there are congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that decline in membership and ministry. These congregations maintain a physical presence until material resources are depleted. The end result is that either they close their doors or they become dependent on resources that come from outside the congregation. This writer has accepted calls from two congregations that were in such a situation. Through the process of education in the Scriptures concerning prayer, stewardship, the "Missio Dei" or Great Commission, and the Means of Grace decline was averted and the ministry transitioned from a focus on survival to an emphasis on growth in discipleship and outreach to the local community. Congregations in decline are not automatically doomed. They do have options.

Throughout this paper the term transition will refer to the transforming of the presentation of the Gospel to make it more relevant to the local community culture. Word and Sacrament are the only source of eternal salvation and strength for daily life. The transformation of presentation is structured carefully to insure that Word and Sacrament are not compromised.

The message of the Gospel as presented in Scripture is that salvation by God's grace is for all people of all races and cultures. It is also a scriptural principle that the Holy Spirit

equips the children of God with all of the gifts necessary to present that Gospel to the community in which they live. Historically Missouri Synod Lutherans have focused their evangelism efforts on a homogeneous culture and developed the congregation community in the same manner. The presupposition of this project is that the church has been called by God to minister to the community in which it has been located. The residents and cultures may change, but they were all created by the same Triune God and redeemed by Christ. The Father does provide each congregation with all things necessary for ministry.

This project will provide a model for declining congregations to follow that will enable them to avert the decline and transition the ministry into one that is designed for their community context. In transition Scriptural doctrine is not compromised, only the presentation is modified. Included will be the transitional history of one congregation that followed the proposed model.

All Scriptural references in this project are taken from New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975, unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE "MISSIO DEI"

Congregations that find themselves in decline have a tendency to ask themselves two questions. The first question is, "Does God want us to grow?" The second is, "Does God want us to remain in this community?" These questions are a strong indication that it is time to return to the Scriptures and focus on those passages that declare the "Missio Dei."

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20

He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.' Mark 16: 15-16

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Luke 24:45-49

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' John 20:21-23

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

These passages are referred to as the "Five Dominical Commissions"¹ in the Witness Workshop manual prepared by the Board for Evangelism Services of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and expanded by the Evangelism Committee of the Colorado District of the LC-MS. From a scriptural perspective, they present a second phase of God's revelation of His will concerning the expansion of His Church. He reveals the implementation of step one with the creation of man in the first chapter of Genesis. He then expands the number of those in relationship with Him with the creation of woman. Later, even after the Fall and death coming into the world, God allows man and woman to populate the world. If He had not intended continued growth, would He not have taken away the ability to procreate? Even after the flood during the time of Noah, He chose to continue to populate the world. During this entire span of time there was the emphasis on the message that these people were to remain in relation to their God. In Genesis are found two statements indicating that God planned to increase the number of His people. "He took him [Abram] outside and said, 'Look at the heavens and count the stars - if indeed you can count them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Genesis 15:5). "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (Genesis 22:15-18).

God promised to make numerous descendants of Abraham from all nations, numbers of such amount that no human being would be able to count them. Paul speaks of these true

¹ Guidelines on How to Conduct A Witness Workshop (Aurora, CO: Colorado District of the LCMS, 1983), 3.

Israelites in his epistle to the congregation in Rome. "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises, theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (Romans 8:23).

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (Romans 9:3-8).

God reveals that the number who will be called His people will not be restricted to natural descendants. His people will be children of faith. He reveals that their number will be beyond human comprehension. "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the lamb. They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

Each of the preceding passages shows that God is going to numerically expand His church. But what is the purpose of this numerical growth? Are these to be individuals who merely state that they believe in God? By no means! The church grows as people come to an active, living faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord. These are the people that God

uses as instruments empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry the Gospel message to the world community by community.

"Missio Dei" is the activity of the Triune God through "sending" the Gospel to rescue lost mankind. God developed this mission and carries out His plan. The mission will not be complete until Christ returns. His plan encompasses the total church. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Peter 2:9).

The reason for God's action is threefold:

1. **Grace:** "He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:5-6).
2. **Mercy:** "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (I Peter 1:20).
3. **Loving Goodness:** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The **reason** is: "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (I John 3:8). The **objective** is to seek and save the lost. "For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). The **task** is to preach the Gospel. "...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). Without the message, there is no mission of God. The arena of

the mission is the whole world. The **means** of carrying out the mission is proclamation: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). "So is My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

The answer from Scripture to the original two questions is God does desire that His Church grow as the Gospel is presented to all peoples. A change in population is not a reason to stop presenting the Gospel through Word and deed in the community. There are complicating elements. Residential areas are often replaced with businesses. A congregation may find itself developing a ministry to employees such as early childhood programs and lunch time Bible studies during the week. These types of ministries attract the same individuals who drive into the area for more traditional Sunday services. Another challenge is that there are those who reject the Gospel no matter how relevantly it is presented. The manner in which God's Word is received in any community is best described in the Parable of the Sower presented in Matthew 13:3-9.

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.

God would have His Church grow. Man by nature resists the will of the Father. ("There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" Romans 3:10b,11.) If the congregation planted does not grow, it is not the fault of

the Father Who provides, by His grace, everything necessary for growth. The pastor and members of the congregation must remember that growth is not always expressed in numbers of members. There is also growth in discipleship and spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A PASTOR SERVING A CONGREGATION IN TRANSITION?

What is the role of a pastor serving a congregation in transition? It is the same as that of a pastor serving in a flourishing ministry situation. Yet the question (What is the role of the pastor in the Christian Church of the 1990's?) is a question that cannot be easily answered. A model proposed is that of a CEO of a large business corporation. This individual makes all of the major decisions and delegates the day to day functions to a board of specialized assistants. One of the complications with this structure is that of accountability. Who evaluates the CEO? The Church is not product or market driven in such a way that consumer satisfaction and profit margin can be used as a point of reference for evaluation. Another proposed model is that of a business manager. This individual would be responsible for arranging all contracts, evaluation of all staff in regard to raises and for the payment of all invoices. A third model is the "Do It All Pastor." This individual answers the telephone, handles all of the maintenance problems, teaches all of the weekly classes, and preaches on Sunday mornings.

Each of these models presents a picture that appears somewhat grim. George Barna in his book Today's Pastors provides a list of expectations as provided by members of various congregations across the United States.

Live an exemplary life;
Be available at all times to all people for all purposes;

Lead the church to grow numerically;
 Balance wisdom with leadership and love;
 Teach people the deeper truths of the faith in ways that are readily
 acceptable in all life situations;
 Be a committed family man who demonstrates what it means to be the
 spiritual head of the family, a lover of one woman, and a positive role
 model for children;
 Keep pace with the latest trends and developments in church life;
 Build significant relationships with members of the congregation;
 Represent the church in the community;
 Grow spiritually;
 Run the church in a crisp, professional, business-like manner
 without taking on a cold, calculating air.²

It is humanly impossible to fulfill these role expectations. What is a pastor to do? The answer to the role question is not found at any "quick fix" seminar. The answer can only be found by returning to the source, the Holy Scriptures themselves. Each of the passages presented must be read through eyes that view Christ as having fulfilled the laws of the Old Testament Covenant. The role of High Priest was fulfilled definitively in Jesus. The pastor of today is a called under shepherd. He is called by God and the congregation to publicly administer the Office of the Keys. This Scriptural search is to provide the basis for setting priorities while exercising the pastoral office.

Early references to pastoral responsibility are recorded in the instructions given to Moses in Exodus 18:17-23.

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain - and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Have them serve as

² George Barna, Today's Pastors (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 52.

judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. But they will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and these people will go home satisfied."

The text tells us that Moses was to be the people's representative before God. He was to teach the people God's decrees and laws. He was to select capable men from all of the people and delegate responsibility to them. Decisions made concerning important issues were still the responsibility of Moses. If Moses followed this procedure, the strain of leading the people would be removed from him. The observation of Moses's father-in-law remains a noteworthy observation in considering what causes strain among God's people and leaders. The pastor of today also has the responsibility of delegating responsibility to members of the congregation while maintaining the position of being the steward of the mysteries of Christ.

The next reference is Numbers 18:5-7.

You are to be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the altar, so that wrath will not fall on the Israelites again. I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. But only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift.

In this text we read of the responsibilities being expanded. Not only will Aaron have the responsibility of interceding on behalf of God's people, he will also be responsible for the care of the altar. Reading further, it was also the priest's responsibility to distribute the offering to those in need. Aaron was to intercede for the people and also be God's instrument of the distribution of material blessings. The text also reveals that the position

of priest was a gift from God. It is important to remember that being in the position of pastor today is still a gift from God.

Throughout the Old Testament the priest served at God's altar, interceding for God's people. He carried the burden of their sins on his shoulders. The model given in the Old Testament also shows the priest as authority in dispute resolution. The emphasis was that all issues between God's people should be resolved according to the will and direction of God. The priest was to recognize that his office was a gift from God. He was to be a good manager or steward of that very precious gift as he exercised the office to the glory of God. Part of the exercising of the office was the delegation of responsibility. God would raise up men to whom delegation would be made. Through this process God insured that neither priest nor people would become worn out. This process is a good model of biblical stewardship of both people and resources. Strain and weariness on the part of today's pastors and congregations are possibly due to failure to look at the Scriptures and follow the model provided.

Early in the book of Acts there is reference to a community of believers structured differently than those of the Old Testament. The Office of the Keys had been given to the believers. The authority for implementation now rested in the hands of the Apostles. Acts 4:32-35, 5:3-4 and 6:2-4 provide descriptions of the stewardship of material goods, the exercising of authority before God, and the delegation of responsibility.

All believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and much grace was with them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.'

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and ministry of the word.'

These passages describe a community that is coming into existence through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The structure is somewhat different from the community of Old Testament Israel. Responsibility before God by individuals He has chosen and delegation of physical care remain. The community of believers is now a mixture of various Semitic people, including those previously considered Gentiles. The common bond is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. With the inclusive growth of the community comes the challenge of meeting both physical and spiritual needs. The Apostles become responsible for the spiritual well-being of the community. Following the Old Testament Model, the physical well-being is delegated to other Spirit filled men. We also read that a certain amount of authority in secular issues remained in the hands of the Apostles. Peter's judgment concerning Ananias and Sapphira is one example. The Apostles had to exercise good stewardship of the gifts God had given to them if the community was to survive and expand.

As the Christian community continued to grow numerically and expand to other cities and countries, it became apparent that the Apostles would not be able to minister to the spiritual needs of each individual group of believers. The continued spiritual nourishment

would also have to be delegated to those men that God would provide. God in His word provided the list of attributes required for the leader of His people along with a reminder of the primary responsibility of preaching and teaching His word. I Timothy 3:2-4 and 4:13-16 provide a brief introduction to those requirements.

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift which was given through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The second and third centuries saw the community continue to develop, and along with the development came increase of responsibility of care, spiritual nourishment and questions of economic concern. For a period of time questions could be answered and disputes settled by referring to the Apostolic Churches as precedent. As the responsibility and economic concerns grew, it became necessary to identify an authority within the structure of the local church. That authority came to be identified with the Office of Bishop. This individual would exercise the Office of the Keys and look after the physical well-being of each individual member of the church community. The bishop would be the "chief steward" of the gifts of God. Reviewing the writings of the early church fathers reveals that the office of bishop followed an Old Testament typology.

This Old Testament typology is developed at great length in the *Didascalia*, the bishop also being presented as the priest and levite of the new people

of God: 'Today, bishops, you too are priests of your people and levites in the service of God's tabernacle, which is the holy Catholic Church.' Like the levites, the bishops were also able to feed and sustain themselves from what was brought to God as a gift by the whole people: 'With the help of these gifts that are offered to you by the people, who depend on you, you must also feed the deacons, the widows, the orphans, the poor and the strangers.' This is an interesting statement, in that we find side by side those who serve at the altar - the bishop and deacons - and those who are served by the altar. In fact, in the third century, most local churches possessed detailed lists of all those who were fed, sustained or aided for various reasons.

The bishop, then became the only manager or steward of the wealth of the community and had therefore to play the part of the patronus for his Christians. It is not difficult, then, to understand how and why this episcopal function became "monarchical" and the reasons that led the authors of the canonico-liturgical documents to moderate that absolute power. 'Like a faithful overseer, bishop, you must take care of everyone. Since you bear the sins of all those who are in your hands, as a consequence, more than anyone, you will be honored by God.'³

This type of structure was fertile ground in which seeds of problem could take root, grow and produce fruit. The bishop was viewed as a powerful individual by the community in which the church was located. As the church grew in various locations, jealousy between churches also grew. There arose a need for a statement concerning total stewardship. As the church fathers met in the various councils during the next one hundred and fifty years, a number of canons were produced that gave direction and instruction to bishops. The Synod of Antioch, held in 341 AD, produced several such canons. Canon 24 stated that the wealth of a bishop, acquired from the offerings of the members, could be bequeathed to family or servants. This same council made a provision that the administering of the church's wealth was to be done under the supervision of the deacons. Canon 22 had earlier stated that other clerics were not allowed to take the possessions of the bishop after his death. Later at the Council of Chalcedon, held in 451 AD, canons 25 and 26 call for a

³ Alexandre Faivre, The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 52-3.

steward to be employed to help administer the church's wealth. This same steward was to keep records concerning the bishop's private wealth. Along with the interest in the stewardship of the bishop in the areas of material wealth and meeting the needs of the people in his care were concerns related to his character.

You shall "not be lovers of wine," nor drunken, and you shall not be much puffed up nor luxurious, nor incurring expense that is not right, as not your own you should make use of the gifts of God, in as much as you are appointed "good stewards" of God who is ready to require at your hands an account of the management of the stewardship with which you were entrusted. Let then that suffice you which is enough for you, food and clothing and whatever else is necessary. And you shall not make use of these (things) that come in (as gifts), beyond what is right, as from alien (funds), but in moderation. And you shall not enjoy yourselves and be luxurious from these things that come into the church- "for to a laborer his clothing and his food are sufficient."⁴

The one who would serve as a bishop must recognize that it is a position of power with authority. It is a position that will be closely watched by the people served, the community, and God Himself.

The Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments clearly state that the individual who holds the office of bishop (today's pastor) has the primary function of being the steward of the mysteries of God. This responsibility is clearly defined in I Corinthians 4:1-2. "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." These two short verses present two very important words. The two words transliterated are *oikonomos* and *musterion*. The definition given in Lenski⁵ for

⁴ Arthur Voobus, The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac (Waversebaan: Louvain: Secretariat du Corpuf FCO, 1979), 49.

⁵ R.H.C. Lenski, The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 160-3.

oikonomos is that of Christ's attendants or slaves entrusted with property to administer in complete subordination. The *mysterion* is the mystery of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ and the doctrines associated with the revelation. The pastor has been entrusted with the mystery of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, and he is to be a faithful steward of that gift. Do the words *oikonomos* and *mysterion* define the role of the pastor in a transitional situation in 1998? Is the model presented in the Old Testament and expanded in the New Testament early church valid for today?

Stand in the pulpit of a Christian Church on any given Sunday and look out over those gathered for worship. What will you see? People, people of various backgrounds and life styles. You see people that are hurting for a variety of reasons. There are the unemployed, divorced, abused, depressed, despondent, addicted, confused, happy, relaxed, joyful, and anxious all gathered together to spend time in a common activity identified as worship. The families are blended, single parent, racially mixed, second family and traditional. Every type of person and situation you can imagine are joined together by the common element that they are expecting some type of encounter with God.

Who is the man in the pulpit? He is a man who has received two very precious gifts. The first is the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. That gift brings a person into the family of God and turns that person into an instrument of the Holy Spirit. The second gift, the call to be a pastor, is not received by everyone. The fact that this service is a gift from God is emphasized in Ephesians 4:11. "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers." The pastor stands

before the people in service to God and the people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Each pastor must ask himself if he is merely fulfilling a role, doing a job, or exercising the gift that has been given to him. A gift is something given, not selected or bought. Being a gift from God also means that it was given in grace unearned and undeserved, picked out by the Holy Spirit Himself as recorded in I Corinthians 12:11. "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each man, just as He determines." The pastor of today is the steward of the mysteries of Christ, and these mysteries are revealed in the Word of God as it has been given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. II Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." I Thessalonians 5:19, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil." Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." All of these passages draw for the pastor a clear starting point from which to begin or renew use of the gift.

There are two passages recorded in the Old Testament that are of extreme importance in helping the pastor maintain focus during his personal spiritual growth journey. Only when he is focused can he lead the people in their stewardship and mission journey. The first is recorded in Joshua 1:6-9.

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not

commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

The second text is recorded in Ezekiel 3:17-21.

Son of man, I have made You a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning for me. When I say to a wicked man, 'you will surely die, and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteousness things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself.

If one is to be a steward of the mysteries of Christ and a caretaker of the people, he will know those for whom he is caring. He will realize that they as well as he are sinful people forgiven in Jesus Christ. He will remember that in every situation sin is the problem and Jesus is the answer. The pastor of the Triune God must constantly be in study of Scripture and in prayer to that same God. The pastor uses prayer as the gift that it was given to be, open communication with the Father, not another Means of Grace. Through prayer the pastor performs that priestly function of offering up God's people with their concerns and joys. In prayer he feels the burdens of the people placed upon his shoulders. Through the Word and prayer he is led by the Spirit to know when to apply the healing balm of the Gospel or the admonition of the Law. A faithful steward strives to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel in all of his presentations whether they are made from the pulpit, in the classroom, or during daily conversations. The people should be able to see Jesus presented from the pulpit and in the pastoral office. Listening, loving,

forgiving, and the building of relationships will become priority. The steward uses the Word of God as the rule and norm for every facet of the life of the congregation. This means that each meeting and each decision are Spirit guided.

As was the case with Moses, the pastor of a transitional congregation learns to delegate responsibility in order that he not wear out himself or the people God has placed in his care. In doing so he will remember that service to the altar is not to be delegated. He is the one that God has chosen to receive and use the gift of the priesthood. The pastor will have confidence that God will raise up people with the various gifts that are needed to carry out the work of the congregation. When they are raised up he should let them exercise their gifts in the same way as he is allowed to exercise his. In doing so, he is able to do his appointed work of providing instruction, equipping, encouragement, and oversight.

As the pastor strives to be a servant and caretaker of that which belongs to God he will be confronted with many temptations. He will be tempted to give in to the pressure placed on him by those he is striving to serve. People, because of their sinful nature, will sometimes be offended by the Word. They become hurt when they do not get their own way. They become angered when the pastor does not meet their expectations. The steward will be confronted with the loss of members and resources.

The Apostle Paul was confronted with these same challenges. His response is recorded in Galatians 1:10, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." Not proclaiming the total Word and not using it as the rule and norm is

compromising the Word, the Church, and the Pastoral Office. Compromising the Word is not good stewardship.

As the church developed in the United States, the people began to discuss their understanding of the role of the pastor as the chief steward. This understanding, or possibly expectation, is revealed in the LC-MS in the document entitled "Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation for Pastor (Ordained Minister)." The following section is a quotation of that document.

In the name of the Triune God and by His authority we hereby authorize and obligate you:

To administer to us the Word of God in its full truth and purity as contained in the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as set forth in the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as found in the Book of Concord;

To administer the holy sacraments in accordance with their divine institution;

To perform the functions of a pastor in an evangelical manner, to aid, counsel and guide members of all ages and social conditions, to visit the sick and the dying; to admonish the indifferent and the erring;

To guard and promote faithfully the spiritual welfare of the members of this congregation, in particular to instruct the catechumens, both children and adults, in the Word of God and thus prepare them for communicant membership in the church;

To guide the congregation in applying the divinely ordained discipline of the church according to the Word of God;

To promote and guide the mission activity of the congregation as it is related to the local community and to endeavors of the Synod and its Districts, in particular to train workers and guide them in evangelism and to enlist the support of the congregation for mission work;

To assist the congregation in adopting administrative policies and procedures that will help carry out the mission of a Christian congregation;

To serve the congregation as an example of Christian conduct; to endeavor earnestly to live in Christian unity with the members of the congregation, fellow workers, and sister congregations in the Synod; and by the grace of God to do everything possible for the edification of the congregation and the upholding of the church in Christ.⁶

⁶ Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988).

The congregation, in this document, appears to have a working knowledge of the responsibilities of the pastor as the chief steward of the mysteries of God. They reveal this knowledge in the references to the various aspects of spiritual growth and application of the Word. The understanding of individual congregation member responsibility is not revealed. There is a reference to the training of workers for evangelism and assisting with administrative policies, but there is no reference to shared responsibility of individual care.

A reading of the remainder of the document informs of the congregation's responsibility to the pastor.

To enable you to do this, we hereby obligate ourselves:

To receive you as a servant of Jesus Christ, to give you honor and love and obedience that the Word prescribes, to aid you by word and deed, and to support you with our diligent, faithful assistance and prayers;

To make faithful and regular use of the means of grace, that God's enabling power may have free course among us to the end that we may carry out our God given ministry to the glory of God and for the welfare of all;

To make appropriate arrangements for your continuing education as a professional person in the ministry of the Gospel;

To provide for your proper maintenance according to our ability and to review your salary, housing arrangements, and all allowances periodically, beginning with the following:⁷

The Office of the Keys is given to the church on earth. The call to serve God's people is initiated through those Christians in fellowship known as a congregation. God has called the individual pastor to be the steward of His mysteries for His people and the community in which they dwell. Confusion can come from two basic issues. The first clarification that needs to be made is whom God has called to be the Chief Steward? The second that needs to be made is who does the delegating? Is it the steward or the people served that

⁷ Ibid.

does the delegating? These questions can be answered through education in Scripture and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This educational process should begin with the pastor. The pastor ought to dig very deeply into those texts of Scripture that remind him that he also is sinful by nature and in need of the forgiveness of God. Very close attention is given to those texts that remind him that the office he occupies is given to him as a gift from God. The pastor is no greater a human being than any other of the members of the congregation. The church belongs to neither him nor the members of the congregation. The church belongs to God. He was merely chosen to receive the call to be the one to proclaim the Gospel to that people and faithfully administer the mysteries of God in that congregation.

After examination of self in relation to the scriptures, the next step would be to read the works of the early church fathers along with the works of the fathers of the Reformation. Those who have struggled with the Word of God are a great source of information for those who seek clarity and direction. What is the function of the pastoral office? How does this office function in relation to other offices? How can a pastor be the best steward? C.F.W. Walther addresses all of these questions in thesis VIII of his Church and Ministry.

Since the incumbents of the public ministry [des öffentlichen Predigtamtes] have been entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which the church possesses originally and immediately (Matt. 16:19; 18:18), in order that they may administer them officially [in öffentlichem Amte] in the name of the congregation [von Gemeinschafts wegen] (John 20:21-23), their office must of necessity be the highest in the church, and all other offices stem from it; for the keys embrace the whole power of the church.

Of the ministers in particular it is said that they should feed the flock of God and watch over the souls as those who must give account (I Tim. 3:1,5,7; I Cor. 4:1; Tit. 1:7; Heb. 13:17).

Luther: If the office of the Word is entrusted to anyone, then all other offices that are performed by the Word in the church are also entrusted to him, such as to baptize, to bless, to bind and loose, to pray, and to judge or decide matters. The office to preach the Gospel is the highest of all.

It behooves these in particular to exercise care not for themselves (which Christ forbids in Matt. 6:25) but for others, so that it may be a care of love and not one of selfishness. For since it behooves him to keep his mind on all, to do and perform all things, and everything depends on him, just as a driver must see to it that horse and wagon move along, he must not be negligent, sleepy, or lax but brave and careful, though all others might be negligent and careless. If he wants to be lax and careless, no other offices will succeed, and it will be as though a driver were asleep on his wagon and letting the horse and wagon go as they please. In such a case nothing good may be expected or hoped for, especially on the dangerous roads and ways that Christians [Christenbeit] must go in the midst of devils, which eagerly desire to overthrow and destroy them at all times.⁸

Once the pastor comes to the realization of who he is and the responsibility of the office, then and only then can the educational process begin with the members of the congregation. This process is also a part of the stewardship of the mysteries of Christ. The education includes Law, Gospel, the responsibility of the pastoral office and the responsibility of the laity. The pastor also remembers that both he and the people he is striving to instruct are forgiven by God in Christ for not meeting the expectations of the Word. He should also remember the words of Joshua and reiterated by Luther that he has to be very strong and brave when presenting the Word of the living God of scripture.

As one reads the words of Luther describing the driver who does not guide the wagon, it becomes apparent why there is sometimes confusion as to who is the steward and who is to delegate. When horses are left to their own they will wander in the direction of their choice. When people are left unguided they will wander until a person of influence gives

⁸ C.F.W. Walther, Church and Ministry (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 289,291.

direction. The problem is that not all people of influence have the work of Christ and His people at heart. A pastor who chooses not to fulfill the office to which he has been called will encounter many difficulties. The people will be blown around by the various winds of doctrine and the human nature will take control. Decisions and delegations will be made according to the will of man (or woman) and not the will of God. Only the proper application of both Law and Gospel can give direction to the people of God.

Now that we have read the words of Scripture and the writings of the church fathers it is time to return to the original question. What is the role of the pastor in the Christian Church in transition during the late 1990's? The answer is actually very clear. If he approaches the position as a role that is to be filled, he is in error. The office is not a role, it is a responsibility. The responsibility is to fill the pastoral office that he has been given by the grace of God. In order to fill the office he seeks to be a faithful steward of the mysteries of Christ. He is a caretaker of that which belongs to Christ. Walther presents in "Concerning the Holy Ministry-Thesis II" the reminder that those who are *Ministers of the Word* will be held accountable to God Himself. "Such ministers of the Word therefore must finally give account [of their ministry] as those whom the Lord as appointed and called and whom they serve." Walther continues emphasizing the seriousness of this responsibility by reminding the pastor that this proclamation of the Word and administering of the Sacraments is the *only* way God has chosen to impart these gifts to men. "Here the office of the keys, which the congregation possesses and by which it administers the means of grace, is identified with the power of the bishops, and to it the obtaining of the eternal gifts is bound. But this is not because the eternal gifts of Christ's

Kingdom could in no wise be obtained without the administration of the means of grace by official [*offentlichen*] ministers [*Amtpersonen*], but because God desires ordinarily to impart these gifts to men only in this way."⁹ As the chief steward he has the following responsibilities:

- 1. Proclaiming the Gospel**
- 2. Teaching the mysteries of God in Christ**
- 3. Training in Evangelism**
- 4. Administering the Sacraments**
- 5. Delegating and over-seeing the care ministry of the church**

Preaching, teaching, evangelism, and delegation as guided by the Word of God are the elements of faithful stewardship. When these elements are used in correct proportion, both the congregation and the pastor are relieved of strain and neither become worn out. In order to get these elements into proper balance the pastor must be a faithful steward of the same gifts in his personal life. The power to be a faithful steward is found in a relationship with God that is continually growing. This growth is found in study of the Word and prayer. As the pastor grows spiritually, the people he shepherds also grow.

The pastor of Scripture is not a CEO, business manager, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, therapist, or financial consultant. The pastor of Scripture is a steward of the mysteries of God. He is not elected, contracted, or hired. He is called by God and the congregation-- called to proclaim the Word of God in word and deed with the assurance that it "will not return void but accomplish that purpose for which it was sent" (Isaiah 55:1).

⁹ Ibid., 189,192.

When a pastor receives a call to serve a congregation, he spends time in prayer and evaluation to determine if God is leading him to accept the call. This is also the procedure which should be followed when considering a call to a congregation that is declining in ministry. There are several questions that the Pastor can ask himself, especially in the call to declining situations. The first two questions will be asked upon receiving a call to any congregation. The first question is: **"What is my understanding of the Pastoral Office?"** And the second question is closely related: **"What is my understanding of the mission of the Church?"** As previously stated, the work of the Church is to present the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world and make disciples. The pastor facilitates this process by being a good steward of the mysteries of Christ. The answers seem simple, yet at times they can become confused when dealing with various worldly pressures. The answer to these two questions brings all of the other questions into focus.

The third question is: **Do I fully understand the ministry to which I am being called?"** Pastors generally have the desire to serve congregations with great resources of members and materials. In this type of congregation harmony is displayed, volunteerism is high and there is high participation in worship services and Bible Classes. To this add a qualified, spiritually mature staff. Although this is somewhat idealistic, the model has been known to exist. This is not the model of the average declining congregation. A more accurate model would be that of a congregation that is in a survival mode. Leaders and resources have been depleted, there is a less than harmonious attitude, and the volunteers are experiencing burnout. Having a good understanding of the situation, the pastor moves to ask himself the next question.

The fourth question is: **"Why do I want to serve a declining congregation?"** The first response to this question is usually "Because God wants me to serve it." That is the answer the pastor knows the people want to hear. This is a question that each pastor will have to answer for himself. There are no standard answers, although "God has called him to do so" is the ultimate reason. There will be challenges and frustrations combined with great rewards. The pastor should be willing to either serve the congregation until it disbands, or transition and grow with the congregation. If he is not willing then he should probably decline the call.

The fifth and final question is; **"Do I know my gifts and how they will be used in this ministry?"** A pastor can have a strong desire to serve in a transitional congregation and not have the gifts and abilities required to do so. A pastor has to be honest about the gifts he possesses and a plan of how they will be incorporated in the overall ministry. The wrong gifts can bring continued frustration to both the congregation and the pastor. But when a pastor has prayerfully considered the pros and cons and accepted the call, it is time to begin the transition process.

CHAPTER 4

A LISTENING MODEL TO DISCOVER ELEMENTS OF DECLINE AND MINISTRY NEEDS.

The elements that have brought a congregation to this point of decline in its history are not always visible to the person looking in from the outside. Nor are they always available to a new pastor. Congregations do not enter into decline overnight, nor will they transition overnight. Time has to be taken to evaluate the true elements of decline. A minimum of a year is recommended. The best way to assess information is to listen carefully to each conversation. By listening carefully not only will the elements of decline be identified, but also areas of ministry need will be defined. This listening process should take place both within the framework of the congregation and in the community. The pastor and the congregation will soon discover that the ministry needs of the congregation and the ministry needs of the community in which it is located cannot be separated.

Congregations have followed a variety of processes to discover ministry needs. A survey can be passed through the worshipping community on Sunday asking what programs they would like to have presented. The various auxiliary groups and small groups can be questioned as to their concerns. The issue of ministry needs can be discussed at a Leaders Retreat. The Elders and Voters can be questioned during their meetings. Within the structure of the congregation all of these techniques can serve as vital sources of information. They also reflect the traditional forms of assessment. The

weakness is that they do not present an accurate picture of actual ministry needs of the congregation or the community in which it is located. People have a tendency to place on surveys those issues they would like to know more about, or those on which they perceive the congregation can best provide information. There is also a tendency to focus answers into the spiritual realm. After all, the people may not believe the church staff know much about issues of employee tension, job security, or teen pregnancy.

Another weakness of this system of evaluation is that only the responses of the individuals involved in the life of the congregation on a regular basis are recorded. If the surveys are mailed to each member family only a small portion are returned. Something about the personal concern seems to be lost in the mail. The structure of the church is not the only place where confusion between actual and supposed needs is found. In the assessment of community needs, many times the source provides the same challenges as presented in the congregation. The media, civic meetings, and school meetings can offer only part of the picture of what is needed for the families of a given community. There is only one way to find out the true needs for the families in a given community and that is to **Listen!**

Consider the example of our Lord. In His ministry to people, Jesus demonstrated the relationship between ministry and listening. Jesus listened to people's concerns, testimonies of faith and praise. He allowed people to express themselves. When He responded, it was to the issue at hand first and then He moved to the deeper concern. Before Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman, He allowed her time to give her confession of faith.¹⁰ Before Jesus proclaimed the good news about His Father's love

¹⁰ Matthew 15:21-28.

for the world to Nicodemus, He carefully listened to Nicodemus's questions and concerns.¹¹ When He was walking with the two men on the road to Emmaus, He gave them time to share their feelings concerning Him and the events that had taken place before providing an interpretation of the prophecies fulfilled.¹² Jesus had the power to know the minds and feelings of each individual He encountered. He showed His concern by first letting the people speak and share their needs in their own words. He listened and then He responded to their need. He gave the disciples, who were with Him, and each of us an example to follow.

The Pastor should not listen to a detached group, but to individuals and their families. How are all the families in the congregation and the community listened to one at a time? If you are in a congregation of ten families located in a community of one hundred and fifty, this is not a major challenge. In a congregation of three hundred families in a community of thousands, there is a challenge. There is also a proposed solution, **Listening Teams**. This solution sounds almost too simple.

Listening to a person reveals that you actually care about that person. People who do not listen to a person or interject a response before a person has completed their thought are not only impolite, they reveal a certain lack of concern. They place their own words above those of the speaker. Talk with individuals who choose not to participate in the worshipping or fellowship community. The common response when questioned concerning their absence is that "*no one has called them.*" They are saying that no one

¹¹ John 3:1-21.

¹² Luke 24:13-31.

called to listen to them. When there is no one to listen, it is taken as a lack of concern. People today live in society that continually bombards individuals with information. At work, at play, and in the home human activity is being replaced with technology. Computers communicate with the general public more frequently than other human beings. Often this is because of choice. When individuals say "*no one called me,*" they are actually saying "*I need someone to LISTEN to me!*"

Listening Teams would consist of a number of trained listeners that would have the responsibility of listening to the individuals in any given setting. The more natural settings would be those of the various auxiliary and other small groups. They would also be in the meeting and Bible study settings. Possibly more important would be to listen to the various conversations that take place while drinking coffee and sharing fellowship time. These individuals would also on a weekly basis contact individuals listed in the church membership directory by telephone. A contact call might be for no specific reason other than to acknowledge the existence of another church member and to listen to the words spoken. These individuals would be members of visitation teams for both member and visitor home visits. The listening teams would fill out weekly contact forms which would include the name, date, setting, and concern observed (if any). These forms would be evaluated by the pastor and Listening Team leader and a needs assessment made. Contacts that reveal a crisis situation would be immediately relayed to the Pastor.

Who would be a good candidate to be a member of the Listening Team? The Stephen Ministry Leader Training presents some insightful material in the whole area of listening.

The following is a summarized portion of the material presented in detail in the Lay Training Manual.

I. Three qualities are necessary to be a good listener.

A. Desire

A good listener wants to listen to other people. Through listening you exhibit Christian concern, understanding, and acceptance of the individual.

B. Professional Commitment

A good listener needs to have a professional commitment to the task of listening. It is the ability to stay committed to the task even when you do not want to. To be professional is to be responsible.

C. Patience

It takes a long time to develop a relationship of trust required for needs to be revealed.

II. Three Orientations of Listening.

A. Sympathy

Sympathy can be defined as feeling a concern for someone else without necessarily becoming involved in a close relationship.

B. Over-Identification

Over-Identification is taking on the feelings and characteristics of the individuals to the point that their needs become your needs.

C. Empathy

Empathy is feeling another's problems as if they were your own without actually

taking them on yourself.

When the listener understands their personal orientation, he or she is able to maintain a more clearly defined path of ministry.

III. The Physical Setting

- A. Listening can happen anywhere.
- B. Plan ahead for the physical setting when possible.
- C. Distractions and interruptions will take place. Be patient and stay focused.
- D. Maintain a comfortable physical distance.

The Stephen Ministry model provides insight on how to train those selected for the Listening Team.

IV. How to Listen.

- A. Be Attentive.
- B. Posture and other physical aspects of listening.
 - 1. Enhance attentive listening through position and eye contact.
 - 2. Movement, looking away, yawning, fiddling with objects or looking at your watch can distract the person speaking.
- C. Reflective Listening.

Being a good listener also involves what you say, ask questions and clarify statements.
- D. Ask questions and then listen.
- E. Do not ask too many questions.
- F. Listen before being directive.

G. Avoid quick conclusions.

H. Listen more than you talk.

V. What to Listen For.

A. A good listener listens for everything said: feelings, thoughts, attitudes, opinions, body language, and facts of information.

B. Listen across time, keeping in mind all the conversations with the individual.

C. Listen to what is not said.

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. Christians.... so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹³

Once the Listening Teams are selected and trained an active listening program can be implemented. Not only will ministry needs be identified, but also the personal resources to meet them. It is through conversations that individuals reveal their talents and spiritual gifts. These types of teams and program can also be used in the community setting. In the same way as all church groups and members need to be carefully listened to, so do the residents of the community. In listening the teams are able to identify how to best present the Gospel and identify actual ministry needs. The Christian responsibility for listening and assessing need does not stop at the church door. The ears of the people go wherever the people go. Remember we are to be "salt and light" in the community. We confess our

¹³"The Art of Listening" Stephen Series Training Manual (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 1989), 2.

faith in Christ when we recognize the humanity of each person and serve them as if we were serving Christ Himself. What we do for the down-trodden of the world we do for Jesus.

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church of Houston, Texas, participates in such a community listening post. Representatives from the church, school district, local authorities, counseling services and other providers of human resources meet together with apartment owners, community residents and youth. The purpose is to discuss the family needs of the community. The family needs of the community are the family needs of the congregation, unless the members of the congregation are from a different community. Listening posts are not a new idea. One of the first was begun some eight years ago in North Carolina by a group called *Rural Southern Voice for Peace*. The Florida - Georgia District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod participates with an organization called *Florida Impact*. They completed a listening project in Pleasant City, Florida, in September of 1995. The Pleasant City Listening Project was as follows:

The Listening Project Process --- Step by Step

Here is a simplified outline of the process. A Listening Project (LP) can take 3-6 months or longer, depending on the goals and capacity of the organizing group and the goals of the LP. A successful LP requires that a qualified, local LP facilitator provide support to the group through out the process.

Step 1. Setting Goals

The organizing group forms a LP coordinating committee that establishes / reviews / clarifies the group's mission, outlines the initial follow - up education and organizing strategies that the group is capable and willing to carry out, decides who the group will reach out to, and establishes the goals for the LP.

Step 2. Commitment

The committee outlines and reviews the people, time, and funding required to meet the goals of the LP and carry out the follow-up outlined in step 1. If

the group decides it is able and willing to expand these resources, they make the commitment to conduct a LP.

Step 3. Planning the Survey and Planning Follow Up

Organizing group reviews LP goals and follow up strategies, decides whom to interview and designs the questionnaire with that information in mind. Questionnaire is field tested and finalized. Group reviews the questionnaire and designs an initial follow-up plan. Additional volunteer listeners are recruited, the target neighborhood is prepared for initial listening, logistics of the combined 1 - day training and initial interviews are taken care of.

Step 4. Training Listeners

Listeners attend training where they become familiar with the goals of the organizing group as well as the goals of the particular LP. Participants practice active listening and become very familiar with the questionnaire that they will be using in the neighborhood interviews. Mechanics and logistics of conducting the interviews are set up. Often a half - day training is conducted in conjunction with a half day of listening in a target neighborhood.

Step 5. Listening

Two person teams, often a combination of residents of the target neighborhood and outside community supporters, conduct the interviews door to door with one person acting primarily as the interviewer and the other primarily as a scribe. They then return to the training site for a debriefing. Listening may extend over days, weeks, or months.

Step 6. Follow Up

Interview responses are compiled and interpreted. Initial follow - up plan is reviewed and revised if necessary. Follow up work begins (mailings, second visits, public meetings, meetings with public officials, resource development work, leadership development training, etc.).¹⁴

The question asked in the Pleasant City LP was: "Can you think of some ways that churches and congregations in Pleasant City could do more to help people in the community?"¹⁵

¹⁴ Voices from Pleasant City, The Pleasant City Listening Project Nov. 1994 - Sept. 1995 (Tallahassee: Florida Prevention Association, 1995), 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 12.

The question received the following responses. Some 15% of the people that responded thought churches in the area were already trying to respond to needs of the community. The other 85% called on churches and congregations to reach out more to the people of Pleasant City, and be active in the neighborhood. Several respondents said they thought the majority of people attending churches in Pleasant City came from outside the neighborhood.

The following are examples of the types of activities and support churches could provide:

A "safety net" to provide clothes, food, and help with emergency bills for the neediest.

More help for the homeless.

Sponsor more youth activities; concentrate more on youth ministry.

Have monthly meetings about the church open to everyone in the neighborhood.

Create a community choir.

Help people get jobs.

Use vans to pick up kids for Sunday School.

Provide Senior Citizens with meals.

Set up homework assistance and tutoring for students.

Help build a park in the area.

Quotes: "Churches could help bring back boy and girl scouts." "Organize marches."

"Churches and organizations need to combine efforts to improve Pleasant City....too many groups work separately. More would get done if they were united." "People from the congregation are not from here so they don't get involved."¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid. 12.

As Pastor of Beautiful Savior I asked the members of the Aldine Listening Post, of which the congregation is a part, to respond to the following question: "How can churches better serve communities that are in the transitional process?" Three letters of response follow. All three of the letters are from laymen that are active in the community. Two of the respondents are African American and the other is Anglo. These letters are presented with the permission of each individual as part of their desire to serve Jesus and His Church. The letters are included in their entirety at this point to present a comparison to the responses presented by the Pleasant City Listening Post.

As you are aware of I am sure, is that most of Houston or Harris County specifically is in transition. The churches in these communities have a very difficult task ahead of them. Transitioning neighborhoods cause declining churches and a reduction in contributions.

The first thing the churches must do is decide if they want the local residents, those who are within walking distance or at best a short drive to be a part of their congregation. That is where most churches fail I must tell you. They, the mostly Anglo churches, do not feel comfortable worshipping with African American or Hispanic persons. The same holds true with those ethnic groups. They don't readily accept the worship style of many Anglo churches. There must be a cultural acceptance first and then overcome the language barrier in the case of Spanish speaking people.

There must be an effort to recruit and hire staff that reflects the changing community. You can't say you want the race in your congregation if you do not have any leadership of that race in your organization.

You must alter your style of worship to attract some ethnic groups.

You must then blanket the neighborhood with flyers and information that reflect your desire for the local residents to become a part of your congregation. In their language if it is different and with graphics that reflect their culture.

Be open and willing to meet their needs through ministry opportunities with a genuine caring attitude from your current members.

Become friends and associates of churches in your denomination of other races

and culture. Become sisters to each other and share worship experiences together. Get to know what the other races are like and how they worship. Become like Paul did, "Become all things to all people so that he might win some to Christ". He was willing to pay the price for that honor. The overriding question now is, are the other churches willing to do the same? The cost will be great. You may not be able to change your congregation. You may kill the current church you have with an attempt at assimilating other races and cultures into your congregation in large numbers. In that case, you should consider planting a new church with that ethnic or race and culture as the prime congregation. You be the sponsor and help finance and support the work. Allow them to use your facilities, in fact encourage them to be a part of your work.

Benny L. Sanders (African American)

The pastor and staff, as well as the leaders of the congregation, need to have a clear understanding how the Lord wants His work done in your community. A few things that can be done are:

- 1. Pray for the Lord's leading.*
- 2. Sermons on how people of all races are equal in the sight of the Lord, and can worship together.*
- 3. You will need statistical reports and demographical data covering the area around the church, three to five miles or whatever area that the church might want for their outreach.*
- 4. Types of outreach:*
 - [a] Open church membership to all that may come. Go visit and ask all to come.*
 - [b] Have different ethnic groups have their own church services during the week as room allows.*
 - [c] Have workers go into the apartment complexes to reach the unchurched.*
- 5. Work with the police and city welfare departments in determining the physical, emotional, mental, and economic needs of the people. Reach out with the help needed. In this way you show Christ's love to them. We must supply their physical needs before we can expect to reach them for their spiritual needs.*
- 6. Work with the local schools by having after school programs. In this way you can also reach the adults.*

James Dodd (Anglo)

The basic role of the church is to teach God's Word, encourage fellowship between believers, win souls for God, and to emulate the works of God here on earth, thus allowing Him to spread His message, not only in words, but in thoughts and deeds. We all know the power of prayer, faith, and belief, but

please realize that there is not power in these elements without action. What actions should the church be taking in the communities in which they are worshipping? The answer is very simple. Do what you feel God would do if He were here today.

Would God feed the homeless in your community?

Would God clothe the naked?

Would God offer solace to the suffering?

Would God try to bring lots of children into the fold?

Would God want us to meet people's basic needs as we are ministering to their souls?

Would God want us to empower the people around us to be able to sustain themselves?

Would God want us to make every effort to go out and bring people into His fold?

Of course the answer is yes to all of these questions. How should churches go about this? Churches can make a real effort to be involved with the aspects of what is happening in the community. Perhaps a committee needs to be formed just for that purpose. Churches should be represented at PTA, Town Hall Meetings, special community events, etc.. This will minister to people that God is in all things and not only in the physical building on Sundays and Wednesdays, but in daily walks of life. Also moneys should be allotted to spend for community projects of feeding the homeless, offering activities to draw the community to the church, having activities out in the community, sponsoring community families who are in need - not only at holidays, but on-going sponsorships, offering respite to people who might need it, offer job opportunities to people whenever possible at the church or the church members could recruit for jobs. Outside community Revivals including many of the community groups & other organizations. Find a community organization to help support with finances and volunteers. Encourage all churches in the community to come together with a plan of action to make sure that the love of God is being poured on all the people in the community.

Mainly, churches need to remember that their worship may be done in the four walls of the church, but their work for the Lord has to take place outside of that building. Most of all, don't reach over the people closest to you that are hurting and suffering to help others in a foreign land. Begin at home and generate your work from there.

Why not have a few Sundays a year that we don't go to our traditional church service, but all church members spend one hour making a difference in their communities. Then they could meet back that Sunday evening and share what action they took to make God's Word become a reality in people's lives. Can you imagine the impact that one action could make if done nationwide? Wouldn't God be pleased and say "Well done, My servants".

Sylvia Bolling (African American)

The voices heard at both listening posts call upon the church to become actively involved in ministering to the physical needs of the people in the communities in which the congregations are located.

CHAPTER 5

A HISTORY OF THE DECLINE OF BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR, HOUSTON, TEXAS.

Having received the call to Beautiful Savior, a congregation in a declining situation, I listened carefully to the information shared with me as I prayerfully considered the pros and cons of the ministry. After accepting the call I continued to strive to implement the elements identified with being a good listener. Listening to the words of Dr. Glenn O'Shoney, Executive Director of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Board for Mission Services; Rev. Kenneth Hennings, Mission and Ministry Facilitator/Coordinator of the Texas District; the Circuit Counselors participating in the Counselor Conferences held during 1990 -1997 while serving as Circuit Counselor; the other pastors enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry classes; various lay leaders and seminar presenters, I was able to compile a list of elements which cause a congregation to decline. **The seven most common elements are:**

1. *Community Change (economically or racially)*
2. *Loss of Resources*
3. *Loss of Leadership*
4. *Loss of Mission Vision*
5. *In - Fighting*
6. *Traditionalism*

7. All of the Above

Actually as this list is reviewed, they can be seen as a sequence of events. What follows is a history of a congregational decline which exemplifies the sequence. The information presented has been gathered from minutes of congregational and council meetings along with the oral history as shared by charter members of Beautiful Savior, previous pastors, and vicars. Along with the information from the congregation itself, I will provide information contained in the Diagnostic Analysis prepared by Carl F. George of Charles E. Fuller Institute in 1981¹⁷ and the Analysis Update prepared by John H. Miller, in 1985.¹⁸ Demographic information was obtained from studies provided by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, the Aldine School District, and Texas State Representative Kevin Bailey's office.

The year was 1968. The city of Houston, Texas, was moving into its prime growth years. The petroleum, petrochemical, and aerospace markets were attracting numerous companies. When the company moved in, along with it came all of the selected employees. The employees were highly educated and highly paid. In anticipation of the influx of the numerous families relocating into the area, the developers planned and began the construction of residential communities. The developers had to include several elements that would make them appealing to the upper middle class, educated employees. The homes would have to be located between the newly constructed north side airport and

¹⁷ Carl F. George, Diagnostic Analysis of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas (Pasadena, CA: Charles E. Fuller Institute, 1981), 47-56.

¹⁸ John H. Miller, Diakonos: Diagnostic Analysis Update Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church (Humble, Texas: John H. Miller, 1985), 1-15.

the downtown office complexes. This location would provide easy access to return flights home and the work place. The homes needed to be in a school district that would provide both excellent education and a competitive sports program. A shopping mall would be part of the development to provide shopping without having to travel to other less convenient locations. Quality affordable homes, a good school district; easy access to work, airport, and shopping were in place. The community was almost complete. There was only one element lacking and that was the church.

The major mainline denominations were very aware of the "harvest field" that was being put into place. The Texas District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod began implementation of its major city evangelism plan that provided for a congregation to be planted every seven miles. The focus was placed on two new north-side developments which were divided by Interstate 45. The location provided both visibility and accessibility. North side sister congregations were contacted, soliciting members with a strong sense of mission to serve as a nucleus for the new mission congregation. The primary emphasis was placed on contacting and serving the Missouri Synod Lutherans that were relocating into the area from both out of state and those improving their lifestyle by purchasing a home in one of the "higher class" neighborhoods.

The first pastor was called in 1968, and a facility constructed that provided 13,000 sq. ft. of space to be used for administration, worship, and education. An additional four acres was available for expansion. The congregation flourished and in 1972 construction of a new worship area was completed, increasing the seating capacity to a comfortable two hundred.

The congregation grew rapidly during this period, nearing eight hundred in membership. The congregation became very involved in the Kennedy Evangelism Explosion. However, the visits and outreach remained focused primarily on Lutherans who visited worship. The first pastor accepted a call to a District position in 1974. The next pastor arrived in July of 1974. The congregation continued to grow numerically, yet worship participation remained at thirty-five to forty percent, with continued "back door" losses. Within ten years of founding, the congregation grew to one thousand members, peaked at one thousand three hundred, and began to decline. Staff during this time was expanded to include an associate pastor, DCE and more secretarial staff. There continued to be an on-going discussion of expansion, but there was division about priorities. A major issue of division was the subject of possible day-care or early childhood program. In 1981 the parking lot was expanded and a metal "temporary" office facility was constructed. It was also decided that an early childhood program would be initiated, and, as long as it was "self-supporting," it would be kept in place. If at any time it called upon the church budget for support, the program would be terminated. The community around Beautiful Savior remained stable at this time, providing approximately five hundred visitors a year. The congregation requested Fuller institute to complete a Diagnostic Analysis which took place during 1981.

The Analysis did reveal some positive strengths of the congregation. They were: loving congregation, expression of warmth, emphasis on evangelism (EE to visitors), location, visibility, attractiveness to community, large pool of visitors, and a balanced ministry. The Analysis also listed the restrictive factors. They were: sociological

strangulation, lack of a positive history of overcoming growth obstacles, budgeting plans do not include a clear "case statement," and no clear over-all ministry strategy. The recommendations were to develop the staff team, develop a growth plan, expedite site planning and usage of present facility, and develop a stewardship program.

The most interesting observation in the Analysis made by Carl George was that the congregation was more interested in maintaining "harmony" among staff and members than following through on any plan.

The second pastor accepted a call and left in 1982. The next pastor to serve was called through a less than proper call process. The congregation had been told by District not to include this individual, who was CRM at the time, on their candidate list. He was not included on the list, but was nominated from the floor and elected by "one vote." There was immediate turmoil and division in the congregation. However, building expansion continued to be a subject of discussion. The pastor resigned, after District encouragement, in January 1983 due to accusations of sexual impropriety.

The next pastor was installed in November of 1983. He was doctrinally conservative and very "high church" in liturgical practice. The previous pastor had introduced practices that were more liberal and charismatic. The main goal of the new pastor was to return confessional Lutheran doctrine to the worship and ministry of Beautiful Savior. Some members had left the congregation due to the previous events. Some left, following the previous pastor to the ELCA. Construction discussion continued and it was decided, after great debate, that a Gym and Education Building would be constructed. The project and Fund raising program divided the congregation. The gym and additional parking was

completed in 1984, giving the congregation 31,509 sq. ft. of usable space and three hundred off-street parking spaces. The new facility could be used only by church members, not by outside groups from the community. Later it was decided that individuals or groups could rent the gym at a rate of fifty dollars an hour with a five hour minimum. Members continued to leave, and staff was reduced due to financial difficulties. The element of "harmony," identified in the Carl George analysis, caused other divisive issues as members left or as staff, that was related to congregation members or were themselves members, were terminated. Their feelings were more important than the ministry program. This continued to be an issue each time members left the congregation. An "update" of the Fuller analysis was requested in 1985.

John H. Miller, consultant for the Texas District, provided the analysis. His report indicated that the original strengths were still present in the congregation. The restrictive factors he observed were: hurts that needed forgiveness and small church thinking. His recommendations were to: heal the hurts, increase worship opportunities, wait two years and conduct another fund campaign, develop staff with proper job descriptions, educate the congregation, develop a ministry plan both short and long term, and exercise patience. He also commented on another divisive element. In order to maintain members, the congregation subsidized tuition of members with children in neighboring Lutheran Schools. The policy became a burden on the congregation's budget as membership began to decline. Once again the element of "harmony" was an issue. Some did not want to hurt feelings by not providing financial support. The study revealed that the congregation was experiencing an eighteen percent decline in membership during 1983 to 1985. It was also

suggested that an outreach plan be developed and no longer be dependent upon visitors that happened through the doors on Sundays. The remaining pastor on staff accepted a call and left in August 1988.

Between the years of 1984 and January 1989 the congregation lost approximately seven hundred and fifty baptized members. There were another twenty five families comprised of in excess of three hundred baptized members that were maintained on the membership roles although they were living out of state with no intention of returning. They were not removed to keep from hurting the feelings of their family and friends that remained in the congregation. With the loss of leadership, finances and resources, the congregation began to suffer the infighting that accompanies power struggles. The mind-set soon became one of survival and the vision of mission was lost.

The community around the church was not standing still during these years. It was actually adding other elements of concern to combine with the internal elements of decline. The community was experiencing growth, but it was not consistent with the congregation membership. There was a second wave of population influx during the late 1970's and early 80's. This influx consisted of individuals from the northern and eastern portions of the United States seeking employment after becoming unemployed in their home states. In response to this, market developers began constructing affordable apartments. The apartments were designed to house individuals until such time as they could afford to purchase a house. Houses purchased were no longer in the immediate community. Developers during the ten year period had moved further north. The mid 1980's brought the downfall of the petroleum and petrochemical industries in the Houston area.

Corporations moved their offices. Select employees were relocated and the others terminated. There were no longer funds to maintain homes or make mortgage payments. Homes were sold below cost or in many cases abandoned. The community that was twenty years earlier a model development was now struggling to survive.

The community is now predominately populated with African Americans and individuals of Hispanic ancestry. The demographic studies indicate the Anglo population within a five mile radius of Beautiful Savior to be thirty percent. The seven apartment complexes within one mile of the church are now funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Urban Housing and Development. The community is now populated with the unemployed receiving welfare, single parents, immigrants (legal and illegal) from a variety of Central and South American countries, and the homeless. The school district has identified three hundred of its students as being homeless and sixty five percent as economically deprived. Due to the amount of gang and other criminal activity in the area during 1992 and 1995, the authorities identified this as the most dangerous section of the city of Houston.

Part of what the community experienced, the congregation experienced. The congregation experienced the economic decline, staff reduction, loss of membership as a result of relocation and "white flight." It did not experience the influx of new members from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds as did the community with population. The community experienced a transition while the congregation did not.

This history of Beautiful Savior is a text book example of the decline process.

1. The community in which the congregation is planted experienced a sociological

change. The individuals who were of the homogenous grouping which was targeted by the church planters relocated to other areas or experienced a change in their economical position. The change in median age became a factor.

2. The change in economy brought about the loss of both financial and physical resources.

Members were employed for lower wages and, in many instances, took more than one employment position to supplement their income. The households also were supported by the employment of both husband and wife. With more involvement outside of the home there was a decrease in volunteerism. The congregation soon received lower offerings and had less people involved in congregational life.

3. The management level individuals relocated to more affluent communities and congregations. The pool of lay leaders decreased in size and content.

4. The overall vision of the congregation shifted to survival. A grief process began due to "all the loss." The energy of the leaders focused on not losing anything else.

5. The members who sought to move ahead soon found themselves in confrontation with those who were grieving. The few new members that came into the congregation found themselves in conflict with a memory of what had been.

6. Traditionalism became the element of power. Those who were baptized, confirmed and grew up as LC-MS members maintained the memory and became guardians of that past congregation.

7. All of these elements combined to eventually hinder the ministry.

These elements of decline in any congregation are actually only symptoms of the real reason for the decline in ministry. The real reason for decline is that the individual

members and the leadership of the congregation forget whose church it is. They are under the false assumption that it is their church. Scripture clearly states that it is the Lord's Church. "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46). As Charles Colson writes,

How easily we are impressed with ourselves and our own inflated importance. How foolishly we seek our identity in office or position in the church. Where were we when God created His church? We live and breathe and serve at His pleasure. And if it were our church or our ministry, we'd fall miserably short. The instrument for making disciples, for making men and women holy, for the redemption of mankind in human hands? How absurd. 'I will build My church,' said Jesus. Those unequivocal words should be posted over the entrance of every church building in the land.¹⁹

A congregation in a declining community situation must remember that it is God's church. They need also to remember that the people who now live in the houses also have souls redeemed by Christ. The Gospel knows no sociological, economical, or racial boundaries.

¹⁹ Charles Colson, The Body (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 67

CHAPTER 6

THE COMPONENTS IN REVERSING DECLINING MINISTRY.

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.²⁰

The Word of God as it came to Joshua presents some terms that are well associated with declining ministry situations. Discouraged and terrified can become daily vocabulary. To prevent this from taking place the words strong and courageous must be the center of focus. The words to Joshua clearly state that the source of strength and courage is the Word of God, both Law and Gospel. Throughout Scripture it is revealed that the prophets of God maintained continual contact with Him. During the public ministry of our Lord He always went to the Father in prayer before, after and during His ministry activities. The Father was the source of strength and focus for Jesus Himself. The pastor and people of each congregation will find strength, courage and direction through deliberate time spent studying the Scriptures and prayer. Through that study each element of decline can be identified and the components of reversal can be initiated.

²⁰ Joshua 1:7-9.

The sources for the listed components are the Synodical and District officials, circuit counselors, D.Min students and lay leaders referenced in the earlier discussion concerning the seven elements that lead to decline. Their input was combined with personal ministry experience while serving a total of thirteen years in two congregations experiencing decline. The first was Our Saviour, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the second, Beautiful Savior, Houston, Texas. The components were discussed with the members of the Congregations in Transition teams from Zion, Orlando, Florida; Bethlehem, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Prince of Peace, New Orleans, Louisiana and Beautiful Savior, Houston. The consensus was that these were the major components used in developing a transition model in each congregation represented.

Each of the components listed must be governed by the proper use of Word and Sacrament. For only through the power of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace will any individual or congregation be transformed into a new creation. Without those elements nothing can be accomplished.

The **first component** in reversing ministry decline is to establish a prayer ministry. Prayer is placed in a prominent position as a way to encourage individuals to relinquish control and submit their lives to the will of God, as explained in Scriptures, and acknowledge Him as the source of strength for daily living. It is of great importance to establish a prayer ministry in such a manner that prayer does not become a type of works righteousness.

[a] As a majority of people are somewhat hesitant to share information concerning their prayer habits, the pastor needs to become the model. He should let the people know that there will be times during the day when he will not be available due to being in prayer.

[b] The instructions should be that each meeting, study, and service begin with prayer.

[c] The initial educational process through sermons will have prayer as one of the main points.

[d] After a period of time a prayer team can be established. This team should be very visible. They could even join the pastor before the altar before each service to pray for the worship service. This would be a visible witness to those present of the pastor and congregation leaders praying for God's blessing and strength for the message to be presented. Members of the team can be located apart from the worshipping congregation to pray for the people and the pastor's message during the time of the service. The prayer team members of Beautiful Savior attend one of the Sunday morning services for their personal worship and pray during the other. They choose to sit in the choir loft in order to see those coming to communion and pray for each individually from a distance.

[e] During worship prayers are solicited from the congregation.

[f] Prayer and devotional study should be an integral part of each board, council, and congregational meeting. The Leaders that grow together spiritually, grow in understanding of ministry and maintain a united vision.

[g] The prayer team is available to pray for specific issues and requests during the week.

[h] The pastor must not be afraid to have prayer partners that he can ask to pray with and for him.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."²¹

The **second component** in the reversal process is to begin casting a "**Threefold Vision**" through sermons.

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.²²

This text from Acts, as quoted from Joel, emphasizes the role of all of the laity in the sharing of the Word of God along with the vision of what can be accomplished when the congregation is faithful to the Word.

The King James Version of Proverbs 29:18 reads: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Although the New International Version translation is somewhat different, the impact is equally powerful: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint."

Unless God's people have a clear understanding of where they are headed, the probability of a successful journey is severely limited. Unless you attend to His call upon your life and ministry, you are likely to experience confusion, weariness, dissipation and impotence.²³

[a] The first vision concerns what it means to be a child of God.

People of today live in a society where there is lowering respect for personhood. As they gradually give in to lowering of respect they begin to strive for some type of recognition.

Human nature has the desire to find approval in the eyes of society. The people strive for this approval by appropriating material goods and striving for physical appearance that is

²¹ Philippians 4:6.

²² Acts 2:17-19.

²³ George Barna, The Power of Vision (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 11.

acceptable to their peers. They become frustrated as they discover that society is extremely fickle. They will never own enough or look good enough to gain complete acceptance. This struggle for acceptance soon leads to frustration with their situation or with life itself. These are the people that need to hear the healing balm of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They need to hear that they were brought into this life according to the will of the Father who is the author and finisher of life. They need to hear of how Jesus gave His life for them as individual human beings and that He has a path laid out for them to follow in this life. They need to hear the message of Jesus' promise to never leave or forsake them, that they are children of God with all rights and privileges of sonship. Not only are they people of great worth, they are members of the royal priesthood. They are forgiven by grace, received by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in the atoning act of Christ. Their worth is not based on the standards of this world, but in the love and grace of the Father.

[b] When the people have "caught" the vision of what it means to be a child of God, then they are ready to visualize what their congregation can become. The Father has promised to bless and grow those congregations and individuals that remain faithful to His Word and mission. Pastors need to help the people think about what can be when they use the power of the Holy Spirit they received through Word and Sacrament. They can picture not only a congregation of great numbers, but one of great service involved in local and foreign mission work.

[c] This vision of an acting serving congregation is followed by a vision of a congregation that has community impact. When the community is surveyed, it is clear to see that all of

the needs are actually sin related. Crime, greed, abuse, dysfunctional families, and hunger are all symptoms of people being dominated by either their own sin or they are victims of someone else's sin. The only answer to sin is the Gospel. The children of God are to be the instruments for bringing Gospel light into the darkness of the world. The children of God are the ones chosen to bring peace and equity to the community in which they are located. The pastor must be able to draw that visual picture of a community changed by the Gospel.

This "threefold vision" becomes more and more relevant as people share the great things God has done in their personal lives and the pastor and staff continually share the great blessings the congregation has seen. The great work accomplished by the volunteers using the gifts God has given them needs to be highly publicized.

The **third component** is to develop an ongoing **Stewardship Program**. The people can envision great things done in their lives and congregation. Where they struggle is envisioning giving their *hard earned money* or valuable time to the work of the church. The pastor should not be afraid to preach the entire Word of God, which includes management of all of the resources given by God. The message has to encourage *first fruit, sacrificial* offerings. The stewardship emphasis, along with prayer, encourages the individual to acknowledge God as the source of provisions for all aspects of life.

According to the account of the rich young ruler, in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18, poor stewardship is not a sign of financial problems, it is a sign of spiritual weakness.

People will trust God with their eternal lives, but they do not easily trust Him with their daily finances. An ongoing stewardship proclamation with education will lead many to a

better understanding of returning to God their offerings of thanksgiving for His grace and great works. Care must be taken to not use the Law as the motivation. Works righteousness through offerings is not good stewardship. Nor is it a good practice to let members think that they can substitute volunteer time for financial support. The parables of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4) and the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) are basic texts. The people of God will respond when they are both comforted and challenged by His Word.

A requirement for all council and board positions should be that the individual members be spiritually mature as revealed in Acts. If they are not mature enough to be good stewards of the gifts they have received, how can they be stewards of the finances and business of the congregation? The pastor sets the example with his offerings. How can he ask the people to do what he does not do? In the same way the congregation is encouraged to tithe to District to support the work of the church at large. These offerings help the congregation recognize itself as only a part of a larger ministry. If not, how can we expect the people to do what the congregation will not do?

The **fourth component** in the reversal process is to identify the **lay leaders**. That is those individuals that carry influence in the congregation whether or not in elected positions.

In Acts 6:5 the selection of the individuals who would be responsible for the care of the widows and distribution was based on their "being known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." Faithful laymen were selected to carry out daily business while the Apostles were about spiritual business of the proclamation of the Word and prayer. This process

set the selection standard. The democratic process of our culture modified that process somewhat. For many years nominations were made, elections were held, and term limitation was instituted. In many of today's situations members are telephoned until someone agrees to serve. Then a list of names is presented to the voters for ratification. Very seldom will there be a nomination from the floor or a complaint raised; no one else wants to serve. Due to this process, the elected leaders of a congregation are not always the true leaders of the congregation. One way of identifying the true leaders is to pass a questionnaire in the worshipping and Bible study groups asking the following three questions. Other than staff :

- 1. Who would you go to if you wanted to find out something about the church?**
- 2. Who would you go to if you wanted to get something started?**
- 3. Who would you go to if you wanted something stopped?**

These three simple questions can identify the people of influence in the congregation.

These are the people that you want to be the first to *catch the vision!* They will generally take ownership and pass it to the congregation. These are the people with whom a pastor needs to spend much personal time. When the leaders are identified, the pastor should not be afraid to let them serve.

The elements of decline will not remain the same during the life of a congregation. As the community and congregation populations change, so will the elements of decline. They, like the people, will fluctuate depending on the culture and climate of the congregation. For this reason it is important to maintain a process of ministry evaluation, but always remember that the eternal Word and Sacraments never change. That Word of

God is eternal and being so is always contemporary. The Word is the base for all components of reversing decline. An accurate historical record of the life and ministry of a congregation can be a great tool for ministry evaluation.

The historical record of Beautiful Savior reveals that, as the congregation continued to experience economic decline and staff reduction, it became apparent that the family ministry needs were not going to be adequately met. 1985 was a year of evaluation. As a result, a two pronged strategy was developed upon which future programming was to be built: 1) creative pastoral care for members, 2) aggressive evangelism in the community. Both parts of the strategy built upon what were seen as the strengths of the Beautiful Savior tradition: a caring Christian Community aggressively sharing the Gospel with the local community.

One of the factors that contributed to the decision to be intentional in caring was the growing number of persons and families in need of special care within the congregation and community. Both economic and social changes were seen as contributing to a growing need in this area: unemployed heads of households, divorce, single parent homes, abuse in the home, drug dependency, poverty, and similar societal problems.

Initial discussions about the possibility of introducing a Lay Caring Ministry began as early as 1984. The model chosen was Stephen Ministry. In the spring of 1986 the pastor and two elders attended an information workshop. The three returned with the conviction that this was the program needed to carry on pastoral care in a new and creative way that involved the laity. The program was introduced and approved by the congregation. During 1987 the pastor and one lay person participated in the Stephen Ministry

Leadership Training. They returned and implemented the Lay Training, and these individuals were commissioned in February 1988. During this same time period the congregation continued to decline and the community continued to change.

After having personally completed the Stephen Ministry Leadership Training as well as a number of years of observing the program, I include an assessment in this project. The staff and leader input were vital, and from a pastoral perspective, right on target. However, what an active member of the church community may perceive as a need of those less active may not always be accurate. After the introduction, a period of recruitment took place. The individuals who expressed interest were interviewed individually and confidentially. The type of individuals selected for training for care-giving can *make or break* the program. Individuals who show prejudice, narrow-mindedness, or are known gossips are not best adapted for this personal one-to-one ministry. Personal, individual care-giving must maintain a high level of confidentiality. After the selection process is completed, training begins. After the training is completed an important part of the program is the Rite of Commissioning before the worshipping community. Then the *caregivers* are assigned to individuals from within the congregation. The congregation now had a Lay Caring Team to meet assessed needs.

The program looked good on paper and sounded good, especially to a congregation low on resources for staff. However there were certain drawbacks. In 1990 the congregation had thirty-one trained caregivers. Of the thirty-one, only four were actually working with families that had expressed a need. Other families in need would not agree

to this type of ministry. The overall mood of the others trained was dejection. They had received fifty-four hours of training and wanted to put it to use.

At the Leader Training the participants are presented with the *Four Big Pitfalls*.

1. Lack of Referrals.
2. Inadequate Supervision.
3. Leader Vacancy.
4. Inadequate Preparation of the Congregation.

During the interim between pastors in 1988, the program experienced loss of pastoral support, leader vacancy, and lack of referrals. This was enough to weaken any program and destroy some. Eventually the program at Beautiful Savior did die. The congregation maintained three leaders and increased publicity. Yet, the people would not express the need for a care-giver. In conversation with the Stephen Ministry Administration in St. Louis, they acknowledged lack of referrals as a common problem. They encouraged involvement of those trained in various areas of congregational service to enable them to make use of their training. This was a good suggestion. The flaw was that during training, emphasis was placed on one-to-one ministry as in crisis intervention, not participation in short term care or visitation.

In an attempt to get a better overall view from each individual trained, a survey was mailed to them which asked for comment on the various stages of their involvement in the program. Of the thirty-one mailed, eight were completed and returned. This in itself spoke of the disappointment experienced and the resulting apathy. Those who returned the completed form revealed their overall experience was good. The major concern was

the lack of people who desired to receive this type of care. The possibility of various other ministry opportunities was offered and received with a certain amount of hesitation. It would take time to *re-program* from crisis intervention with long term care to short term ministry. It is important they remember that ours is a life of serving and loving in any situation, culture or context and not only in specialized areas.

In the evaluation process, both sides of the lay-care subject need to be examined. The next step, after solicitation of information from the individuals trained, was to ask for congregational input. The Sunday morning Bible Class consists of the individuals that comprise the heart and leadership of the congregation. The majority stated that they understood the program. They complimented the Stephen Ministers on their love and caring. They said that they would be willing to recommend someone to make use of the program. However, they would not use the program themselves. "It's a great program for other people." Some of the reasons given as to why they would not use the program were:

1. "Because of family that supports us."
2. "I feel a person should be able to take care of their own problems."
3. "I, myself, would feel I would be an inconvenience and interruption to someone else and taking away from their time."
4. "People are people; we are born sinners. Word has a tendency to get around."

On the one side there were thirty-one trained specialists to address lay ministry needs and on the other, people who felt self-sufficient yet accepted the program as being viable for others. This type of Lay Ministry appeared to have congregation support, but not individual ownership.

Scripture tells us that ministry through trained laity is the way to meet congregational needs. However, in discussion of lay ministry, one of the tension points continues to be whether or not the pastor is willing to let the laity assume some of the responsibility for providing care. Analyzing the situation, a question needs to be asked of the laity. Why do they choose not to carry out the ministry? Is it due to a lack of understanding of the universal priesthood? Is it due to our tradition of having the pastor make all of the sick calls and be available to discuss all of the various family situations and needs? Is it the issue of confidentiality? How we move individuals to involvement is the real question.

In seeking a solution to the paradox of congregational acceptance and individual rejection there are a number of factors that must be kept in mind.

1. Along with the strong adherence to Biblical Doctrine, the LC-MS also prides itself on established tradition. Although there is an emphasis on gaining converts, the mainstream members have some very long roots embedded deep in tradition. Lay care is not part of that tradition.
2. The LC-MS is made up, for the most part, of educated, logical thinking individuals. New programs, even after initiation, have to be thought out before acceptance.
3. LC-MS members are accustomed to being served by trained, paid professional workers. Professional care is accepted and expected. Lay care is perceived as something less.
4. All change is considered as loss. Members are comfortable in their routine. Any change of routine or procedure will bring discomfort.
5. For individuals to admit need is to admit weakness.
6. Voting in a new program does not mean immediate acceptance. Those involved in the parliamentary process usually represent a very small percentage of the actual congregation.
7. Pastors are not comfortable nor quick to delegate care responsibility to a lay caring network.

In moving the congregation and individuals in the direction of acceptance, several of the seven points of opposition can be turned into tools of reception. Reception of change is an important element in the reversal of ministry decline.

1. The pastor and other professional staff members should do a very in-depth personal evaluation. Are they secure enough in their ministry and position to be able to delegate responsibility. Do they *trust* the laity? If not, there is no need to institute a one-sided program.
2. There needs to be an educational process that encourages individuals to see themselves as only a part of a very large picture. There needs to be a process that moves individuals from being results oriented to being process oriented. Along with this, individuals should be educated to the fact that change does not always destroy. Change adds to what is already in place. Change expands. It is a way to help younger members develop their traditions alongside those inherited.
3. Keep in mind that seeds sown one day do not produce fruit the next. Use the pecan orchard as an example. From seed to productive orchard is a ten year process.
4. Show people those passages in Scripture where Jesus wept, where He struggled with decisions, where He was betrayed by friends. Help them identify emotions and understand response as response, not weakness.
5. Pastor and staff must continually encourage the use of lay care providers.
6. Have the care providers involved in short term care projects. Have them make hospital, home and new member visits. Make a concentrated effort to give high visibility to lay caring to give those that are skeptical something to see.
7. In training the laity make sure that they understand that they are *care givers* not *cure givers*.
8. Use the laity to assist in each worship service.

Highly visible trained laity serving under the authority of the pastoral office can produce a dynamic impact on ministry transition.

Component five in the process is to do everything within your power to put in place a **staff that reflects** the racial make-up of the surrounding community. This includes volunteer boards as well as paid staff. The community must see for itself that you consider it to be equal and will include it in all areas of the life of the congregation. An all Anglo governance does not reflect well in a predominately Hispanic or African American community.

Component six is to resolve the **membership versus ministry** issue very quickly. It is very important to educate the members that numerical increase in congregation membership is not the ultimate goal. Many people who are ministered to will never become members of the congregation. The important point is to care for our neighbors and present the Gospel to them.

Another area where the world has had great impact on the church is that of measuring success. The world demands numbers to verify production. The church has adopted many statistical measurement standards to measure growth also. Numerical growth and spiritual growth are not synonymous. A statistical tool for measuring ministry has not yet been devised.

As was discussed previously, when the Gospel is proclaimed in word and deed the Lord will build His church and even the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it. The members of a congregation usually have an understanding of the responsibility of Gospel proclamation by word of mouth. The lack of understanding is in the area of "Gospel works" or the showing of love to all of their neighbors. Reading the Epistle of James reveals that the congregations of today are not the first to struggle with the mixture

of faith and works. A suggested text for clarification of the role of works in Gospel proclamation is Matthew 25:31-46.

The text and comments included are lengthy, but of extreme importance. Pastors and laity alike need to have a clear understanding of the role of works in the life of an individual and congregation. The humble works of faith and gratitude for God's grace are a living confession of the Lordship of Jesus. The Lord brought us a living example in the Word made flesh. The church is to be the living Word to the community. Prayerfully this discussion will enhance the understanding of the importance of deliberate instruction in lay ministry.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, he will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. The King will say to those on His right, 'Come you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?

He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

This text begins with the discussion of the Parousia of "the Son of Man." The picture that is drawn is very powerful. The Son of Man is going to come in all of His *doxa*. *Doxa* in this instance is majestic power or the wealth of glory. Along with the Son of Man will be His angels. The picture revealed is similar to the one in Revelation 19:13-14 where the Word of God comes in all of its power followed by the armies of heaven. The Son, the Word made flesh, returns in all of His divine glory and power as judge of all of the earth. His arrival is intensified in verse 32 with the usage of *thronos*. He is coming to sit on His throne of glory. He will be the King in the judgment seat. Before Him will gather *pantas ta ethnos*, all the nations. The human race will be divided as sheep and goats or wheat and tares. The faithful (sheep) will be separated from the unfaithful (goats) that they have been living with on earth, an intermingling that no human could separate. "The Greek idiom uses the neuter plural to indicate the right and the left hand (omitting 'hand'). It thinks of these two places as being composed of parts, while to us each is a unit."²⁴ "The sheep here are those who do the works of faith which Jesus will recognize as having been done unto Him; the goats are those who fail to produce the works of faith, whose works, whatever they are, Jesus cannot recognize as having been done unto Him."²⁵

Verse 34 presents a highly significant statement; "you who have been blessed by My Father." The genitive *tou patros mou* states the source of the blessing as being the Father, not themselves. The King uses the possessive "My" to tell them that the Father has blessed them through the Son.

²⁴ R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 1964), 988.

²⁵ Ibid. 988-989.

The substantivized perfect participle *oi eulogeo* has its usual meaning, an act of blessing that occurred in the past, whose effects continue to the present. When God blesses He does more than to pronounce the words of blessing and praise, as we poor creatures do when we bless Him; He bestows His grace with all its gifts upon us and thus makes us persons that were and still are blessed. This perfect participle refers to all that God's grace wrought upon these people during their earthly lives. They died in this grace, and thus after they have been raised from the dead (or suddenly transformed), they are those that have been blessed. The aorist imperative *kleronomeo* bids them forthwith to enter upon their inheritance."²⁶ Included in this verse is also the statement from the King that His Kingdom has been prepared from the "world's foundation.

Verse 35 presents the works as evidence in the final judgment. The works are in accordance with the Law, they are works that only faith can produce. They are works of humility, works of true love for the King and done for Him. The King's final judgment will be rendered in public.

Verse 36 reveals a picture of help being given to one without sufficient clothing. The *periballo* refers to the putting on of any kind of clothing and the sense of looked upon with help is relayed in *episkeptomai*. Remembering what Jesus had done for all through His suffering and responding with faith works is not charity. Works done out of love for Jesus and our neighbor are a confession of faith.

Verses 37-39 form the next unit for consideration. The focus is placed first on the *dikaios*. This adjective is always used in the forensic sense. God's verdict is always in their favor. *Dikaios* contains the complete doctrine of justification through faith because of the atonement of Jesus. The response of the righteous is a revealing picture in itself.

²⁶ Ibid. 990.

They respond almost dumbfounded. They had no intention of doing the works to obtain merit. The works were done out of love for their neighbor and their Lord.

In verse 40 the King seated on the throne of glory regards the works as having been done for Him personally, *eph oson*. This statement by the King is not to be taken lightly. The personal works of faith are recognized when the King identifies these individuals as "brethren."

Verse 41 turns to those on the left, the *katara*, those that become the subjects of a curse. The word used for curse is a perfect participle without the article. "We have 'the ones that have been blessed,' but only, 'such as have been cursed.' The righteous and elect are one body that has been fixed in the council of God from all eternity; the damned are only a conglomerate mass made up of all types and kinds. The perfect participle is passive, these people have incurred God's curse."²⁷ Those individuals who turn from the Father will spend eternity in the fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels. They chose to follow them while on earth, and they will keep company with them for all eternity.

Verses 42-43 bring out that the basis for their judgment is the sin of omission. All of those things they failed to do speak as evidence against them. The negative sins of unbelief cry out against them. In verse 44 the cursed continue to reveal their lack of concern for and respect of the King. The righteous repeated clearly the words of the King when they responded to His judgment. The cursed responded to His words in an abbreviated response. In verses 45-46 the King gives the judgment requested by the

²⁷ Ibid., 996.

cursed. They had not seen or responded to the King when they saw Him in others. They did not know Him, so they would not spend eternity with Him.

In studying various commentators on this text, two made comments worthy for consideration in the context of this discussion. R.C.H. Lenski's commentary contained two thoughts that stood out. The first is: "But these works are decisive in the final judgment, not because of an inherent meritorious quality, but because of their evidential quality. As in any proper court of law the evidence and the evidence alone decides in harmony with the law, so in this most supreme court at the end of the world this same procedure is followed." The second is: "the fact that all the works mentioned are of the humblest and the lowest kind. Not one grand work is listed."²⁸ The judgment is the same as the Gospel, public. The works of faith and confession exhibit the nature of Christ, love and humility.

William Hendriksen presents a number of comments for consideration. He begins his discussion of the text with the thought that this section is not really a parable. It contains parabolic elements but in actuality it is a "very dramatic, frequently symbolic, description of the last judgment." He is firm in his reminder that the persons before the throne are there without any regard to their nationality belief or non belief. The believers are there and there is only reference to their righteous deeds, not to any of their sins.

The objection is often heard, 'The final judgment is entirely unnecessary and superfluous, for long before that time the reprobate will already know where they will spend eternity, and so will the elect. Is it not true that when a person dies, his soul immediately enters heaven or hell? So, what possible purpose would a final judgment serve?'

However, this reasoning is faulty. Note the following facts which show that the final judgment, at the last day, is necessary:

²⁸ Ibid., 991 & 992.

- a. The *survivors*-that is those individuals who will be living on earth when Jesus returns-have not yet been assigned either to heaven or hell. Hence *they* at least must still be judged.
- b. But the final judgment is necessary for not only them but for everyone. This is true because the exact degree, or measure of weal or woe which everyone will receive in *soul and body* throughout eternity has not yet been designated. Up to the moment of the final judgment all those who have died have been in heaven or hell *with respect to their souls only*.
- c. The righteousness of God must be publicly displayed, that he may be glorified.
- d. The righteousness of Christ and the honor of his people must be publicly vindicated. When the world in general last saw Jesus, he was hanging on a cross, *as if* he were a criminal! This estimate-as if he were a malefactor condemned for his own personal crimes- must be reversed. All men must see Him whom they have pierced. They must behold him in his glory-with his people 'on his right hand.'²⁹

The good deeds referenced are stated to be a confession of faith by Lenski. Hendrickson presents the same thought and expands on it:

it is the faithful discharge of humble duties pertaining to day by day living, that is given as the reason for the words of congratulation and approbation, and for the cheering invitation to come in and take possession of the blessings of the Kingdom in its final stage. What Jesus is saying is 'In your daily life and conduct, in what are often called *the little things of life*, you have furnished proof that you are my true disciples. Therefore I call you blessed.' This shows that in the Kingdom of heaven there is room, plenty of room, for people who have not in the practical sense prophesied in Christ's name, have not cast out demons, and have not done "many mighty works" in his name. In fact, for those who *boast* about such "great accomplishment" there is no room (7:22-23). It is Christ's unpretentious but sincere follower, who honors him in the common things of life, that is here pronounced blessed.³⁰

Hendrickson gives a four term description of hell that presents a vivid picture of the events of verse 41. The four terms are *separation, association, fire* and *darkness*. The one cursed is *separated* from all of those he knew and loved, *separated* from the life he

²⁹ William Hendrickson, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 887.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 888 & 889.

cherished and *separated* from God for all eternity. He will spend an eternity *associated* with the devil and his angels in *fire and darkness*.

Leading the congregation through an in-depth study of this text will help them come to the knowledge of community ministry as a confession of their personal faith. The study will also help the pastor and lay leaders maintain a focus on what the priority of the church should be. Then the growth provided by the Lord will be seen. It may not be in great numbers but it will be a great spiritual growth. This is the type of growth that the "gates of Hades will not overcome"(Matthew 16:18). This is one of the major keys in restoring viable ministry to a declining congregation. Numerical growth in membership is not the bottom line. How many people's lives, outside the walls of the building, are touched with the Gospel? How many people through the presentation have become a part of the *ekklesia* even though they did not become a part of the congregation presenting the Gospel? It is difficult for congregation members to identify with the concept that their individual congregation is only a small part of the church in the world and in eternity. The gates of Hades from time to time can bring disruption of the local congregation, but they cannot prevail against the *ekklesia*!

It will take time to change the thinking of a congregation from statistical numerical growth to a mind-set focused on ministering to the needs of the individual. For some members this thought process modification will never occur. They think that the pastor is paid to do every aspect of ministry and that any type of lay ministry is invalid. Others will become very excited about caring for persons outside of the congregation. This excitement must be carefully directed. In the same way, as the needs of the community

and the needs of the congregation cannot be separated, neither can one congregation or group of individuals meet all of the needs.

Component seven in this model is to **select one need** at a time and minister to that need according to the gifts and resources available. To begin setting ministry goals it is very important to reflect on the needs presented by the listening teams. It is important to make certain that the need presented as a project is actual and not felt. In many cases the presented need is actually a symptom of a greater need. An example is that of working with "at risk" youth. Consideration must be given to what has brought them into this classification. Study soon reveals that the root of the issue is family environment. This discovery points to the need of some type of family ministry need assessment. Each assessment uncovers elements that can eventually overwhelm individuals and congregations striving to provide care. Many of the ministries targeted become a process of long term care. The individuals did not arrive at this point in their lives overnight and the congregation must be ready for long term commitment. Behavior modification is a process, not an event. The time element involved in the process is usually cited by volunteers and professionals alike that experience "burn-out."

An important point to remember is that it is not appropriate to become involved in a project if the resources are not available. It is very detrimental for a congregation in a transitional situation to begin a project and then "abort" before completion due to poor stewardship of resources. A changed community is also in the process of evaluating the congregation. Information shared by the Aldine Community Listening Post, of which Beautiful Savior is a part, reveals that consistency is very important. When the

congregation makes a statement to the community about a service or ministry that they are going to provide, it will take time for the community residents to build enough trust to participate in the process.

The eighth component in this model consists of several elements. A congregation can be located in a community for numerous years and yet not be seen by the community residents. The reason is that the building has never been a part of the majority of resident's lives. The church building is "just another building" with which they are not involved. Many may know that it is some type of church, but it is not their church or property. The church has to **become visible** and become **the community's church**. This is not going to be an easy process. The congregation will consider the church and property to be exclusively theirs. Gaining community acceptance will depend on the congregation relinquishing ownership. The community residents need to feel as if "it is their church," whether they are members of the congregation or not. This partnership of ownership begins very slowly.

a) The congregation needs to become very visible in the community. The first step is to make sure the church grounds and facilities present a good impression to the community. The congregation reflects their pride and respect when they are good stewards of the gifts God has given, including the building where they gather and the grounds on which it is located. This pride is seen by those who walk or drive by.

The pastor and the congregational lay leaders should become very visible in the community. This can be accomplished by shopping in area businesses, attending local community meetings, and by walking the streets. Walking the streets does take some

preparation. It is important to study the most recent demographic studies available to learn of the residents. The next study would be the predominant cultures in the community. Become familiar with customs and idioms so as not to unknowingly offend. Walk with the intention of communicating with the residents. Walking, shopping and participating in meetings provides opportunity to identify yourself as being "from the church down the street." This participation with the community builds trust and helps with needs assessment. The pastor and lay leaders should also become involved in membership with organizations which seek to serve and improve the community such as the Chamber of Commerce or Rotary. These organizations can provide information concerning business growth and projected employment figures.

b) Open the doors to the church facility. This may be difficult due to the ownership issue. A declining congregation has lost many resources and becomes very protective of what remains. Yet, usually the greatest resource they have that the community does not is the facility. Make a deliberate effort to invite the community, by word of mouth or community publication, to each congregational activity. Allow community groups to use the facility. Community organizations such as Neighborhood Watch and other anti-crime and personal safety groups are usually in need of space for presentations. Providing space for community education reveals that the church recognizes itself as a part of that community.

A good practice when opening the church facilities is to limit the practice of free usage to established non-profit or educational organizations. Those who seek to use the facility

for business seminars or receptions should agree to a contracted usage fee. Presenting an established Facility Usage Policy lowers the rate of usage abuse.

c) The congregation should learn to network. Resources that have been lost due to decline can be replaced by using those that are made available through the community. The Apostle Paul was continually reminding those seeking to punish him that he was a "Roman Citizen" which gave him rights of citizenship. The church members are also citizens with rights of access. This gives the church access to a plethora of information. This information is shared more freely when those approached feel that they are in a partnership working toward the goal of improving the community. Beautiful Savior's transition team has identified resources that are common to communities.

School District Administrative staff who can provide student demographic statistics.

School District Counselors who will volunteer to help with student and family counseling.

Local Authorities provide information concerning crime in the community, fraudulent activity and safety education.

State Representatives Office provides demographic studies and legislative information directly related to the church and human resource programs.

Chamber of Commerce supplies construction and employment projections.

Funeral Homes will give names of individuals seeking pastoral assistance.

YMCA can provide youth activities you cannot provide at your site or provide helpers for some of your programs.

Various Non-Profit Agencies that can provide food, clothing, job training, and transportation.

These are only a few of the resources that are available to use as citizens of the community. The congregation must be careful to not let resources dictate ministry,

especially when they limit themselves and God by only looking within the walls of the church building.

As a congregation develops a process to identify those resources of the community that are available for use, there are theological aspects which must be taken into consideration. As community programs are developed, they sometimes include those agencies with which the congregation will not want to partner. The congregation's representatives must be willing to stand on the scriptural position even if there is chance of resource loss. For example, a well-known agency such as Planned Parenthood, which supports and counsels for abortion, will volunteer to provide support in the area of counseling of teenagers. The congregation should not provide education or counseling space in its facility for this organization. At community functions the congregation representative may be requested to open the meeting with a prayer, yet be asked not to pray in the name of Jesus. A stand must be taken for the Gospel and a refusal stated. The congregation must continually be involved in an education program that informs the members and community representatives of the scriptural position of pro-life and other human care issues. It is also very important to know the teachings of the other religious organizations in the community to prevent becoming ecumenically linked with them. Developing a Gospel directed care ministry does not include participation in joint worship or prayer services. The CTCR document, Inter-Christian Relationships, An Instrument for Study, is good study to use in educating the congregation as to why we do not partner with all groups and agencies.

Whether we speak of the involvement and activities of individuals, congregations, or church bodies, we must recognize that what we do in this area, or fail to do, bears witness to a greater or lesser extent to *what*

we ourselves believe as well as to our *perception* of the beliefs of those with whom we relate. In determining whether a contemplated action should be done or not, it is therefore extremely important to consider the witness it will give. As Christians engaged in carrying out Christ's mission, we will want to ask such important questions as, Will the action give a false or unclear witness about God's truth? Will it manifest the kind of love for the brother or sister that includes concern for their doctrinal position? Will it give evidence of the unity that the Spirit gives? Will our failure to be involved with other Christians in a given activity advance or retard the faithful proclamation of the Gospel? The answers to such questions may be extremely difficult to establish with certainty and may differ depending on whether relationships are between individuals, congregations, or church bodies. However, the effort to do so must necessarily be made.³¹

When the congregation is building partnerships with community agencies governed by state or federal regulations, doctrine is not usually a major issue. Those agencies sponsored by other denominations or "Grass Roots" organizations can provide a different challenge. It is important to listen carefully to the words that are being said in order to determine the organization's or individual's understanding of Scripture. Some organizations are very subtle and are masters of disguise when it comes to the real issues of community partnership. Some are involved for the right reasons of serving others, some for personal gain through the abuse of the welfare system, and others for the presentation of a false Gospel. They know the vocabulary needed. Yet for them it takes on different meanings.

Two terms that are common to the vocabulary of the community in the process of decline or transition are *liberation* and *empowerment*. The residents need to be *liberated* from the elements that have them confined to their environment. They also need to be

³¹ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Inter-Christian Relationships, An Instrument for Study (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1991), 25.

empowered to take control of their situation and re-direct their lives. The ultimate goal of the various agencies and religious organizations is to work together in the community to provide the resources necessary to enable the residents to attain this liberation and empowerment.

The declining community is, more often than not, an ethnic melting pot. Into this pot each culture pours its own concept of liberation. In the Hispanic and African American cultures, liberation theology is a part of their religious expression. Of these two cultures the one that exhibits the greater ecumenical impact on the religious community and overall community life of the model being discussed is that of the African American.

It is important to understand where Black Liberation Theology finds its base. With oppression as the base for being chosen as God's people, the people have God on their side as they fight the oppressor. God is active throughout and in history as the God of the oppressed. Jesus is the Savior of the poor and those suffering injustice. For many Black theologians God is at work in the Black community rescuing it from the White oppressors. Therefore God cannot be for the Black and the White at the same time. From this perspective Black Liberation Theology becomes a survival theology. In the Black community there is the daily struggle between life and death. Many of the Blacks feel they must turn to illegal occupations in order to survive in a White dominated job market. The White economy does not pay equally to Blacks. A drug or weapon deal, even though it may bring death or incarceration, can also bring the income necessary to survive or move up the socioeconomic ladder. Some of those in the Black community also believe that there is an attempt on the part of the Whites to destroy their identity. The Whites favor an

integration that assimilates the Blacks into a White society, and a congregation which require Blacks to forfeit their culture. Then there is the thought among some that the Whites control both social and political power. If an individual takes the time to examine closely and honestly the Black culture, it is not difficult to understand why the Theology of Liberation becomes so appealing.

Black Liberation Theology presents to an oppressed community, which is predominately African American, a liberating Black Christ. As strong as the liberation movement appears to be, it is not the only one that impacts the community. This is only one example of the necessity of being educated on the community cultures and their religious expressions. There are some challenges to developing a resource network that can only be met with a strong scriptural base.

The intent of networking is not only to identify those who can provide resources for congregational use but also to introduce the congregation to a wide variety of individuals in the community. With the establishment of a trust relationship comes a higher possibility that community residents will turn to the congregation for the one element that only the congregation can provide. That element is the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is presented in Word and Sacrament.

The **ninth component** in the transitional model is to **develop a worship environment that is comfortable**. *Comfortable* is not a term normally associated explaining worship. The plan of the church is to involve as many individuals as possible and to *make disciples* of them. The declining community, as previously stated, is a melting pot of ethnic cultures. There is another factor which is a part of the over-all picture. Each generation,

no matter what the ethnic origin, is a culture in itself. A worship service should be presented that is relevant to every individual present. The terminology "contemporary" has become very popular to describe the direction worship revisionists are moving. What must be remembered is *that which is eternal is also contemporary*.

The liturgical format which is presented in both the Lutheran Hymnal and Lutheran Worship provide the outline of elements for worship that reflect the sacramental heritage that defines LC-MS worship. The structure presented also contains enough flexibility to develop diversity of presentation.

The discussion of worship format is not unique to the modern congregation. Luther was also questioned concerning proper worship. His response was,

As Long As Hearts Are One, Ceremonies May Vary. I cannot give the advice that uniformity of ceremonies should exist at all places; but where obviously impious or absurd ones have been abolished, dissimilar ones may be tolerated....Such are altars placed in the customary position, the attire of the preachers, whether vestments or ordinary clothing (*de vestibus sacris vel profanis*), and similar matters. If the heart and soul are one in the Lord, one person will readily bear the lack of uniformity in externals on the part of another. But if the striving after oneness of heart and soul is not there, an external oneness will achieve little.³²

The use of instruments common to various cultures, the change in rhythm, or the use of solos and duets are elements which can enhance presentation. The printing out of the service or the use of various Bible translations can enable those not as familiar with the English language or those who have limited reading abilities to participate more comfortably. The use of lay readers and responsive readings will bring a higher level of congregation participation. Of course, the Word and Sacraments cannot be compromised in any manner. These are the Means of Grace. The Word must be presented in its purity.

³² Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says, Vol. I, (St. Louis: Concordia 1972), 307.

The message of Law and Gospel needs to be heard by all of those present. Without the Word and Sacraments there would be only a shallow attempt at entertainment.

During the proceedings of the 1995 Synodical Convention a lengthy discussion was held concerning the proper hymnal and worship materials to be used by member congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Congregations in transition seeking to develop a comfortable worship environment need to listen to the voices of today and also of the past. Luther also spoke about what he considered to be the most important elements of church services.

If Need Be, Omit All Rather Than Preaching. It is better to omit everything but the Word. Nothing deserves to be fostered more than the Word; for the entire Scripture shows that this is to be in common use among Christians, and Christ Himself says (Luke 10:42) that one thing is needful: that Mary sit at the feet of Christ and hear His Word daily. This is the best part that is to be chosen, and it will never be taken away. It is an eternal Word. All the rest may pass away, no matter how much work it gives Martha to do.³³

Main Purpose Of Services Largely Forgotten. At this point the Gospel teaches what kind of works a tried and experienced faith performs and what is real service and honor that may be rendered to God. Some build churches, some found masses, some ring bells for God, some kindle a light for Him-that He by all means see. And they act as if He were a child in need of our goods and service. Although building churches and celebrating Mass arose in the first place so that Christians might congregate there to perform the right divine worship, this worship subsequently disappeared and was entirely silenced. Then we have stuck to founding, building, singing, ringing, vestments, incense burning, and to all the additional preparations for divine worship up to the point that we consider this preparation the real, main divine worship and do not know how to speak of any other. And we are acting as wisely as the man who wants to build a house and spends all his goods on the scaffolding and never, as long as he lives, gets far enough along to lay one stone of his house. Guess where the man plans to live when the scaffolding is torn down.³⁴

³³ Ibid., 301.

³⁴ Ibid., 301-302.

The pastor and people are to be alert so as not to be swept away by "every wind of doctrine" in an attempt to attract worship participants. The Lord has promised to bless those congregations that remain faithful to His Word.

The tenth component of the model recalls the emphasis of the "Great Commission." "Therefore go and make disciples....."(Matthew 28:19); "These twelve Jesus sent out....."(Matthew 10:5); "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent....."(Luke 10:1) all emphasize that the disciples were **SENT** with the Gospel into their community, nation and world. This concept of being sent has not always permeated the local congregation. In past years the church would bring together people of a common background, culture and confession. In their unity they would build a worship structure, call a pastor to preach, teach, evangelize, administrate, and be available for each member twenty-four hours a day. The growth of the church was due primarily to birth and marriage. As more church buildings came into existence, a sign was placed out front to attract individuals of a similar confession. As the country became more mobile, the church began to experience growth by transfer from sister congregations. The next step was to advertise in the newspapers, telephone directories, and on Christian radio stations. The sign out front and the various ads gave the location of the facility and the times for Worship and Bible Study. All of these techniques basically said; "If you have the same confession, same heritage, and speak the same language, you can come in during the posted times." The prevalent thought was that if any evangelism was to be done outside of the "walls," it was to be done by the pastor. The picture was of an introverted church serving only itself and having no real impact on the community in which it was located.

Following this model has mainline denominations of the 1990's finding themselves in a state of numerical decline. The model was also one of the elements that led society to develop the attitude that the church is not relevant to everyday life. Society says it offers no help or solutions.

Carefully reading through Scriptures one finds the ministry plan of the Triune God. Throughout the Old Testament the prophets were sent into the community to warn the people. Moses was sent to Pharaoh, Ezekiel was sent to the Israelites and Jeremiah was told by God that he was to go to whomever God sent him and say what God told him to say. In the New Testament the sending continues first with our Lord being sent by the Father into this world. Jesus then went into the villages proclaiming the Kingdom. He went among tax collectors and other sinners. After the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts, all believers were sent out with the Gospel. The model to follow is one of going out with the Gospel that is presented in both word and action. The going out is not done by the pastor alone, but by all those who confess Jesus as Lord. The first question in the mind of the average congregation member is how and where to begin? Matthew 10:16 is a good starting point. "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

The being "shrewd as snakes" is a point to be remembered wherever one is sent, including into the church visible which is also made up of people who are sinful by nature. The first step in going out is knowing from where you are starting. It is important that a period of education take place within the congregation. The individuals of the congregation will learn from Scripture that they were chosen by the Triune God Himself

to carry the message of the Gospel into the world. They were chosen to glorify God with their lives. They were called into the community in which their church is located for the purpose of bringing "light" and "salt" into that community. They will come to understand that they have no right to complain about the community unless they are trying to bring about change by the power of the Word.

They will also be educated to the fact that their community is part of the world community and that their congregation is a part of the world community of believers identified as the Body of Christ. "Unless God's people have a clear understanding of where they're headed, the probability of a successful journey is severely limited, at best. Unless you attend to His call upon your life and ministry, you are likely to experience confusion, weariness, dissipation, and lack of impact."³⁵ Mission education is to be instilled slowly and precisely. Force-feeding brings rejection. The education process is given on all levels of education, beginning with the children's Sunday School classes and moving up through all of the grades including adults. Sunday School offerings can be given to support mission outreach projects. This will give each class a sense of being involved. The projects need to be publicized and response letters shared with the class. The Lutheran Association of Missionary Pilots is very good about communicating its ministry with both letters and videos. LAMP is only one example. Other projects could be Bibles for Russia, Ministry among Native Americans, and the various ministries along the border between the United States and Mexico. For older youth and adults, make use of opportunities to participate in Servant Events and Project Can-Do which give "hands-

³⁵ George Barna, Without A Vision, The People Perish (Glendale, CA: Barna Research Group, 1991), 11.

on" experience in cross cultural communities. Make use of any project that emphasizes world mission involvement. This type of emphasis makes it easier to shift the focus to ministry among those same cultures that have become a part of the local community. Take the time to read the demographic studies that center on the people that live within a five mile radius of the church. For example, the community within that radius of the congregation studied for this model is equally populated by African Americans, Hispanics and Anglos. The city of Houston has the second highest population of Vietnamese outside of Viet Nam, five hundred thousand Indians from India, and a Hispanic community that speaks seventeen different dialects of Spanish. The world mission field is truly coming to us. It is important for Bible classes to provide instruction in the various world religions and how to respond with the Word to them.

Jesus continually used illustrations base on the surroundings as He walked with the disciples. His discussion of the harvest of souls is presented in John 4: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."³⁶

As was the case with the disciples, our natural tendency is to look around and see only the material or physical. The disciples saw the wheat plants. Jesus saw the souls of the Samaritans. He saw they were hurting and in need of the Savior. In the city there are those that look at a section of the city and see run down buildings and economic despair

³⁶ John 4:35-36.

and consider the area to be a lost cause. If one gives a closer look, with spiritual eyes, one can see the harvest.

The problem is that certain groups not even associated with the spiritual also see a harvest. The youth gangs find these communities to be ideal for recruitment. The young are looking for a support group that will give them the sense of family that they do not find at home. These gangs will provide that family. Those who sell drugs find a harvest of those who are seeking to escape reality. The individuals who market humanity find a harvest of young people who are willing to turn to prostitution to earn enough money to escape from their lives. Along with these are the weapon dealers, gamblers, and con artists all taking their harvest from the people that are ripe for picking.

Not all of the people who live in the community are involved in evil or are seeking to escape. There are those who are seeking to bring meaning into the lives of their friends and neighbors. They search, but not always in the right places. They are so eager to bring change and stability into their lives that they become a harvest for dream merchants and false prophets. In the midst of despair, hurt, and sickness, the proclaimers of a false or modified Christ also find a people ripe for the harvest.

When the children of the Triune God enter the harvest field, they will not be without opposition. "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in

wickedness."³⁷ "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist."³⁸

Whatever the community cultural mixture, the starting point is to build a relationship of trust. Take the time to listen without defensive response. The individuals with whom you are conversing must be able to see that there is honest concern for them and their well-being. They should be able to sense that you do respect their right to have an opinion. Remember the individual, like all humans, is living in a world of personal pressure. He has developed a protective system that includes some type of God. Many of the false gods are going to be similar to the one of Scripture in power and attributes. There can be a conversation on the common elements. Be ready for a tension point to develop when the conversation moves from "God is One" to a "Triune God." The presenter can focus on the nature of God and the fact that God is a personal God, separate and distinct from creation. The conversation progresses to the position of man in the world as part of creation bound by the laws of God for His creation. If the conversation is with individuals associated with Liberation Theology, Islam or the Nation of Islam these are familiar doctrines. The challenge is to move the conversation to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The presenter must remember that when there has been preparation through Scripture, the Holy Spirit will give the words to speak and guide the direction of the conversation. The difficult part is allowing Him to do His work.

The name of Jesus is going to stir all types of responses in each individual who hears it. Very seldom will there be no response at all. Jesus must be presented as the Savior of all

³⁷ II Thessalonians 2:9-11.

³⁸ II John 7.

and not merely a prophet or great teacher. The presenter should be firm in his personal confession of faith. It is impossible to represent someone that you do not know personally and in whom you do not have faith. If the foundation of trust has been put in place, the individual will listen out of respect if for no other reason. The most important point to relay is the fact that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, not in the works of human hands. Make use of passages such as John 3:16-17, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the Name of God's one and only Son." One should remember to present Jesus in a basic and precise manner. He is to be presented as the true Son of God sent by God's grace to provide salvation for all. Natural man is sinful and unable to save himself from God's wrath. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

As a person is led by the Holy Spirit into a faith relationship with Jesus, he or she will "thirst after" more of the living water. Then the presentation can be expanded. The presenter should take care not to place "chunks of meat" in the "baby bottle" thus strangling the one needing to be nourished. The Lord of the harvest knows the location of each seed sown and what nourishment is needed to make it grow. Each person is an object of God's love and redemption and must be treated as such. All barriers and prejudices need to be removed from the presenter's agenda and the trust relationship expanded. This can only be accomplished when the presenter lives the Word he seeks to

proclaim and defend. Ultimately the presenter must stand on the basic Scriptural presentation of Law and Gospel. To go in any other direction would be a violation of Christianity and a blasphemy of the Christ Who sends His people into the world as His laborers.

The final point to remember in the transition process is that before there can be a resurrection, there must be death. The leaders of a congregation in transition need to have the courage to let programs die an honorable death. Tradition will strive to maintain declining programs on the life support system of guilt. It may even be important that the congregation itself die in order that another can come forth from the seeds planted by the first.

CHAPTER 7

THE CURRENT REALITY OF THE CONGREGATION FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED MODEL.

The history of Beautiful Savior was presented earlier in this work. What is the status of the congregation today? Was the decline reversed? Does the proposed model work?

The reality is that Beautiful Savior is in a changed urban community that exhibits inner city characteristics. The congregation that was planted as a traditional, German Lutheran Missouri Synod congregation is no more. The glory days of that type of congregation are gone.

The new Beautiful Savior is emerging from the ruins. It is a congregation made up of a variety of individuals from working class neighborhoods. There is a blending of generational, socioeconomic, and racial cultures. The growth that is being displayed is not great numerically. However, it is great spiritually.

The congregation is made up of the following resident adult categories.

Husbands and wives living together with children under 18 at home.....	128
Husbands and wives living together without children under 18 at home.....	74
Single, never married adults.....	43
Currently divorced men.....	1
Currently divorced women.....	3
Currently separated from spouse.....	7
Currently widowed men.....	3
Currently widowed women.....	32

Experienced divorce and remarried	28
Blended families (those with children from previous relationships who marry)	13
Single mothers.....	8
Single mothers with racially mixed children.....	3
Teenage mothers	4
Single fathers.....	2
Interracial marriages	13
Children of interracial marriages	12
Couples living together.....	3
Hispanic Members	33
Asian Members.....	8
African American Members	4
The ages of today's baptized members: 0-13	<u>19%</u>
14-17	<u>7%</u>
18-21	<u>9%</u>
22-24	<u>8%</u>
25-34	<u>14%</u>
35-44	<u>13%</u>
45-54	<u>11%</u>
55-64	<u>10%</u>
65-74	<u>6%</u>
75+	<u>3%</u>

During the time period between 1989 and 1998 adults confirmed numbered 249 and infants baptized numbered 174. The membership of the congregation presently in 1998 is 533 baptized and 410 confirmed. The demographic make-up of the congregation fairly reflects that of the community, as do the identified needs.

The Listening Post participation reveals that our community is in need of employment, education, child care, and English classes. There is a high rate of violent crime, drugs and

prostitution. A high number of students are identified by the school district as being homeless. There are seven apartment complexes within a one mile radius of the church location, 90% of which are funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The school district gives a figure of two thousand children living in those apartments. The local authorities have identified at least seven gangs active in the same area. The problems of the community and the individual resident should become the problems of God's people. The one ministry that Beautiful Savior chooses as priority on which to focus is "At Risk" youth. The implemented ministry plan is as follows.

1. An Early Childhood Program that is designed for children between the ages of eighteen months and five years. The tuition and fees are kept at a level lower than most area day-cares. There are bilingual staff members to assist with the Hispanic children who do not speak English. When the program was originally established it was decided that congregation members would not receive a financial discount. The intent was that the program would be financially supported through tuition and fees rather than from the congregation's budget. The tension between the supporters and nonsupporters of this type of ministry is lessened when the nonsupporters hear that their offerings do not pay for the program operation. This practice would also eliminate families from joining the congregation only for the tuition discount and yet never support the budget through offerings. The equal tuition and fee schedule also enhanced the nonmember ownership of their child's school. There is a greater number to share the total expense that allows for a lower rate that is more attainable for the residents of the community.

2. During the summer and after school volunteers go to the apartments and assist with supervised activities for the resident children. The high school students of the congregation volunteer to help with county directed athletic activities held at area schools during the summer.
3. During the school year volunteers go to schools to assist with reading programs.
4. Congregations in changing communities usually have more "space" than any other asset. The congregation allows non-profit organizations and those providing language classes, GED classes, or other behavior modification classes to use rooms at no charge.
5. The congregation participates in the national program of Mid-Night Basketball. The program is operated between 9:00 PM and 2:00 AM. The participants must agree to certain rules and participate in all of the training programs before they are allowed to play basketball. The program is directed toward youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty two. A volunteer, who by career is an Alternative High School Principal, directs the program. Volunteers from the congregation and community provide a variety of assistance.
6. Many times misdemeanor offenders of the law are assigned by judges to do community service. The church serves as one of the places where they can fulfill this requirement. The members of the congregation have, for the most part, come to the realization that these outreach activities will not bring numerical growth or increase in worship attendance. However, they do know that this type of outreach and caring builds trust and opens the door for Gospel presentation by word as well as action.

The congregation continues to "work at" the transition process and reveals both positive and negative elements.

The positive elements of Beautiful Savior are:

- 1. A lay initiated and lay led prayer ministry.** Before the first worship service a lay member of the prayer team arrives at the church, enters the worship area and prays for all of those who will participate in the morning worship, Bible Studies and Sunday School. Before each of the two morning services on Sundays and the mid-week Advent and Lenten services, prayer team members join with me at the altar to pray for me, the organist, and all others who assist in the various capacities during the service. They pray that the Word will fall on fertile ground, take root and produce fruit. During the worship service prayer team members pray for the service and for each worshipper as they go forward to receive Communion. Prayer requests are solicited during the prayer portion of the service and a prayer folder is inserted in the bulletin listing special requests, missions and missionaries. Each worshipper is encouraged to take this folder home and pray for the requests during the week. Each day of the week prayer team members can be contacted for personal prayer requests. The team members are coordinated by one of the Elders.
- 2. A lay initiated and lay led stewardship program.** The members of this team are all tithers. Several of them have attended stewardship seminars presented by the Texas District, Synod and by Dr. John Maxwell. Dr. Maxwell speaks nationally on subjects relating to stewardship and development of lay leaders. The members of the stewardship team have a tremendous grasp of the scriptural principles of stewardship. They

continually review stewardship material and offer suggestions. They emphasize all areas of stewardship: time, talent and treasure. They coordinate handouts and mailings and encourage stewardship as an all year activity.

3. Lay involvement in each worship service. Each worship service involves lay readers (male and female) who are primarily teenagers. There are lay assistants who assist with communion and elder led lay ministry teams who visit those home bound or hospitalized during the time of the second service. During these visits they share sermon notes, offer prayers and share announcements. These visits help the home or hospital bound to feel linked to the worshipping community.

4. Lay scheduling. All of the elder, usher, acolyte, senior server, lay communion and prayer team schedules are coordinated by the Elders. Each of these groups has a specific Elder assigned as an overseer.

5. Warmth and openness. The majority of the members of the congregation are very accepting of all visitors and new members. They are sincere in their caring and regularly receive door offerings for stranded travelers or others who express a need.

6. Versatile. Members listen and are open to different ideas. They have a willingness to try new things if the rationale has been communicated to them.

7. Honest. Members will tell you what they are thinking or if they do not like something. Very few of the members maintain a "grudge." They tell their opinion and respect the right of others to do the same.

8. Active seniors ministry. The retired members have Bible Study, a scheduled day to play table games, take bus tour trips, and participate in a number of other activities together. Their activities are also coordinated by one of their number.

9. The congregation is young and has a lot of potential. Fifty percent of the congregation is under the age of thirty five. The members recognize this as a gift and have elected three under the age of thirty to Church Council positions. One of the elders is thirty and leads a Sunday Morning Bible class for young adults. This young man has grown up in the congregation. The older elders selected him to become an elder in order to provide someone for the younger adults who could better identify with their life challenges. The younger adults appreciate having "one of their own generation" with whom to discuss issues.

10. The congregation cares about the pastor's well being. They provide ample time off for rest, vacation, conferences and continuing education. They believe that the priority of the pastoral office should be preaching, teaching and evangelism.

The negative elements of Beautiful Savior are:

1. Some lack of respect for the pastoral office. Although the majority of the members have a respect for the pastoral office, there is a missing element in the overall atmosphere of the congregation. This is possibly the result of several elements. Among the older members it might be due to their feeling betrayed through a sexual impropriety issue with one of the earlier pastors. Another element is the large number of recent converts who have not grown to understand the total meaning of the office. Seventy percent of the members come from unchurched or non-Lutheran backgrounds. Another element, in

Houston, is the number of less than professional pastors. In conversation, congregation members reveal that they like and even love their pastor, but respect for the Office is not always revealed. This attitude was present nine years ago and remains to a lesser degree today. Some of the attitude is due to the negative influence of previous paid lay administrative staff who had each developed their own power structures during the vacancy between pastors. These individuals were not in harmony with the transitional process and eventually resigned.

2. There is a low level of commitment. It is the old *pareto principle* which is eighty percent of the people will let the other twenty percent do the work. The Elders and Stewardship Board know that this is a spiritual problem.

3. There is weakness in continued evangelism and assimilation. Through the various community activities and the families involved in the early childhood program, approximately one hundred nonmember families are regularly in the congregation's facility each month. The names and addresses of each family are made available to the church office for mailings and other more personal contacts. As pastor I have led lay evangelism training workshops each of the last nine years. A number of members participate, yet the majority never implement the training. The evangelism committee will function for several months and then revert to complacency. The majority of the individuals who become members are a result of my personal interaction with them in the community or in their homes after they have visited worship. When new members are received it takes time before they are asked by some of the other members to participate in projects. The congregation is somewhat of a paradox. It expresses concern and care for those who

visit, yet there is the tendency not to want to become involved with individuals too personally. I am well aware that this trait is very common in today's culture.

4. Some maintain the "let the Early Childhood program support itself" mentality.

The Early Childhood program and subsequent building of an educational building came to existence out of dissent. There were some members who felt that a Christian school was

needed and there were others who did not want the "burden." The early childhood program was a compromise with a plan to add a new grade level after a number of years.

The idea was good. The construction plans and contractor were not as good. The building was constructed with a gym, kitchen, and two classrooms on the lower floor.

Four very large classrooms were constructed on the second floor. Department of Human Resources, the licensing agency for early childhood, was not consulted. The regulation is

that students below the fourth grade cannot be placed in second floor classrooms. The congregation had constructed an educational facility that contained four classrooms that

could not be used for the original plan. The loss of classroom space limited enrollment and increased tension. The early childhood program has never been fully accepted as a

ministry of the congregation. The children enrolled participate, as a children's choir,

during Advent and Lent in one of the midweek worship services. The worship service will have an extremely high attendance. Of those present less than ten percent will be members

of the congregation. The excuse being that "it is too crowded."

5. There is a reluctance to be "in charge." The members who volunteer will do the

work if they are told what to do. However, do not ask them to be in charge. Most do not

want the responsibility of leading a project. The ones who will accept the responsibility are very good.

The positive elements outweigh the negative. The congregation continues in the transition process and understands that it must be pro-active rather than re-active in all areas of ministry. The year 1997 began with a "back to the basics" emphasis. All of the programs were examined to evaluate their viability. Several of the boards were not functioning and their responsibilities were assimilated into other boards with similar responsibilities. The congregation functions best when it is task driven. In response to this observation the Council structure was re-aligned, on a trial basis, into a staff led Board of Directors. There was some negative response to this modification from some of the "older members." The structure is proving to function very efficiently. Projects are selected or normal tasks arise, the Board discusses and determines the appropriate action and individuals are selected to carry out the project. The congregation offers three Bible Studies during the week. They consist of basic "book studies" and application of the Word to today's issues in society. The LWML continues to exist and involves a number of women. The group has attracted a number of younger women by meeting at night and providing child care. The thirty year old president is striving to make the business meetings briefer and the topics more relevant. The Elders have made visiting the homes of the families involved with the Early Childhood program a priority. There are fifty families involved and the majority of them are unchurched. There is a renewed attempt to have visitation teams visit the Sunday morning visitors the Tuesday night after they attend. The congregation has ample prospects for new members.

A major event for the past three years is the sponsoring of the Houston Police Department, Aldine Station, Christmas party for underprivileged children. The event is held in the gym and provides Christmas for one hundred and fifty children.

The chairman of the Board of Elders, the chair of the Board of Stewardship and the organist were asked to respond to the following question: What do you consider to be the most urgent or important issues before the congregation today?

The most urgent issue that is before our congregation today is the lack of concern for outreach to the community around our church. We have seen growth in the number of people that work or serve the congregation and the commitment to the financial needs of the church. Our congregation needs to take the next step; start reaching out to the people that live around our church. This is something that cannot be started by any one person in the congregation. It is so easy to say, "pray and wait on the Holy Spirit!" But it is by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the timing of God. It may be time to call for an organized time of prayer for the clearing of barriers that we put in our own way and honestly seeking the way God would have us do the out reach! *Burl Holloway; Chairman of Elders*

Each member needs a 'personal relationship' with Jesus Christ their Savior so they can share the Good News with others. There seems to be a 'contentment' that is dangerous with a lot of the members. They need their fire lit-their wood is wet. We need more members involved in the working of the church. *Diane Kingsley, Chair; Board of Stewardship*

One of the most pressing issues facing Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church today is the lack of motivation of its members. At the present time we have low participation in the services, classes, activities, etc. that take place on other than Sundays, including chairing or participating on Boards. Some of the problem can be attributed to the number of two person working families in our congregation, combined with the distance which some must travel to reach BSLC. (Many of our membership do not live in the surrounding community.) On the other hand, however, those members who are committed often drive great distances to participate. Additionally, we are still an inward looking congregation to a great extent. Even though we have opened our facilities to various community groups, we are not actively sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world which God has placed at our doorstep. Our congregation has a lot of potential for leadership and outreach which we are not fulfilling at the present time. *Lee Roeder; Organist*

These responses were recorded in January of 1997. As was stated earlier, the people are very honest. All three of these individuals have a good understanding of the contemporary reality of their congregation.

CHAPTER 8

THE GOALS OF THE CONGREGATION FOLLOWING THE PROPOSED MODEL.

What are the goals of Beautiful Savior?

Staffing.

- 1. Director of Children's Ministry.** This person would supervise the existing ministries directed toward children below the sixth grade, including Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and the Early Childhood Program. This individual would work with the Directors of Evangelism and Publicity to develop a marketing plan that would penetrate the various cultures in the community. He or she would ideally have some relation building skills and be available to provide interaction and direction to parents with counseling needs. This individual would be responsible for developing new children's programs and have the authority to develop necessary volunteer staff and would work with the Early Childhood Director and have the authority to employ and terminate Early Childhood staff.
- 2. Music Director.** This person would be responsible for developing the music ministry, using both congregational members and outside resources.
- 3. Community Worker.** This person would serve as a liaison between the congregation and the community. He or she would attend community and school meetings, assessing the needs presented. These needs would be presented to the congregation at which time it would be determined which could be met by the congregation. This person would be the

voice of the congregation to the community, and the voice of the community to the congregation.

4. Business Manager. This person would be responsible for administering the business affairs of the congregation including the Early Childhood Program. He or she would be responsible for communication with vendors, janitorial services, and scheduling of building and property usage. He or she would also be responsible for accounting.

5. Maintenance Man.

Ideally the staff put in place would reflect the racial make up of the community.

Facility Improvements.

1. The present worship and office facilities are sufficient for growth. They need to be remodeled to improve lighting, air conditioning and energy efficiency. The roof will soon require replacement. A major expense would be incurred when changing the portion of the parking lot not yet concrete from asphalt. A cover for the entrance from the parking lot would provide dry access during inclement weather.

2. The Gym and Educational facility have recently been inspected by the City Life Safety Team as a part of the process of obtaining a new occupancy permit. The fire alarm system needs to be upgraded and several other updates need to be made. In addition to those required, several other improvements would enhance the buildings and programs offered. The gym needs new insulation and paneling. Installing a permanent sound system and giant screen television would improve the educational process.

3. New Early Childhood Center.

For a period of sixteen years the Early Childhood Program has been operating from a building not properly designed for such a program. The building needs extensive modifications to meet the growth potential. The congregation owns the property necessary for the construction of a new facility. A new facility would capitalize on the ministry potential.

Lay Ministry.

In the area of growth in Lay Ministry ideally there should be:

Increased numbers of individuals involved as prayer team members.

Increased numbers of lay leader retreats.

Increased numbers of stewardship seminars.

Lay ministry teams providing Bible Studies in the surrounding apartment complexes.

Lay led Vacation Bible Schools in the apartment complexes.

Continued growth in discipleship.

A weakness of lay ministry is that involvement is directly proportional to burn out. The more members involved in ministry, the less the load on each, and the higher the retention of workers. This theory is good on paper. What must be taken into consideration is that lay involvement is directly proportional to growth in discipleship. As individuals grow in their study of the Scriptures, they grow in their understanding of what it means to be a disciple. As they practice discipleship they take personal ownership of the ministry. As lay ownership increases, more ministry in the congregation and community can be accomplished.

CHAPTER 9

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE PROPOSED MODEL.

The tools necessary for evaluation of the results of the proposed model are limited. A partial evaluation can be obtained from basic statistical information. The congregation declined in membership by an average of 157 members a year during a seven year period prior to implementation of the model. Since implementation that decline has been reduced to 24 members a year for a six year period. During that same time period there have been 230 confirmations of adults and juniors and 125 baptisms of infants.

The congregation has made great strides in stewardship. During 1990 the congregation was informed that, due to the delinquency of mortgage payments to the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, foreclosure proceedings would be initiated if fifty thousand dollars was not paid to bring the account to date. The finances (in cash) were raised in seven weeks. Since that time there has been continual instruction in biblical stewardship. As a result, not only have the scheduled payments been made on time, also twenty thousand dollars a year has been paid toward the principle.

The congregation that was established, a traditional LC-MS congregation composed of individuals of European descent, no longer remains. Presently the congregation is a mixture of racial heritages. The worship services and studies are presently conducted in

the English language. Many of the individuals who are ministered to, when they come to the door seeking assistance and in the community during the week, speak only Spanish.

The congregation has stabilized. There is numerical growth; there is growth in stewardship and discipleship. There is also a racial mixture. Word and Sacraments are recognized as priority by the members. These traditional tools for evaluation would lead to the conclusion that the proposed model is effective. However, the transition is not complete. It has only started. Transition is not an event. It is a journey. The congregation must stay continually in an evaluation and transitional mode.

There are some elements that still need to be addressed. At the present time seventy percent of the membership comes from an unchurched or nominally churched background. Therefore, they do not have a history of regular worship or Bible study attendance. This results in fluctuation of average attendance. Converts also have a lack of knowledge of Lutheran heritage and congregational history. Actually the congregation is in the process of creating its own traditions. This lack of tradition can also be positive. There is little struggle to overcome the "we never did it that way" syndrome. With a large number of converts it is also necessary to maintain a clear explanation of the Sacraments. Many of the visitors that attend with converts ask to join them in communion. For this reason many times I explain the Real Presence from the altar prior to Communion. Actually, education is continually emphasized in every aspect of the congregation's programs and ministry. This type of ministry requires a large amount of patience with and acceptance of the individual.

Another element is the continual tension concerning the "pastor's time." Older members want the pastor to spend time visiting with them in their homes. They cannot understand the need of community visibility or the time spent ministering to the unchurched school and community families. After all, "they do not pay his salary." Questions to be wrestled with are "Has the Pastor been called to only serve the congregation?" and "When the Pastor serves the people of the community, is he not representing the congregation in service?" One of the roles of the pastor is to represent the congregation in the community.

Another challenge is that, although the majority of the programs are led by very qualified laymen and women, there is still the need on their part to have the pastor involved in all of the various stages of the program they are coordinating. They are given project approval and the authority to make decisions, yet there is still hesitancy. During a time when I was hospitalized and in the recovery process, they took control. Everything functioned very efficiently. After my return they slowly released the "responsibility " back to me. I questioned the adult Bible class one Sunday morning as to why they thought this transfer resulted. Members responded that "when the pastor is around they like for him to be responsible for the final decisions." I continue to give them the responsibility of discipleship, and they continue to attempt to return it.

I have been in regular communication with Rev. Kenneth Hennings, Mission and Ministry Facilitator/Coordinator for the Texas District concerning the model Beautiful Savior was developing and its progress. As a result the congregation was selected to

represent the Texas District in a Synodical project of developing a model for congregations in transitional situations.

The other congregations involved in this project were Bethlehem, Ft. Wayne, Indiana; Zion, Orlando, Florida; and Prince of Peace, New Orleans, Louisiana. Each district involved in the project was represented by the pastor and four lay members of the congregation selected, along with the Mission Executive of the district. The project directors were Dr. Bob Scudieri, Board for Mission Services and Rev. Jerry Kosberg, Board for Evangelism Services of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The pastors, district, and synodical representatives met for the first time to initiate the project November 15, 1995. The "transition teams" met four times since that time, once in each congregation represented, with the final meeting occurring September 12-14, 1997. At the February 1-2, 1997 meeting I presented the basic outline of the model being followed at Beautiful Savior. The representatives agreed that it was a viable format which could easily be implemented in the various situations.

The transition teams were asked to produce two lists. The first was a list of **Points to Remember for Congregations in Transition** and the second **Things Good to Know as a Congregation Begins the Transition Process**. The teams involved in the process were aware that the project we were developing was also the emphasis of my Major Applied Project. They supported my work as we shared information.

Points to Remember for Congregations in Transition.

I. Maintain Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Identity

Remember whose Church it is.

Have diversity without loss of identity.

Spiritual growth through the Means of Grace is needed.

Develop the ability to communicate to the community who "Lutherans" are.

II. Becoming a Part of the Community.

Staffing and leadership need to reflect the demographic realities of the community.

Leadership works with and reflects the community.

Congregation and community share the congregation's facilities.

Use the church school as a bridge to the community.

Maintain an on going community awareness and make early response to change.

Survey the community needs and direct ministry toward those needs.

Recognize the reality and cost of change. There will be losses.

The congregation needs to earn the confidence and respect of the community.

The community needs to incorporate the congregation as its own.

It is important to have pastoral leadership in the congregation and community.

Congregation needs to be "visible" in the community.

The congregation needs an awareness and knowledge of the community leaders.

III. Working With and Advising the Congregation.

Bridge and involve all generations, race and socioeconomic cultures in the transition process.

Respect the past while focusing on the present reality.

Continually communicate to the membership what is being done.

Publicly praise and give thanks to God for the new opportunities.

Choose terminology carefully.

Incorporate new members into the congregation's ministry.

Invite prayer for new ministries.

Let each member know that they are welcome to participate in all projects.

Be honest about the transition.

Be willing to sacrifice, let programs have an honorable death.

IV. Structuring Goals.

Know what support is available from district and synod.

Focus less on "membership" statistics and more on ministry.

Pastors need a different way of measuring success.

Create a structure that helps transition and does not hinder it.

Establish a transition team.

Be intentional about transition.

Dream bigger dreams.

Continually cast the vision.

V. Things that are Good to Know as a Congregation Begins the Transition Process.

What is the understanding of the congregation of their present ministry or reason for existing?

What are the critical issues in the congregation?

Who are the "real influences" in the congregation?

Who is in favor of transition?

Who are the workers and who are the talkers?

What are the demographics of the congregation and the community?

What are the available resources of the congregation and community?

Know that money should not be an issue.

Know that there will be failures and loss of members.

Know that transition is a long process.

Know that you are not the only congregation in this situation.

Know that you start where you are with what you have.

Know that God knows you, the congregation, and the needs.

An extremely important point is that Urban ministry takes place in urban homes. It does not take place only in the church gym, sanctuary, parochial school, or day-care; it also takes place in the urban home. We need to meet the people, build a relationship and find out their needs. Jesus went to the people. We need to do the same.

The conclusions arrived at by those participating in the Congregations in Transition project provide support for the model proposed by this project.

My original intent for entering the Doctor of Ministry program was to be involved in a structured, continuing education program on a professional level that would both hone and expand personal ministry skills. Although there was ample opportunity to be involved in a program presented in area institutions, it was of extreme importance for me to apply for the theologically sound program offered by the institution from which I graduated. Upon entering the program I soon realized that it would be far more than an educational exercise. The instructors and pastors involved in the class provided a secure forum in which both professional and personal ministry issues could be shared. During certain classes and evening discussions the mood was that of a group therapy session. I looked forward each year to the time that would be spent on campus. These were times of

renewal for ministry. The required reading material and projects became an important resource for ministry in the congregation. The insights I acquired while participating in the program enabled me to become a more effective parish pastor, circuit counselor and board member of various community boards.

The city of Houston continues to be a center for immigration. As immigrants arrive they bring with them a variety of religions. Those who are heavily involved in ecumenical activities continue to strive to develop avenues of incorporation for all religions. The city has become a religious melting pot from which community members are invited to indulge. There is a continual need for information concerning these world religions, the ecumenical movement, and how these issues can best be addressed. Combine these concerns with the trend to develop "contemporary worship" settings, dysfunctional families and stewardship issues and you have a typical ministry setting. The program and those involved provided the information and encouragement that enables a pastor to return to the parish equipped and focused on ministry direction.

As to the effect of the Major Applied Project on my personal ministry; this project model is my ministry. The congregation is the setting in which I minister each day. The striving to transition ministry is an every day challenge. The written portion of the project may be complete. However, for Beautiful Savior and myself, the transition process continues.

The most important point that I have learned through the project is: As the congregation grows through the transition process, the pastor also must transition. Transition not in the sense of doctrinal compromise, but in presenting the Word to a

community made up of believers and non-believers in a manner relevant to their situation.

I am convinced that the eternal Word and Sacraments, given by the grace of the Triune God of Scriptures, are always contemporary and that the Holy Spirit is the initiator of transition.

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