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A Theological and Sociological Analysis of the Family Dropout Problem Following the Rite of Confirmation and Graduation of Children from Trinity Evangelical Lutheran School, Springfield, Illinois

Micheal Strong
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_strongm@csl.edu

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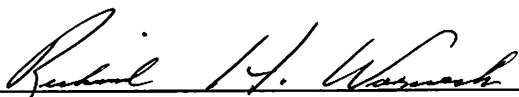
A THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FAMILY

DROPOUT PROBLEM FOLLOWING THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

AND GRADUATION OF CHILDREN FROM TRINITY EVANGELICAL

LUTHERAN SCHOOL, SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

A Major Applied Project
presented to the faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri
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by

Micheal M. Strong

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Advisor Richard H. Warneck
_____   DATE

Reader Glenn A. Nielsen
_____   DATE

Director, Dr. of Ministry Program   DATE
Glenn A. Nielsen

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PREFACE

By all outward appearances it was a "silk-stocking" vicarage assignment. The congregation was composed of mostly well-to-do folk who commuted to work in the city. The church had a relatively new building with an even newer day-schoo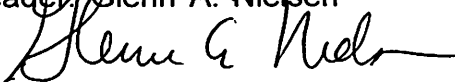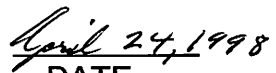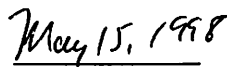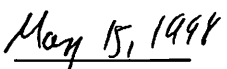l facility with high enrollment. The congregation could afford a fine organist and choir director. The new pastor had been a respected professor at Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Even the vicar's salary and housing were adequate. There was only thing wrong: many of the two thousand plus communicants didn't exist. Because the former elderly pastor had been slowing down for several years, and because the leadership of the congregation was rather ill-informed, and because record keeping was inadequate, over 600 communicants existed only on paper. No calls had been made on them; their contact with the church by and large consisted of a monthly newsletter. The new Senior Pastor, in the light of this rather disturbing information, made the decision that, among other things, it would be the vicar's job to begin the process of determining membership status and, if possible, reactivate some of the inactives through an intensive visitation program. I am happy to say that, despite the vicar's inexperience, idealism, and sometimes assertive nature, some were reactivated, some had children

baptized, and some even became part of the congregational leadership. I am sad to say that most did not. In one year of calling he did not even complete one entire round of calls on the delinquents. The number to be called on was too large for one person. The vicar was too inexperienced. Some persons were determined to be indifferent to their spiritual needs, no matter the cost. Others were so needy that no matter the number of calls, it would never be enough.

The second and third parishes were much like the vicarage. They both were characterized by a high number of lapsed members who rarely, if ever, were visited. The lay leadership, while perhaps somewhat aware of the discrepancy between membership and attendance, seemed indifferent to the situation. Initially, there was much suspicion on the part of some members for being called on, and some family members became very anxious that their family members were being "targeted" because of their inactivity. Again I am happy to say that some successes were experienced. But once again the task was too large and the obstacles too great for one person, or two, or even twenty.

It is in this context, of a pastor who is thoroughly experienced in making delinquent calls and enjoys doing it, that this paper is being written. This paper, however, is not written with a view of providing the pastor/reader with better organizational skills, wiser words to say, or a plan of attack which will mobilize masses of laity to go out and knock on doors and get the lapsed

back to church. While there is nothing wrong with those ideas and perhaps some day someone will "discover" such a surefire method; rather it is the purpose of this paper to investigate three areas of study.

First, we will look at the meaning of a *quia* subscription to the confessions especially as this subscription impacts one's use of Church Growth and systems theory insights. Secondly, I hope to remove myself from the horns of a dilemma regarding Church Growth and systems theory. Both appear to have the potential of helping the body of Christ deal with those who are spiritually delinquent, but both are viewed askance by many Lutheran theologians. For this reason, I approach Church Growth with a great deal of skepticism, knowing from the start that an attitude of full acceptance or rejection will be unpopular with myself. Systems theory I approach much more comfortably, knowing that it is not as controversial in the church. However, systems theory still needs careful scrutinization as it is clearly an extra Biblical/confessional resource with presuppositions all of its own. In order to examine these three areas of study, I have attempted to very carefully define what it means to be a confessional Lutheran in order that an appropriate "spirit" in each of the other two areas might be carefully determined. In addition to this, a number of delinquent persons were surveyed, and a smaller number of them were personally interviewed to see if any of their observations might coincide with some of the suggestions gleaned from the two above mentioned areas.

In order that the Body of Christ at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Springfield, Illinois, might more faithfully serve Him who is both its Redeemer and Lord, the final section of the paper will draw together all three areas: Confessional Subscription, the two areas of sociological study, Church Growth and systems theory, as well as the responses/observations of the delinquents surveyed.

ABSTRACT

This project analyzes the problem of dropouts at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Springfield, Illinois, by a four step process. (1) First a strict confessional position will be articulated in this paper. (2) Then, while examining two current sociological trends, Church Growth and systems theory, some aspects of both movements will be found to be deficient for a confessional Lutheran while others usable. (3) Former or lapsed members are then surveyed and interviewed to determine their perceived reasons for becoming dropouts. (4) Finally, incorporating all of the above material, recommendations are made to the congregation and pastor of ways that dropouts may be reduced and the lapsed may be reclaimed.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM DEFINED

The Problem of Church Dropouts

The problem of inactive members within the visible church is a universal
one. So, likewise, is the difficulty, grief, and frustration of congregational
and/or family members who are concerned about the inactivity of a loved one
universally felt. For many pastors the problem of inactivity is also aggravated
when recommending termination of membership for those who do not return
within a reasonable period of time. It is not pleasant for a pastor to deal with
such cases which, frequently, also includes dealing with the family members
who seem unable to understand the reasons their loved one is being removed
from membership. How does the church/pastor/member get to this point?
Why do some families/individuals become delinquent? Why do others, who
for all practical purposes appear no different, remain faithful and active in the
church? Why is it so difficult for some congregations to address the problem
of delinquents? Why is it that some congregations seem absolutely indifferent
and uncaring toward the lapsed, never visiting them and/or endeavoring to
encourage them to return to the Word and Sacrament ministry of the church?
And why is it that at other times these congregations appear very protective

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and caring, refusing to remove inactives after many years of delinquency? What can the church and pastor do to alleviate the problem of delinquency? The purpose of this paper will be to examine some of the theological and sociological issues of the dropout problem at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Springfield, Illinois. Finally, this paper will draw together the information gathered and address the problem in a constructive way.

<u>The Problem of Church Dropouts at Large</u>

Within the Christian community the problem of dropouts is a well-documented and long standing problem. The Scriptures[1] do not have a specific designation for those who drop out of the church and still consider themselves Christians. And although Hebrews 10:25 "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, . . ." seems to be addressing the problem of dropouts, it could also be argued that it is really addressing those who are abandoning the faith altogether. Nevertheless, in spite of a certain number of losses, the history of the early church is one of almost unparalleled growth.[2] Yet very early in the apostolic era, St. Luke

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[1]All Scriptural references are from the New International Version.

[2]Tertullian, near the end of the second century or the beginning of the third said, "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed." Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, <u>The Ante-Nicene Father, Vol. III</u> (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company n.d.), 55.

records the first cases of post-resurrection apostates,[3] Ananias and

Sapphira,[4] and shortly thereafter, Simon the Sorcerer.[5] Likewise, St. Paul,

who witnessed phenomenal growth in the Hellenic and Roman world, also

experienced the problem of apostasy. About midway through the apostolic

era, but near the end of his ministry, St. Paul writes to his younger co-worker

Timothy, "Fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.

Some have rejected them and ship-wrecked their faith"[6] and "Demas,

because he loved this world, has deserted me"[7] So also Jesus, even

earlier, in a much more somber tone, addresses the problem of future

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[3] "Apostasy" is from the Greek *apo* meaning "from" and the root *sta* meaning "to stand." Thus someone who apostatizes no longer stands with his/her companions. It is found only once in the New Testament in I Thessalonians 2:3 and translated in the New International Version as "rebellion." William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 97. While the word may seem offensive to many today regarding dropouts, Biblically, it does, so it seems, describe the situation for many dropouts. However, since it is not the intention of this writer to read the hearts of those interviewed, and the fact that those interviewed did not profess a rejection of the faith, throughout this paper the words "dropout" and "lapsed" will be used as synonymous terms separate from that of those who apostatize.

[4] Acts 5:1-11.

[5] Acts 8:9-24.

[6] I Tim. 1:18-20.

[7] II Tim. 4:10.

apostates when he asks, "However, when the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth?"[8]

The early church fathers also make frequent references to the problem of apostasy and heresy.[9] As a result of frequent persecutions they also developed a particular terminology regarding both the faithful and the lapsed. Austin notes the development of the terms.

> Those who suffered death were called *martyrs*. Those who suffered great punishments and remained true to the faith were called *confessors*. Many, however, renounced Christ, some permanently and some temporarily, to escape torture; they were known as the lapsed. Those who bribed officers to purchase certificates stating they had sacrificed to gods were called *libellatici*. Some delivered up copies of Scriptures and came to be scornfully identified as *traditores*.[10]

It is also a well known fact that at least one of the more long-lasting and relatively successful[11] separatist movements of the early church (Donatism) came into existence, in part at least, because of apostasy of the clergy during times of persecution.[12]

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[8]Luke 18:8.

[9]Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Father, Vols. I, II and III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1989), Vol. I, 68, 71, 82-83, Vol. II, 50; and Vol. III, 243-265.

[10]Bill R. Austin, Austin's Topical History of Christianity (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1983), 61.

[11]Ibid., 92.

[12]D.F. Wright, "Donatism," in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House 1978), s.v. "Donatism" by D.F. Wright and also s.v. "Traditors." The formation of the Donatist sect was in large part the result of

However, the problem of dropouts like that of apostasy has not been confined to the early church alone. In the United States, in the last twenty five years, the problem of dropouts has received much attention due to the rather dramatic decline of membership in many mainline denominations and the rise of numerous cults. As early as 1972, Dean M. Kelly has documented the decline of mainline Christianity in his book Why Conservative Churches are Growing:

> In the latter years of the 1960's something remarkable happened in the United States: for the first time in the nation's history most of the major church groups stopped growing and began to shrink. Though not one of the most dramatic developments of those years, it may prove to be one of the most significant, especially for students of man's social behavior. Certainly those concerned with religion, either as adherents or observers, have wondered what it means and what it portends for the future.[13]

And, of course, as most are aware, the decline has not abated. Carl Dudley draws an interesting, almost humorous, verbal picture of this continued decline:

> Mainline denominations and academic institutions have responded to this challenging new situation with all the resources of their arts and sciences. Statisticians collected data, pollsters asked questions, denominational leaders developed programs, theologians reflected, biblical scholars pondered, pastors agonized--sociologists,

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objections raised to the acceptance of clergy who were consecrated by those who had apostatized during Emperor Diocletian's persecution (303-304). Those who did so were called traditores, i.e. "traitors." Although generally proscribed, Donatism continued to exist in North Africa into the 7th century when the Saracens overran the land.

[13]Dean M. Kelly, Why Conservative Churches are Growing (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 1.

anthropologists, historians, missiologists, all took a look and commented. But church membership continued to drop in the 1970's, then seemed to be stabilizing, and now . . . the story is unfinished.[14]

While Dudley's 1979 uncertainty about the future is understandable, we now know that the decline he noted has not abated. Recent information regarding membership for mainline denominations continues to reflect a decline of membership as well as an increase in non-Christian religions[15] in the United States. According to Kenneth Woodward,

For 25 consecutive years, liberal Protestantism's seven-sister denominations[16] have watched their collective membership decline. Although the number of Protestants in general is growing - an evangelical church is opening somewhere daily - the mainline denominations are not.[17]

Recently, however, more attention has focused on the younger, newly accepted/received or confirmed than on the more mature dropouts because the dropout rate among the younger age groups is higher than that of the more mature. For example, Hoge, McGuire, and Stratman state that within the Roman Catholic community 45% of all dropouts, prior to old age, are

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[14] Carl S. Dudley, Where Have All Our People Gone? (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 5.

[15]The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary (Glendale, California: The Barna Research Group, 1990), 24.

[16]The Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

[17]Kenneth L. Woodward, "Dead End for the Mainline?" Newsweek, 9 August 1993, 46-48.

young dropouts, that is, Roman Catholics who stopped attending Mass at age

twenty- two or younger.[18] While this information is significant, it should also

be noted that their working definition of Roman Catholic dropouts excludes

those members within the early teen-age years. Undoubtedly, inclusion of the

teenagers would raise the dropout rate even more. They write that,

> a dropout is a baptized Catholic who no longer attends Mass as
> often as twice a year (apart from Christmas, Easter, weddings, and
> funerals) and who has stopped within the past three years.[19]

> Since our lower age limit for interviewing persons was 18, no one
> could have dropped out prior to 15, even though, in fact, some
> persons drop out earlier.[20]

Caplovitz and Sharrow have summarized their perception of the gravity of the

situation by saying that dropouts are

> growing at a rather rampant rate among the young before they
> reach college. Were this trend to continue unchecked, it may well
> mean that in fifty years or so, America's religious communities as
> we know them today, will have disappeared.[21]

Thus we find that across much of the ecclesiastical spectrum in the United

States decline in membership is a predominant trend.

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[18]Dean R. Hoge, Kenneth McGuire, and Bernard F. Stratman, <u>Converts, Dropouts, Returnees: A Study of Religious Change Among Catholics</u> (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), 84.

[19]Ibid., 81.

[20]Ibid., 82.

[21]David Caplovitz and Fred Sharrow. <u>The Religious Drop-Outs: Apostasy Among College Graduates</u> (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), 188.

The Problem of Church Dropouts in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LC—MS) has experienced the same decline of membership as mainline Protestantism is evident. Table 1 summarizes this decline.

Table 1.- - Two decades of change in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

1972 Communicant membership	1982 Communicant Membership and change	1992 Communicant membership and change
2,028,728	2,051,168 +1.11%	1,958,747 -4.51

Source: Statistical Year Book, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 214.

This trend toward declining membership was already noted by Paul Picard. He noted that since 1960 the growth rate had been decelerating and by 1970 The LC—MS would very possibly be at a point of declining membership.[22] As the title of Picard's study would indicate, back door losses played an important part in that decelerating membership.[23] He also suggests, tentatively, that the number of back door losses of persons in the age brackets of 19-34 is disportionately higher than it ought to be given the

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[22]Paul R. Picard, Back Door Losses: An Analysis of Membership Losses from the Congregations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod during the year 1966 (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, n.d.), 3-4.

[23]Picard, 5.

distribution of membership by age.[24]

Within The LC—MS, this same decline/loss in participation by the young recently received into communicant membership may also be seen in the sharp decline in attendance at Sunday morning Bible classes. For example, through the years 1989-92, 121,010 youth were instructed and confirmed in

Table 2. -- The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Ten years of gains and losses

Year	Gains from the Outside	Back Door Losses	Net Effect (Gains/Losses)
1979	38,836	49,573	-10,737
1980	43,105	49,387	- 6,282
1981	43,576	50,769	- 7,193
1982	43,537	48,094	- 4,557
1983	42,822	51,096	- 8,274
1984	42,143	50,497	- 8,354
1985	41,599	50,019	- 8,420
1986	40,862	49,721	- 8,970
1987	40,561	50,501	- 9,490
1988	41,988	53,220	-11,232

Source: Ibid.

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[24]Ibid., 30 and 74.

Synod's churches; yet in 1992 total enrollment for high school Bible class was only 46,138 or 37.77% of those confirmed in the years 1989-92.[25] While not in itself proving that the youth have dropped away altogether from the Word and Sacrament ministry of The LC—MS, it nevertheless does suggest a diminishing participation of post-confirmation age young people.

Since the purpose of this paper, in part, is to investigate the problem of dropouts or back door losses, it is also helpful to compare the number of members gained from the outside with the number of those lost. As shown in table 2 the ratio of losses to gains within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for the years 1979-88 has run, on the average, over 20% higher in the loss column. Regretfully, no figures are available regarding the ages of those received and removed. Nevertheless, regardless of age, when one considers the impact of this decline in lost souls, workers for the kingdom, revenues, and opportunities for personal witness, the loss is truly staggering!

The Problem of Family Dropouts Within the Framework of Trinity Lutheran Church

Ultimately, however, the problem of dropouts is a local church problem, as most problems in the church are. Trinity Lutheran Church in Springfield, Illinois, has experienced a similar dropout problem analogous to the church at large and The LC—MS. However, the problem of dropouts at Trinity Lutheran

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[25]Sunday School Statistics. (St. Louis: Board for Parish Services, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1992).

Table 3. -- Delinquents by age groups at Trinity - December 31, 1993

Age Groups and Numbers		Number Delinquent and Percentages	
11-15	45	0	00%
16-20	133	42	31%
21-25	113	58	51%
26-30	126	64	50%
31-35	172	54	31%
36-40	148	39	26%
41-45	148	28	18%
46-50	123	31	25%
51-55	86	23	26%
56-60	64	13	20%
61-65	67	13	19%
66-70	93	8	08%
71-75	73	6	08%
76-80	55	1	01%
81-85	67	2	02%
86+	47	0	00%

Source: Trinity Lutheran Church

can be examined more closely than the impersonal statistics and figures

given for Christendom at large and particular denominations. A review of the

dropout statistics (table 3) at Trinity is enlightening because it reveals that the

highest percentage of delinquents at Trinity is found in four

contiguous age groups ranging from 16-35.[26] This group is remarkably

similar to Picard's 19-34 age groups that had a disportionately high dropout

rate.

The impact this delinquency problem will have on Trinity congregation in

the next twenty five years, if it is ignored and left unattended, is profound.

The impact becomes clear when one considers that these four age groups, in

addition to representing the prime child-bearing ages necessary for internal

growth of the congregation, also represent *in toto* about one third of the

communicant membership and over one half (57%) of the total delinquents in

the congregation. It is also interesting that while few current school families

are among the delinquents, the highest delinquency rate among the various

age groups at Trinity Church is found to be among those who have school

age children. Thus, while 72% of possible Trinity's student members are

enrolled in Trinity School and there is little delinquency problem among those

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[26]Following the lead of the Department of Planning and Research of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in my paper, I will operate with the definition of an inactive member (dropout) as one who has not communed in a given calendar year. And although it may be argued that this criterion is far too lenient, it will be the one used since this paper is written in the context of this particular church body.

enrolled (less than 10%), the vast majority of those who do not have their children enrolled in Trinity are delinquent. Undoubtedly, Trinity School's church attendance policy of a 60% minimum for school children and parents has an impact on the attendance of these families. This attendance policy states that Trinity Lutheran Church members who have students enrolled in Trinity Lutheran School "be expected to maintain a minimum of 60% church attendance each quarter of the school year."[27] It should be noted that in addition to this requirement for enrollment at Trinity School, there are penalties for families that fail to meet this expectation.

> If a Trinity church parent member fails to attend at least 60% in a given school quarter, they will be placed on a "mission status category." These families will then be billed 50% of the non-member tuition fee for the school quarter following in which they were below the 60% minimum.[28]

Yet, how long-lasting is the positive attendance pattern of children and parents of Trinity school families? As one examines the records of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, especially the lists of former members, one cannot help but be struck by the family names that are represented in the general category of no longer being members at Trinity. Even a cursory glance at these records reinforces the idea that the loss of members is not haphazard but follows family lines. While the removal of entire families over a period of years is done for varying reasons, (some transferring out, others

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[27]Voters Assembly, Trinity Lutheran Church, March, 1993.

[28]Ibid.

joining other churches, and some being removed for delinquency or public sins), the number of families who are lapsed does suggest that something more is at work than the occasional removal of individuals who apostatize.

The conjecture that post-confirmation/graduation dropouts and the larger membership dropout problem are related is confirmed in tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. -- Junior Confirmand dropouts at Trinity Lutheran Church after ten years

	Confirmed 1984	Confirmed 1985
Junior Confirmands where at least one parent was a member	20	28
Junior confirmands still a member at the end of 1993	13 (65%)	19 (68%)
Junior confirmands active (at least 1 Communion) in 1993	7 (53%)	9 (47%)

Source: Trinity Lutheran Church

Given the loss of a certain number of confirmands due to moves, releases, and removals, table 4 reveals that between the year they were confirmed and 1993, of those still members, the number of post-confirmation dropouts is considerable. Of those still members, barely one half of those confirmed in the years 1984/85 have communed at least once in the year 1993. The old attitude that "they'll return after they get the rebellion and the

sowing of a few wild oats over"[29] does not seem to be true, at least over a ten year span in Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.

As disturbing as such figures are, further examination reveals that the problem of post-confirmation dropouts in Trinity Church has broader ramifications than just the loss of a significant number of junior confirmands following confirmation. The problem of post-confirmation dropouts should also be viewed in the larger context of families. That is, not only do youth drop out who have first been catechized through several years of parochial education, confirmation, and finally graduation, but frequently so do their families and in particular their member parents. This dropping out of families, viewed over a period of years, begins with a decline in the vital participation of the parents in organizations of the school or church. Eventually, sometimes simultaneously, attendance at divine services declines for both the newly confirmed members and their parents as well. This progression of "delinquency" of families over a period of years often results in the loss of a major portion of those families from the local church through removal, excommunication, or joining another church often of a different theological viewpoint. An example of this dropping out of adults may be clearly seen in table 5.

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[29]Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen ed., Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950-1978 (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979), 30-40. David A. Roozen and Jackson W. Corrall in "Recent Trends in Church Membership and Participation: An Introduction," "... suggests that the return rate is particularly high for individuals in their late 20's and 30's."

Table 5. -- Percentage comparison of 1984/85 confirmands and parents
and active/inactive in 1993

Junior Confirmands of 1984 still members in 1993 and % active.	7 53%	Active parental units of 1984 Junior Confirmands in 1993.	5 38%
Junior Confirmands of 1985 still members in 1993 and % active.	9 47%	Active parental units of 1985 Junior Confirmands in 1993.	6 31%

Source: Trinity Lutheran Church

As can be seen from tables 4 and 5, a sizable number of young adults are lost to Trinity Church over ten years. Only slightly more than half of those confirmed in the years 1984/85 are still members. And of those who are still members, only 53% and 47% in their respective confirmation years, are active in 1993. But equally important for the consideration of the lapsed, on the parental side of the active and inactive junior confirmands, even fewer parental units are still active in comparison to their children. (A parental unit would consist of member parents only. For a two person parental unit to be active, both husband and wife must be active.)

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the reasons why some families, relatively active prior to confirmation and graduation of the children from the primary educational institution of the church, stay active in the church, while others families, under the same outward circumstances, do not remain active but become less and less so eventually resulting in removal from membership. With that understanding, a partial remedy for the high

dropout rate can be proposed for Trinity Lutheran Church that is appropriate from a confessional Lutheran position.

To accomplish this, I will first examine the meaning and importance of Confessional subscription as we attempt to deal with the "cause and curing" of dropouts. Secondly, I will discuss from a Confessional and Biblical perspective the cause of apostasy. Thirdly, the Confessions will be examined for the purpose of determining if they themselves speak to the question of "How the church needs to reach out to the lapsed." Next, with both a summary and a critique of their views from a confessional Lutheran position, I will attempt to answer the question of why people fall away from the church from the perspective of two *extra ecclesia* organizations. We will see what the Church Growth Movement and systems theory suggests in the way of remedies for the problem of lapsed members. Next, I will explain the content of my research, how I conducted it, and the findings. Finally, I will draw together the information presented and address the problem of dropouts at Trinity in a constructive manner.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPORTANCE AND MEANING OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION IN ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF DROPOUTS

Like many issues that have arisen since the writing of the Lutheran Confessions, there are no specific articles in any of the confessional writings on the subject of dropouts or apostasy.[30] Much less do the Confessions deal with the problem of entire families dropping out of the church. This absence of a definitive article, however, does not mean that the Confessions are silent on the subject. Also, they do suggest a Biblical/confessional remedy. What the absence of a specific article does mean, however, is that the confessional answer is more difficult to ascertain and hence is more prone to misunderstanding and confusion than if there had been an article *"de apostasy."* Secondly, the absence of a specific article also means that the Confessions must be examined *in toto* before one can extract a confessional position statement on dropouts and the manner in which they should be treated. That is the primary purpose of chapter three.

However, before we do that, we will discuss the matter of confessional

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[30] It has often been pointed out that there is no article on inerrancy. We may also add to that list the absence of articles on Chialism, the Church Growth Movement and the like.

subscription. The subject of confessional subscription arises here for the following reason. How one views the Confessions will also impact how one attempts to deal with the problem of dropouts in view of the many varied theological solutions to the problem.

Confessional Subscription

The various Lutheran churches in America are clearly divided on the issue of what it means "to subscribe" to the Confessions. Allbeck noted in 1968 that there "are differences among Lutheran Churches as to whether they officially acknowledge all of the Confessions, or only the major ones."[31] While this observation was made over twenty five years ago, the controversy regarding confessional subscription is a much older problem. It could reasonably be argued that the issue of confessional subscription has existed almost as long as the Lutheran Church became an identifiable confessing body at Augsburg in 1530. Be that as it may, the confessional subscription issue certainly came to the forefront of American Lutheranism when some in the General Synod in the mid-1800's began emphasizing the Lutheran church's particularities from Protestantism in general.[32] With the formation of the Missouri Synod in 1847, its rapid growth and its strict aggressive

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[31]Willard Dow Allbeck, Studies in the Lutheran Confessions (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 4-5.

[32]David A. Gustafson, Lutherans in Crisis (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 121.

confessional position, the issue was aggravated. The situation was thoroughly exacerbated in 1855 when Samuel Schmucker published the "Definite Synodical Platform" as an attempt to answer the "German churches, which profess the entire mass of former symbols."[33] It sought to replace The Augsburg Confession as a genuinely American document freed from the supposed errors of the reformers who had brought on the Reformation but who had not gone far enough in their theological corrections. Nerv gives this summary of the "adjustments" made in the "Platform" in comparison with the "Augsburg Confession.

> The sanction of the ceremonies during the Mass is struck from the 24th article of the Augsburg Confession. Eliminated from Article II was the sentence stating that the new birth takes place through Baptism and the Holy Ghost; from Article VIII the declaration that the blessings of the Lord's supper are not dependent on the worthiness of the officiating minister; from Article IX the statement that through Baptism grace is offered. Article X reads in its revised form; "In regard to the Lord's supper they teach that Christ is present with the communicants in the Lord's supper, 'under the emblem of bread and wine.'" Article XI has been dropped entirely because it commended private confession.[34]

At least as early as 1858 the understanding of confessional subscription of various synods had taken on a thoroughly polemical air when C.F.W. Walther, first President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, delivered an essay to the Western District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod entitled,

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[33]Ibid., 127.

[34]J. L. Nerv, A History of Lutheranism in America, 1619-1930 (Fort Wayne IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1979) , 58.

"Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe

Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church." In this essay

Walther holds to an unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions

and discusses the objections to that position.[35] Walther's closing paragraph

gives a clear picture of the situation that inevitably arose between those who

advocated an unconditional subscription to the unaltered Augsburg

Confession of 1530 and those who opted for Schmucker's "Americanized"

version of the same. Walther asserts,

> If our Church, which is now [1858] lying in the dust shall rise again
> and not gradually degenerate into a body which is Lutheran in name
> only, without any characteristics of the Church of the Reformation,
> that all the fine words about ecclesiastical propriety, about the re-
> introduction of ancient rites and ceremonies, all attempts to invest
> the office of the ministry with special glory and authority, all this will
> be utterly in vain. The only help for resurrecting our Church lies in
> a renewed acceptance of its old orthodox confessions and in a
> renewed unconditional subscription to its symbols.[36]

Although the times have changed dramatically and in 1997 there are far

fewer Lutheran church bodies in the United States, the debate regarding the

meaning of confessional subscription continues. The constitution of The

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) states that they accept:

> the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel,
> acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that

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[35]C.F.W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church," trans. Alex. Wm. C. Guebert, Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 18, (April 1947): 241-253.

[36]Ibid., 253.

likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.[37]

The other confessional writings, after fellowship has been declared on the basis of agreement with the Augsburg Confession, are then declared to be "further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church."[38] What the statement "further valid interpretations" actually means regarding the other confessional writings, however, has not been defined up to this date by the ELCA.

However, one may reasonably determine what the position is regarding these words by two examples. (1) First, the ELCA's position may be seen in Braaten/Jenson's dogmatics book, Christian Dogmatics, used in ELCA seminaries. Braaten and Jenson thoroughly reject an unconditional subscription to the Confessions in lieu of an historical and evolutionary subscription.[39] (2) The Lutheran-Reformed committee's document "A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today" (ACC) recommends full altar and pulpit fellowship between the ELCA and the Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church USA, and the United Church of Christ without full confessional agreement. The

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[37]Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (n.p. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987), 19.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., Christian Dogmatics, Vol. I. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 51-54.

subsequent review of this document by the seminary faculties of The LC—MS

speaks to the question. Both the phrase "further valid interpretations" and

what the following statement in the constitution

> . . . accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness
> to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all
> churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered
> Augsburg Confession[40]

becomes clear.

Further, the ACC states that:

> we can name no "church-dividing differences' that should preclude
> the declaration of full fellowship between these churches. While the
> disagreements between our communities that led to the sixteenth-
> century condemnations regarding eucharist, christology, and
> predestination continue to shape and reflect our identities, they
> cannot claim to be church-dividing today and should not stand in the
> way of achieving "full communion" among us. In addition, we affirm
> that the differences among these churches of the Reformation on
> questions of confessional commitment, ministry, and ecclesial polity
> fall within the bounds of allowable evangelical diversity and are
> therefore not church-dividing.[41]

Needless to say, this conclusion has been challenged by the more

conservative LC—MS. The response of the faculty of the Ft. Wayne

Seminary of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod clearly demonstrates how

the ELCA in "A Common Calling" departs from the historic Lutheran position

regarding confessional subscription. In sum the faculty states that

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[40]Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.

[41]Keith F. Nickle and Timothy F. Lull, eds., A Common Calling The
Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today (Minneapolis:
Augsburg, 1993), 65.

The fundamental understanding of the ACC that the Confessions are not regarded as doctrinal statements is quite striking, since we have traditionally understood them to be doctrinal statements. This is presupposed by the oath to the Confessions required in the constitutions of our congregations and the ordination vows of our pastors.[42]

The joint response of both seminaries of The LC—MS is even more to the point as to what the ACC document does to confessional subscription and the Christian faith when it states

In summary, we wish to point out that the ACC uses the Lutheran Confessions in a way that is in conflict with their self-understanding. Thus the Book of Concord as a faithful witness to the life-giving truth of God's word is lost. What is finally important about this is not merely that the truth is lost, but that in losing the truth salvation is lost.[43]

In contrast to the ELCA's constitution, the constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states that "every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.[44] In other words, The LC—MS, ranks all of the confessional writings on the same level. The ELCA does not. Thus, while both the ELCA and The LC—MS constitutionally accept the Augsburg Confession in principle as a defining document for what Lutherans must believe, the tentative and vague acceptance in the ELCA of the symbolical writings, other

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[42]"A Review of 'A Common Calling,'" Concordia Theological Quarterly, 57 (July 1993), 196.

[43]Ibid. 193.

[44]1992 Handbook The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1992), 9.

than the Augsburg Confession, clearly calls into serious question the kind of commitment the ELCA has to the Augsburg Confession as well. And the matter of confessional subscription in the ELCA is made even more tenuous by the recommendation of the ACC to full altar and pulpit fellowship with some non-Lutheran churches, clearly rejecting thereby the historic view of the Confessions as doctrinal statements fully in accord with Holy Scripture and to be confessed before fellowship is established.

The problem of confessional subscription does not stop here. While it may be said that both churches insist upon acceptance of the Augsburg Confession as a confessional document, it is clear that the understanding of ELCA and The LC—MS acceptance of the Augsburg Confession clearly differs. Regarding the meaning of confessional subscription, Frederick Bente, a Missouri Synod pastor, writes,

> The position accorded the symbols in the Lutheran Church is clearly defined by the Book of Concord itself. According to it Holy Scripture alone is to be regarded as the sole rule and norm by which absolutely all doctrine and teachers are to be judged. . . .
>
> The Lutheran symbols, therefore are not intended to supplant the Scriptures, nor do they do so. They do, however, set forth what has been at all times the unanimous understanding of the pure Christian doctrine adhered to by sincere and loyal Lutherans everywhere; and, at the same time, they show convincingly from the Scriptures that our forefathers did indeed manfully confess nothing but God's eternal truth, which every Christian is in duty bound to, and consistently always will, believe, teach and confess.[45]

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[45]Frederick Bente, Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Concordia Triglotta, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 7.

The "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod," adopted

by the Synod in 1932, while not binding upon the membership of the Synod,

also reflects the historical position of the Synod and continues to speak for

many in the Synod regarding confessional subscription when it states:

> Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the
> Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the
> symbols not "in so far as," but "because," the symbols agree with
> Scripture.
>
> The confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that
> are treated *ex professo*, but also those that are merely introduced in
> support of other doctrines.
> The obligation does not extend to historical statements, 'purely
> exegetical questions," and other matters not belonging to the
> doctrinal content of the symbols. All *doctrines* of the Symbols are
> based on clear statements of Scripture.[46]

And Robert Kolb recently echoed the same sentiments regarding confessional

subscription. He writes that confessional subscription

> does not mean, for example, simply claiming a certain historical
> tradition in name while ignoring it in the daily practice of the church.
> It does not mean viewing the Lutheran confessional documents as
> ends in themselves.[47]

Rather it means, "continuing to confess their content."[48] Thus, still to this

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[46]Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 21-22.

[47]Robert Kolb, Confessing the Faith Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 133.

[48]Ibid.

day, the position of The LC—MS, for both its professional church workers[49]

and its laity membership[50] is that all of the Confessions of the Lutheran

Church are accurate statements regarding the positions they espouse. No

mental reservation or "*quatenus*" positions are permitted, but *"quia"*[51] alone,

without reservation, is the position of The LC—MS. On the other hand, The

ELCA's subscription to the Augsburg Confession, by its tentative "historical"

acceptance of the other confessional writings in its constitution and its

recommendation for pulpit and altar fellowship with non-Lutherans relativizes

what the term confessional subscription means.

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[49]Commission on Worship, Lutheran Worship Agenda, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 211, 225, 256. Pastors state their agreement to this question: "Do you believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Authority and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord - as these are contained in the Book of Concord - are also in agreement with this one scriptural faith?"

[50]Lutheran Worship (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 206. In the Rite of Confirmation the confirmands are asked: "Do you hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God and confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church drawn from them, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true?"

[51]*Quatenus* from the Latin meaning "in so far as." Hence one who holds a *quatenus* position would say, "I subscribe to the Confessions in so far as they agree with Scripture," meaning that if one disagrees with the Confessions one still can speak of subscribing, but the end result is a selective subscription. *Quia* comes from the Latin meaning "because." Hence one who subscribes *quia* believes all of the Confessions correctly teach the Word of God.

Conclusions Regarding Confessional Subscription

What impact does the "type" of confessional subscription one declares and practices have on the issue of family dropouts? Actually, confessional subscription matters a great deal. If one's subscription is *quatenus*, then the loss of members may not be a concern. That is, a *quatenus* subscription to the Confessions relativizes doctrine according to one's personal viewpoint. Thus, depending upon one's view of various key doctrines, a loss of members to a sect that clearly undermines essential doctrines may not be viewed with concern. So, likewise, even the loss of a member of a congregation to the Latter Day Saints, the Hindu religion, or another non-Christian cult may not be viewed as a matter of concern for the clergy, church body, or its members, all because adherence to the doctrines set forth in the Confessions is relativized.

The fundamental problem with a *quatenus* subscription is that such a "subscription" to the Confessions is little better than no subscription at all given that whatever "in so far as" means to one person does not necessarily mean the same thing to another. Thus when one holds to a *quatenus* subscription of the Confessions, the loss of members may or may not be viewed as detrimental to the health of the local church or the spiritual welfare of those individuals who apostatize. And if it is viewed with concern, there can be no consensus in the church about what that concern is or ought to be since there can be no confessional consensus with a *quatenus* subscription. With a *quatenus* subscription the relativism of the faith has already been

determined, and each person and/or congregation is free to believe whatever is chosen. Such relativism, while accepted by many in the church today,[52] is eventually fatal to the proclamation of the Gospel, the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and the life of the local church.

As a Lutheran, it can be said, that only as one holds to a *quia* subscription of the confession is one able to maintain the kind of conviction that results in the serious attention that is needed to deal with the problem of dropouts. Furthermore, only as one holds to a *quia* subscription of the Confessions will the Confessions themselves be important enough to seriously consider what they have to say regarding dropouts and to consider their recommendations. Even when fundamental doctrines of the Holy Scriptures are denied, the net result - eventually - without that "felicitous inconsistency"[53] of which Luther and Pieper speak so frequently, is unbelief. So also the result must be the same when the Confessions are approached other than with a *quia* subscription.

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[52]George Barna, <u>Absolute Confusion</u> (Ventura California: Regal Books, 1993), 73. Barna reports that "two out of three adults contend that 'it does not matter what religious faith you follow because all faiths teach similar lessons about life.'"

[53]Francis Pieper, <u>Christian Dogmatics</u> Vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), x. "We do not call into question the personal faith of every theologian who from the safe retreat of his study or lecture room attacks the *satisfaction vicaria*. Luther, too, takes cognizance of such "felicitous inconsistency" when he says of the theologians whom Erasmus quoted against him that the language they used *inter disputandum* was not the language their heart spoke before God." 6.

Herman Sasse's remarks in His "Church and Confession" written in 1941

speak well for the need for a *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions in

seriously addressing the matter of the lapsed as well as all doctrinal

difficulties the church is experiencing today.

> Here the "pious relativism" has become impious indeed; in removing
> the authority of the confession, it removes that of the Bible also. If
> it is no longer possible to say whether a confessional statement is in
> accordance with Scripture or not, or if I can say no more than,
> "Today it appears so to me; therefore I will allow it to stand
> provisionally," then my doubt is basically not toward the confession
> but toward Scripture. I have lost confidence in it to interpret itself. I
> hear then only the confusing throng of exegetical opinions as they
> contradict one another, but no longer the clear and unmistakable
> voice of God's Word.[54]

> Here there is no "provisional," no "for the time being." That can
> never be, for the confessor always stands at the threshold of
> eternity. Confession is always "in the presence of God," as the
> Formula of Concord says.... This means that the confessor is
> always aware of the final judgment. Because the Lutheran Church
> has understood the profound eschatological seriousness of all
> confession, to which the New Testament bears witness, therefore it
> knows no "provisional" confession.[55]

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[54]Herman Sasse, <u>We Confess Jesus Christ</u>, (St. Louis: Concordia
Publishing House, 1984), 85.

[55]Ibid., 86.

CHAPTER 3

A CONFESSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF APOSTASY

Although there has not been a controversy in the Lutheran Church regarding the matter of falling away from the faith, the Confessions[56] are quite clear as to the cause of apostasy. Article XI of the Formula of Concord, which was written largely to avoid anticipated future difficulties in the Lutheran Church regarding the matter of eternal election,[57] quite naturally also discusses the matter of falling away. It will be helpful, therefore, to summarize the confessional material from Article XI and other symbolical writings regarding the matter of dropouts. Two issues are important in this regard, The first, God's salvation by grace through faith, is addressed by the Lutheran Confessions as they address simultaneously the second issue, why some are eventually lost. Comprehending the teaching on these two issues

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[56] Hereafter, the phrase "Confessions" or "confessional" will refer to those writings of the Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord. It is these writings which historically have defined what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess.

[57]Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), "Formula of Concord", Thorough Declaration, Art. XI, 1. (Throughout the remainder of this paper the citations in the Triglotta will include the particular document, an article if appropriate, and the paragraph number as adopted by the Triglotta.)

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helps to arrive at a Lutheran confessional remedy for dealing with the dropouts.

Salvation by Grace Through Faith

In dealing with the first issue, the Confessions are unequivocal in reply. In fact, the one over-riding message of the Confessions deals with this question of grace and forgiveness and its Scriptural answer. Even as Luther struggled with the problem of finding a gracious God in a theological system that largely focused on Jesus as the angry judge, so the Confessions present Luther's re-discovery of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. That is, those who are saved are saved solely by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus with man contributing nothing to his salvation. That central message is made clear throughout the Confessions.

> Also they teach that men cannot be *justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith.* [58]

> But the Gospel freely offers, for Christ's sake, to us, who have been vanquished by sin and death, reconciliation, which is received, not by works, but by faith alone. This faith brings to God, not confidence in one's own merits, but only confidence in the promise, or the mercy promised in Christ.[59]

> Accordingly, this eternal election of God is to be considered in Christ, and not outside of or without Christ. For *in Christ*, the Apostle Paul testifies, Eph. 1:4f., *He hath chosen us before the*

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[58]Concordia Triglotta, "Augsburg Confession," Art. IV, 45.

[59]Concordia Triglotta, "Apology to the Augsburg Confession," Art. IV, 133.

foundation of the world as it is written: *He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.*[60]

...Holy Scriptures ascribe conversion, faith in Christ, regeneration, renewal, and everything that belongs to their efficacious beginning and completion, not to human powers of the natural free will, neither entirely nor half, nor in any, even the least or most inconsiderable part, but *in solidum*, that is, entirely, solely, to the divine working and the Holy Ghost, as also the *Apology* teaches.[61]

And this salvation is always worked by the third person of the Holy Trinity through the means of grace. The "Small Catechism" states,

I believe that I cannot by my own reason of strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith;[62]

The "Formula of Concord" makes certain that there is no misunderstanding about the necessity of the Holy Spirit and the means of grace.

God the Holy Ghost, however, does not effect conversion without means, but uses for this purpose the preaching and hearing of God's Word....[63]

And in order that we may come to Christ, the Holy Ghost works true faith through the hearing of the Word, ... when it is preached in its truth and purity.[64]

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[60]Ibid., "FC." Through Declaration, Art. XI, 65. (All references to the "Formula of Concord" in this chapter will be to the 'Thorough Declaration' unless noted otherwise.)

[61]Ibid., Art. II, 25.

[62]Concordia Triglotta, "Small Catechism," 545.

[63]Ibid., "FC.," 'Epitome,' Art. II, 4.

[64]Ibid., Art. XI., 69.

For the Father draws indeed by the power of His Holy Ghost, however, according to His usual order [the order decreed and instituted by Himself], by the hearing of His holy, divine Word, as with a net, by which the elect are plucked from the jaws of the devil.[65]

It is also through the Sacraments that this faith is engendered for "the Holy Ghost desires to work these things, namely repentance and faith, in us through the Word and the Sacraments."[66] Finally, in the "Apology to the Augsburg Confession" we read,

This faith is nourished in a manifold way in temptations, through the declarations of the Gospel [the hearing of sermons, reading] and the use of the Sacraments. For these are [seals and] signs of [the covenant and grace] in the New Testament, i.e., signs of [propitiation and] the remission of sins. They offer, therefore, the remission of sins, as the words of the Lord's Supper clearly testify, Matt. 26,26.28: *This is My body, which is given for you... This is the cup of the New Testament*, etc. Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the Sacraments.[67]

Clearly, in the matter of salvation, the Confessions declares that no one contributes anything toward salvation, but instead attributes all credit to God the Holy Spirit working faith in the heart through the means of grace. Those who are saved are saved solely by grace through faith. "We must conclude, therefore, that being reconciled by faith, we are accounted righteous for Christ's sake, not for the sake of the Law or our works."[68]

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[65]Ibid., 76.

[66]Ibid., 71.

[67]Ibid., "Ap.," Art. XII, 263.

[68]Ibid., Art. III., 56.

Why Do Some Fall Away?

God is gracious and desires all men to be saved. However, as Scripture attests, some are eventually lost. Thus, we are at the very heart of the matter - dropouts. It is the position of the Confessions that those who are believers may also fall into unbelief and if they do not repent and believe the Gospel once again, they will be eternally lost. Thus the "Augsburg Confession" condemns "the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost."[69] And the "Smalcald Articles" agrees,

> It is, accordingly, necessary to know and to teach that when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting of and striving with it, happen to fall into manifest sins, as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the Holy Ghost has departed from them [they cast out faith and the Holy Ghost]. For the Holy Ghost does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so as to be accomplished, but represses and restrains it so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Ghost and faith are [certainly] not present.[70]

What is the reason for their fall and eventual damnation if they do not repent? Clearly, the "Formula of Concord" thoroughly rejects any attempt to make God the cause of the believers' fall or damnation. It says,

> For few receive the Word and follow it; the greatest number despise the Word, and will not come to the wedding, Matt. 22,3ff. The cause for this contempt for the Word is not God's foreknowledge [or predestination], but the perverse will of man, which rejects and perverts the means and instruments of the Holy Ghost, which God offers him through the call, and resists the Holy Ghost, which God offers him through the Word, as Christ says: *How*

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[69]Ibid., "AC.", Art. XII, 49.

[70]Concordia Triglotta, "The Smalcald Articles," Part III, Art. III, 491.

often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not Matt 23:37.[71]

As a summary to the question, "Why are some lost and not others?" Brechmann provides a clear and concise confessional answer. "The true cause of reprobation is in man himself, and is undoubtedly the obstinate contempt of the grace offered in the Gospel.[72]

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[71]Ibid., "FC.," Article XI., 1077.

[72]Heinrich Schmid, <u>The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,</u> trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacob (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1875; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 292.

CHAPTER 4

A CONFESSIONAL APPROACH TO THE ENDANGERED AND LAPSED

Given that apostasy is really a matter of a person turning his back on God, the question still remains whether the church can do anything with those who have fallen away or those who appear to be in danger of falling away. The framework of this chapter will address three issues related to the above. First, I will examine the question of whether it is possible to determine if a person has or is falling from the faith. Second, I will elaborate on the importance of properly distinguishing Law and Gospel in dealing with the delinquents. Third, I will confront the problem of dropouts from a confessional perspective with a view to seeing what the Confessions have to say to the church regarding the use of sociological insights in dealing with the lapsed.

Can You Tell Who Is A Genuine Dropout?

As the following citations demonstrate, the confessors believed that it was possible to tell when a person had fallen from the faith.

> Wherefore, the faith which receives remission of sins in a heart terrified and fleeing sin does not remain in those who obey their

desires, neither does it co-exist with mortal sin.[73]

But when the baptized have acted against their conscience, allowed sin to rule in them, and thus have grieved and lost the Holy Ghost in them, they need not be rebaptized, but must be converted again.

... in genuine conversion a change, new emotion [renewal], must take place.... For where none of these occurs or is present, there is also no true conversion.[74]

Therefore true, saving faith is not in those who are without contrition and sorrow, and have a wicked purpose to remain and persevere in sins.[75]

Whoever does not seek or desire the Sacrament at least four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is no Christian, just as it is no Christian who does not believe or hear the Gospel;[76]

While it is also clear that the Confessions do not say that in every case it is possible to tell whether a person is a Christian or not, ("hypocrites and wicked men ... are members of the Church according to this fellowship of outward signs"[77]) they do state that it is possible to tell by a person's willful, sinful, and unrepentant actions that he/she is no longer a Christian. For the Confessions, faith is not merely intellectual agreement to certain propositional truths, but it is a matter of living those truths as well. And when people no

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[73]Concordia Triglotta, "Ap.," Art. III. 24.

[74]Ibid., "FC.," Art. II, 69-70.

[75]Ibid., Art. III, 26.

[76]Concordia Triglotta,"Small Catechism," Preface, 22.

[77]"Ap.," Art. VII, 30.

longer live according to that truth, even if they had earlier confessed the truth, they were not to be regarded a believer in Christ.

Law and Gospel the *Sine Qua Non*

Confessionally, given that the church is able to determine that a certain person has fallen from the faith due to impenitence, or at least is in danger of falling due to his neglect of the means of grace, we ask what approach is the church to take in its attempt to reclaim its lost sons and daughters? By today's rather *laissez-faire* attitudes within the church catholic, this question might seem a bit narrow as it asks for a confessional response to the matter of the lapsed rather than just asking about methods of getting them back. The latter approach, however, is inadequate because it ignores a theology of reclamation and whether the absence of members from church really makes a significant difference to the church other than reduced income. As to the lapsed, such an attitude fails to adequately understand the position of the lapsed according to the Scriptures and thus fails to have the mind of Christ. In this regard it is helpful to remember T.A. Kantonen's remark: "Evangelism is the living expression of a church's doctrinal theology."[78] While evangelism, *per se,* is not the issue here, it is true nevertheless that because the Lutheran church has a doctrinal theology based on the Scriptures and the Confessions, we must ask if there is a specific confessional approach to

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[78]T. A. Kantonen, The Theology of Evangelism (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), 11.

reaching the lapsed. Without asking such a question, the doctrinal theology of the Lutheran church is relegated to the textbook and classroom and is no longer a living thing. Therefore, what approach is a confessional Lutheran church to take in its attempt to reclaim its lost sons and daughters?

The answer to this question may be briefly summarized under three headings. First, it must be remembered that conversion, faith in Christ, is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. This point has already been made in the preceding chapter and clearly accompanies a *quia* subscription of the Confessions. Second, a Scriptural and confessional approach to reclaiming a lost son or daughter is always through the means of grace—Word and Sacraments. This too has already been elaborated on, but Luther's extremely clear statement in the "Smalcald Articles" on this subject helps put the issue of delinquents in its proper perspective. He writes,

> we ought and must maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and the Sacraments.[79]

Third, while people may outwardly return to church and even become active in its organization and programs, it ought not to be assumed that by virtue of external activity that they are Christians. Rather, confession of the faith once delivered is necessary. For the lapsed that is possible only through the proper distinction and application of Law and Gospel given by the

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[79]Concordia Triglotta, "Smalcald Articles," Art. VIII., 10.

working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. The importance of

Law and Gospel has not been discussed thus far, but it obviously merits

some elaboration from the Confessions. The "Formula of Concord" reminds

us that,

> the distinction between Law and the Gospel is a special brilliant
> light, which serves to the end that God's Word may be rightly
> divided, and the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles may
> be properly explained and understood, we must guard it with
> especial care, in order that these two doctrines may not be mingled
> with one another, or a law be made out of the Gospel, whereby the
> merit of Christ is obscured and troubled consciences are robbed of
> their comfort, which they other wise have in the holy Gospel when it
> is preached genuinely and in its purity, and by which they can
> support themselves in their most grievous trials against the terrors
> of the Law.[80]

The Lutheran teaching regarding the Law is quite clear. The "Formula of

Concord," in speaking regarding the nature and purpose of the Law says that

it is,

> a divine doctrine in which the righteous immutable will of God is
> revealed, what is to be the quality of man in his nature, thoughts,
> words, and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable
> to God; and it threatens its transgressors with God's wrath and
> temporal and eternal punishments.[81]

The Smalcald Articles succinctly identifies the task of the Law:

> the chief office or force of the Law is that it reveals original sin with
> all its fruits and shows man how very low his nature has fallen, and
> has become [fundamentally and] utterly corrupted[82]

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[80]Ibid., "FC.," Art. V., 1.

[81]Ibid., 17.

[82]Concordia Triglotta, SA., Part III, Art. II, 4.

The result of this work that the Law performs is quite clear as well. The Apology reminds us that, "the Law always accuses us, always shows that God is angry."[83] While the Law is to be proclaimed to all people, believers and unbelievers alike,[84] regarding the lapsed or erring, the confessors say, "through the preaching of the Law and its threats ... the hearts of impenitent men may be terrified, and brought to a knowledge of their sins and to repentance."[85] Of the Gospel it says, once they have come to repentance,

> that they be comforted and strengthened again by the preaching of the *holy Gospel* concerning Christ, our Lord, namely, that to those who believe the Gospel, God forgives all their sins through Christ, adopts them as children for His sake, and out of pure grace, without any merit on their part, justifies and saves them,...[86]

Regarding the necessity of both Law and Gospel being proclaimed, the "Apology" says,

> To a true and salutary repentance the preaching of the Law alone is not sufficient, BUT THE GOSPEL SHOULD BE ADDED THERETO. Therefore the two doctrines belong together, and should also be urged by the side of each other, but in a definite order and with proper distinction.[87]

In summary, of the confessional position regarding the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, Article V of the Formula concludes,

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[83]Concordia Triglotta, Ap, Art. III., 7.

[84]Concordia Triglotta, FC, Thorough Declaration, Art VI., 20.

[85]Ibid., 24.

[86]Ibid., 25.

[87]Ibid., 15.

Now in order that both doctrines, that of the Law and that of the Gospel, be not mingled and confounded with one another, and that which belongs to the one may not be ascribed to the other, whereby the merit and benefits of Christ are easily obscured and the Gospel is again turned into a doctrine of the Law, ... therefore the true and proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel must with all diligence be inculcated and preserved.[88]

Thus, both the Law and Gospel must be proclaimed to the endangered or lapsed. But because the dropout gives testimony to have fallen or is near to having fallen from the faith by the despising of Word and Sacrament, it is the Law that especially must be proclaimed to bring the impenitent to repentance in order to be saved through the Gospel.

Beyond the Law and Gospel

Finally, speaking confessionally and still addressing the issue of dropouts (although it need not be dropouts exclusively), the question arises whether it is proper to speak of going beyond the Confession's Law/Gospel *modus operandi* in attempting to reach out to the lapsed? Is there anything that can or ought to be done beyond the proper proclamation of Law to the lapsed and the saving Gospel to the repentant? Certainly the church is duty-bound, scripturally and confessionally, to proclaim both Law and Gospel. And certainly, in many instances, the person being dealt with is not just a weak brother in Christ, but has already fallen from the faith, is actively opposed to the Gospel, and cannot respond to the Gospel in any positive way as the

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[88]Ibid., 27.

Confessions repeatedly remind us,

> But before man is enlightened, converted, regenerated, renewed,
> and drawn by the Holy Ghost, he can of himself and of his own
> natural powers begin. work, or concur in working in spiritual things
> and in his own conversion or regeneration just as little as stone or a
> block or clay. For although he can control the outward members
> and hear the Gospel, and to a certain extent meditate upon it, also
> discourse concerning it, as is to be seen in the Pharisees and
> hypocrites, nevertheless he regards it as foolishness, and cannot
> believe it. And in this extent he acts even worse than a block,
> inasmuch as he is rebellious and hostile to God's will, unless the
> Holy Ghost is efficacious in him....[89].

Given these truths, is there an approach, or approaches, to take toward

the lapsed individual which includes anything else in addition to Law and

Gospel being rightly proclaimed? Said still another way, within the bounds of

a *quia* subscription to the Confessions, are there other factors that the church

may address, in addition to Law and Gospel, as it attempts to reach the

lapsed? It is the belief of this writer that the Confessions do address this

matter. And again, while there is no article in the Confessions dealing

specifically with this question, even as there is no specific article dealing with

why some people drop out, we are saying that the Confessions recognize, in

addition to the proper proclamation of Law and Gospel and the correct

administration of the Sacraments, that the church has the command to speak

to the needs of the people, even those who are outside the Body of Christ.

While the proper proclamation of Law and Gospel remains pre-eminent, the

consideration of the people, "where they're at" beyond their spiritual condition

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[89]Ibid., Art. II., 24.

is also a recognized concern in the Confessions and ought, therefore, to be in our parishes as well. And as we speak of "where they're at," it should be noted and emphasized that we are not speaking of their spiritual state as that is already determined by their neglect of Word and Sacrament. By "where they're at" we mean the sociological/psychological situation the dropouts are in prior to and during the time of the church's attempts to reclaim them through Law and Gospel.

For example, in the "Augsburg Confession" Melancthon notes that when the Mass is conducted, that Latin is retained except for the interspersing of some German hymns.[90] Melancthon's reasoning for this is that "ceremonies are needed to this end alone that the unlearned be taught [what they need to know of Christ]."[91] In the Apology he elaborates on this practice by saying,

> The adversaries have a long declamation concerning the use of the Latin language in the Mass, in which they absurdly trifle as to how it profits [what a great merit is achieved by] an unlearned hearer to hear in the faith of the Church a Mass which he does not understand. They evidently imagine that the mere work of hearing is a service, that it profits without being understood. We are not unwilling to malignantly pursue these things, but we leave them to the judgment of the reader. We mention them only for the purpose of stating in passing, that also among us the Latin lessons and prayers are retained.
> Since ceremonies, however, ought to be observed both to teach men Scripture, and that those admonished by the Word may conceive faith and fear [of God, and obtain comfort], and thus also may pray (for these are the designs of ceremonies), we retain the Latin language on account of those who are learning and

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[90]Concordia Triglotta, "AC.," Art II, 2.

[91]Ibid.

understand Latin, and we mingle with it German hymns, in order
that the people also may have something to learn, and by which
faith and fear may be called for.[92]

Now why do the churches of the Augsburg Confession do this? Obviously,

because "it's where the people are at." Granted that the Mass of necessity

had been purified, and granted that it is the purified Mass and the meaning of

the words of the hymns that are crucial for the teaching of the faith to the

people, yet clearly some of the adjustments made in the Mass went beyond

the pure proclamation of Law and Gospel. Law and Gospel could just as

easily have been proclaimed through the exclusive continued singing of Latin

hymns and liturgy with proper instruction of the people as to their meaning.

Yet this was not done.

In Article XXVI of the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon notes that "very

many traditions are kept on our part, which conduce to good order in the

Church, as the Order of Lessons in the Mass and the chief holy-days.[93] At

the same time he remarks that should such observances be understood as if

they justified the sinner before God, they may be "omitted without offense."[94]

While the problem of thinking that rites and traditions justify is not the issue

here, it ought to be noted that a rigid attitude toward changing rites and

traditions is not altogether evident.

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[92]Concordia Triglotta, "Ap, " Art. XXIV, 2.

[93]Concordia Triglotta, Art XXVI, 40.

[94]Ibid., 41.

Melancthon also observes that certain human traditions were introduced

into the early church since they served a good purpose and have been

retained by the confessing churches.

> But they (the early church fathers) observed human rites for the
> sake of bodily advantage. That the people might know at what time
> to assemble; that for the sake of example, all things in the churches
> might be done in order and becomingly; lastly, that the common
> people might receive a sort of training. For the distinction of times
> and the variety of rites are of service in admonishing the common
> people. The Fathers had these reasons for maintaining the rites
> and for these reasons we also judge it right that traditions [good
> customs] be maintained[95]

Thus, here, while defending the use of time-honored tradition, the Apology, by

inference, recognizes these traditions are dispensable in the event they

should no longer serve the people since they are not necessary for

justification as their opponents claimed.[96]

Melancthon's litany of sermon topics in Ap. XV also clearly supports the

contention that the needs of the people, be they active or lapsed, need to be

taken into consideration. He states that,

> in our churches all the sermons are occupied with such topics as
> these: of repentance; of the fear of God; of faith in Christ, of the
> righteousness of faith, of the consolation of consciences by faith, of
> the exercises of faith; of prayer, what its nature should be, and that
> we should be fully confident that it is efficacious, that it is heard; of
> the cross; of the authority of magistrates and all civil ordinances
> [likewise, how each one in his station should live in a Christian
> manner, and our of obedience to the command of the Lord God,
> should conduct himself in reference to worldly ordinance and law];

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[95]Ibid., Art. XV, 20.

[96]Ibid., 9.

of the distinction between the kingdom of Christ, or the spiritual kingdom, and political affairs; of marriage; of the education and instruction of children; of chastity; of all the offices of love.[97]

While the pericoptic system was not abandoned and free texts used exclusively on these topics to meet the needs of the people, it is also nevertheless true that Melancthon's list of sermon topics does make the point that the sermons in the evangelical churches addressed the needs of the people, both as to the chief article of faith and other articles, while the Romanists preached on "trifles" and their services were largely deserted.[98] From these examples one can see that a *quia* subscription does not automatically exclude hymns, sermons, and the like which are different from the time-honored practices of the church, as long as they are Christocentric and not a reintroduction of works-righteousness.

So also Luther reminds the preachers in his Preface to the "Small Catechism,"

> When you preach to intelligent and educated people, you are at liberty to exhibit your learning and to discuss these topics from different angles and in such a variety of ways as you may be capable of. But when you are teaching the young, adhere to a fixed and unchanging form and method.[99]

Now Luther does not say, "Change the doctrine," but clearly he says that the preacher needs to adjust the sermon to the level of education and spiritual

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[97]Ibid., 43.

[98]Ibid., 42.

[99]Concordia Triglotta, "SC.", "Preface," 9.

maturity that is appropriate to his hearers. Given a generally pervasive

Biblical illiteracy among God's people today, similar to that of Luther's day,

one wonders how much innovation is good for the people today.

Nevertheless, addressing the needs of the people through innovative liturgies,

topical sermons, and the like is not unacceptable confessionally.

In the Apology, Art. III., Melancthon, responding to a comment from the

Confutationists referencing St. Paul in Colossians 3:14 (*Charity, which is the*

bond of perfectness), speaks of the conduct and attitude of members of the

church toward one another,

> the integrity of the Church is preserved, when the strong bear with
> the weak, when the people take in good part some faults in the
> conduct of their teachers [have patience also with their preachers],
> when the bishops make some allowances for the weaknesses of the
> people [know how to exercise forbearance to the people, according
> to circumstances, with respect to all kinds of weaknesses and
> faults]. of these precepts of equity the books of all the wise are full,
> namely, that in every-day life we should make many allowances
> mutually for the sake of common tranquility. And of this Paul
> frequently teaches both here and elsewhere.[100]

Here Melancthon, while by no means attributing justification to the conduct of

people, does recognize a salutary benefit when people and pastors bear with

one another in their faults. Now what does Melancthon mean when he uses

the word "fault" and "weakness?" While it cannot be absolutely proven that

he is speaking of sins, that suggestion cannot logically be ruled out. At the

least, Melancthon means petty annoyances and "minor" sins. But be they

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[100]Concordia Triglotta, "Ap.," Art. III. 113.

sins or not, it is clear they are not the most positive qualities of the clergy or people. And it is clear that Melancthon, while not excluding the application of Law and Gospel, simply allows for everyone to practice patience and recognize that in the Church, for the sake of peace, sometimes these things must be tolerated. Is this an example of "going beyond the Law and Gospel"? Certainly the answer you give will depend upon what you mean by "going beyond." But one thing is clear: Luther and Melancthon did not, in all instances, weigh everything that was done in and around the divine services solely according to Law and Gospel. While Law and Gospel were preeminent, and not to be confused or ignored or omitted, the spiritual maturity of the people and their readiness to make changes also tempered how Law/Gospel was to be applied or not applied to the people.

What is the point of these examples? Clearly, it is not to suggest that we can contribute anything towards our personal salvation or that of another. Nor is it to suggest that addressing the lapsed "where they're at" instead of the proclamation of Law and Gospel will somehow open their hearts to the right hearing of the Law or Gospel when it is proclaimed. That position has been sufficiently refuted here. Rather, the point is to thoroughly recognize that the church does have a responsibility to put its best foot forward. In all manner possible the church is obligated to address the needs of the people. It is not with a view to abandoning the Law and Gospel as the sole means of conversion, but as much as is possible to address those needs so that when

the Law and Gospel are proclaimed, the dropouts will be listening, according to their fallen flesh, so that the Holy Spirit may anew terrify the heart through the Law and bring consolation through the Gospel. And when this is done properly, it is not synergism or Pelagianism but divine monergism.

CHAPTER 5

SOME CURRENT THEOLOGICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEWS
OF FAITH AND FAMILY DROPOUTS

PART 1

Since different disciplines operate with different presuppositions, many times antithetical to each other in whole or part, it is almost inevitable that they would come to different emhases and/or conclusions in addressing the same questions. This chapter and the next will examine two such disciplines, the Church Growth Movement and systems theory. It is, first of all, the intent of these chapters to glean from these disciplines their particular perspectives why people drop out of the church. Second, we intend to recommend adoption of any confessionally acceptable concepts from them that will help to alleviate the dropout problem.

These two disciplines were selected for different reasons. The Church Growth Movement was chosen because whether one agrees with all of its assumptions and presupposition, there can be little doubt that it is currently a much discussed topic among Christians in general and among Lutherans in particular. To ignore the Church Growth Movement and its conclusions relative to church dropouts is foolish. Although little has been written in the Church Growth field regarding congregations that operate Christian day

schools, many of its suggestions and insights are being applied to the typical Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation with or without a day school.

Systems theory was included because it addresses the problem of behavior, in this case dropouts, in a way that suggests that some of its insights may be useful in approaching lapsed persons. Better understanding of systems theory may help congregations modify the current and rather ineffective approaches being used with lapsed individuals in many congregations today as well as adopt new ones compatible with the systems approach.

These chapters will include a summary of the main tenets of these two fields, what they believe to be the "cause" of family dropouts, a critique of their positions, and what according to their particular view might help remedy the problem.

Church Growth

Church Growth is hot! A brief perusal of any Christian bookstore will reveal dozens of books that have been published in the last several years on the subject of Church Growth. If Church Growth Movement writers have not examined nearly every conceivable angle to promote their cause, it does not appear that it is for lack of trying. A sampling of titles includes

Leading Your Church to Growth
Understanding Church Growth
Church Growth Through Lutheran Schools
Activating the Passive Church
Ten Steps for Church Growth

Foundations for Church Growth
Your Church has Doors
Your Church Can Grow
The Friendship Factor
The Master's Plan for Making Disciples
The Contagious Congregation
The Small Church is Different
The Middle Sized Church
Foundations for Church Growth
The Apathetic and Bored Church Member
Heart to Heart, Sharing Christ With a Friend

Many denominations also have their various spokespersons who advance this or that aspect of Church Growth. Persons prominent within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who promote varieties of Church Growth Movement literature and programs include Rev. Dr. Kent Hunter, Rev. Waldo Werning, Rev. Dr. Alan Harre, Rev. Dr. David Luecke, Rev. Dr. Elmer Matthias, Rev. Dr. Guido Merkens, Barb and Dave Anderson, Rev. Leroy Biesenthal, and Rev. Dr. Stephen Wagner. Within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod many pastors, congregations, and even districts of the Synod have adopted a particular Church Growth model in one form or another to stimulate growth. Although not without their critics, the popularity of these "leaders" is obvious by the frequently positive "press" they receive along with the number of their speaking engagements throughout the Synod.

Church Growth is popular, in part, due to the difficult times Christendom, Lutheranism, and, in particular, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have come upon and the implied benefits of becoming a "church growther." For example, George Barna, a fervid "Church growther" himself, writes,

If we focus on the quantitative condition of the Church, the situation looks grave. There are few statistical measures, other than dollars contributed, which suggest that Christian churches are enjoying growth or success in impacting people's lives. Yes, the Church indisputably has a presence. However, it is a declining, leaderless presence.[101]

While a few denominations are growing in numbers, the majority are declining or plateaued.[102] And even those highly publicized increases frequently are of a questionable nature. Roozen and Hadaway suggest in their book,

When we talk about church growth and point to examples of rapidly growing congregations, frequently we are fooling ourselves into thinking we're having an impact that does not exist. Most church growth is a result of the recycling of the saints. We have become adept at circulating the faithful, without perfecting means of attracting the lost.[103]

Nationally, across the denominational spectrum, attendance at weekly divine services is sliding. In three years alone Sunday church attendance nationally has declined from 49% to 45%.[104] Sunday schools, the last generation's prime "church growth" tool, continues to be less than effective with adults with only about 16% of adults attending.[105] In The LC—MS, while Sunday School has rebounded from its low in the early 80's of 640,000 enrolled, to

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[101]The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary (Glendale, California: The Barna Research Group, 1990), 25.

[102]David A Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway, Church and Denominational Growth (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 38-39.

[103]Ibid., 27.

[104]Barna, Absolute Confusion, 63.

[105]Barna, The Church Today, 25.

692,000 in 1990, the attendance still remains well below its high of 969,000 in

1965.[106] The Church Growth Movement, however, "promises" positive

results for what ails the body of Christ. Church Growth literature, with its

success stories and its willingness to address these declines with a boldness

often missing in other sectors of Christendom today, has attracted a large

following of devotees.

Is the Church Growth Movement the new Ezra which will lead the

children of Israel out of the Babylonian captivity of plateaued and declining

membership and reclaim the promised land as many of its devotees claim it

to be?[107] Can it stem the tide of dropouts? Can it reverse the trend of a

high percentage of inactives on membership roles and increase church

attendance? Is Church Growth the cure for what ails Christendom?

What is the Church Growth Movement?

Win Arn and Donald McGavran define Church Growth in these words:

Church Growth—an application of Biblical, theological,
anthropological, and sociological principles to congregations and
denominations and to their communities in an effort to disciple the
greatest number of people for Jesus Christ. Believing that "it is

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[106]Dale E. Griffin, "1990 Christian Education Statistics," (n.p.:The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1991), 5.

[107]While no reputable Church growth advocate will guarantee growth, the way much of the literature is written and phrased the impression is given that if one faithfully applies the proper Church Growth methods that numerical growth must follow. A casual consideration of the titles of Church Growth books at the beginning of this chapter certainly supports that assertion as well.

God's will that His Church grow and His lost children be found," Church growth endeavors to devise strategies, develop objectives, and apply proven principles of growth to individual congregations, to denominations and to the worldwide Body of Christ.[108]

In addition to this overriding definition, Church Growth advocates have developed a number of principles by which the movement can be said to operate. A summary of these Church Growth principles is provided by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The LC—MS.

1. Church Growth principles are rooted in Scripture.

2. Churches grow when they are faithful stewards of the Gospel.

3. Finding the lost is the church's primary mission.

4. The church has a vital role in God's plan for discipling the nations.

5. God equips His church for mission by giving its members spiritual gifts.

6. The church has the responsibility to discern the spiritual health of its members.

7. Church Growth sees the mission fields ripe for the harvest.

8. Church Growth emphasizes the importance of the church knowing the community in which it lives and works.

9. The church can and should measure the receptivity of those whom it hopes to evangelize.

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[108]Donald A. McGavran and Winfield C. Arn, Ten Steps for Church Growth, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 127.

10.   Church Growth emphasizes the importance of wise planning.

11.   Pastors and congregations should develop Church Growth eyes.[109]

As one can see, the principles do hold out a promise to assist the church in successfully addressing the dropout problem.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in its ongoing examination of issues and theological trends has examined these Church Growth Movement principles. As a result, a series of Missiological principles has been produced which address Church Growth principles from a Lutheran/Biblical perspective. While the elaboration of these missiological principles (within the CTCR document) is clearly critical of many Church Growth principles, it should be noted that they do not out of hand reject each and every Church Growth principle. In addition, these missiological principles of the CTCR are not just critical of Church Growth. They also include corrective statements and milder warnings about non-Biblical/non-Lutheran theology which would also apply to the problem of dropouts. These corrective statements are:

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[109]Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement (Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1987), 27ff. While these principles are not direct quotes from Church Growth literature, they do represent general principles of Church Growth as gathered and articulated by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. These same principles were shared with theologians of Fuller Theological Seminary, the home of the Church Growth Institute and one of the recognized leading institutions in Church Growth matters.

1. Missiological principles must be applied in a way that correctly distinguishes between Law and Gospel.

2. Missiological principles must be applied in a way that reflects the proper relationship between justification and sanctification.

3. Missiological principles must distinguish between mission methods and the means of grace.

4. Missiological principles must distinguish between the pastoral office and the priesthood of all believers.

5. Missiological principles must distinguish between the gifts of grace which God gives His church today and the special signs and wonders He gave the apostles.

6. Lutherans using missiological principles must distinguish between faith in the promises of God and triumphalist claims to success through programs.

7. Lutherans using missiological principles must evaluate the homogenous unit principle in the light of the efficaciousness of the Gospel.

8. Lutherans using the missiological principles may find it advisable to use more familiar terminology.[110]

As one can see, these corrective missiological statements do not totally reject the Church Growth principles. Yet, they are an attempt to carefully address the excesses of Church Growth principles from a Lutheran/Confessional position as well as provide some guidance in our attempt to reach out to the lapsed.

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[110]Ibid., 39ff.

Church Growth Movement and Dropouts

The Church Growth Movement, by and large, does not spend a great deal of time on the matter of church dropouts. Its attitude seems to be that people would not drop out if the church were doing things correctly (which, while not entirely true Biblically, does have some validity regardless of one's attitude toward Church Growth). Thus, rather than focusing on the dropouts, the movement focuses on what brings people into the church. Furthermore there seems to be an assumption that what brings people into the church and keeps them there will also work for those who have become disenchanted or are lapsed. And while gaining new members is naturally a more appealing endeavor than attempting to reclaim the lapsed who frequently have a lot of "negative baggage" with them, it is true, nevertheless, that back door losses continue to be a major problem in most denominations whether or not the church/denomination is growing.

In a survey of the literature which discusses dropouts, this writer has found that many of those who do discuss the issue are Lutherans. This is not surprising, given the Lutheran church's strong position on justification by grace through faith alone and the means of grace as the instruments through which God's grace is proclaimed. But there are also problems with focusing on dropouts when the classic Church Growth model is incorporated into the plan, even if those who address it are Lutheran. The CTCR document addresses many of the problems in the current Church Growth model. For

example, can those who are Lutheran address the problem of dropouts from

a Church Growth perspective and remain faithful to Scripture and the

Lutheran Confessions? The CTCR document sees some serious problems.

> 1. The Lutheran Church confesses the Biblical doctrine of
>   the total depravity of the entire human race. This implies
>   that unconverted persons become receptive to the Gospel
>   only after they have been brought to a realization of their
>   lost condition by means of the Law, and the Holy Spirit
>   works faith in them by the proclamation of the
>   Gospel.[111]

The Church Growth model of Fuller Theological Seminary, on the other

hand, by and large, fails to recognize this utter fallenness and inability of man,

without the aid of the Holy Spirit, to come to faith.[112] Further, the Church

Growth model lays heavy emphasis upon sociological and anthropological

factors to get people to join a church and assumedly also uses the same

technique to get them to rejoin. In as much as most Church Growth

advocates and literature adhere to a synergistic view of salvation,[113] there is

little guarantee that there will be an emphasis on Law and Gospel if one

adopts the Church Growth perspective. Since the prevalent Church Growth

model has adopted a synergistic means of salvation, the question is whether

the Law and Gospel will even be recognized in Church Growth as the means

by which the Holy Spirit will do His work.

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[111]Ibid., 37.

[112]Ibid., 38.

[113]Ibid., 38.

2. Lutherans believe and teach that the Gospel, Holy
    Baptism, and the Lord's supper (as well as Holy
    Absolution), are the only means of grace which God has
    given to His church.[114]

Unfortunately, most Church Growth models, in addition to their synergistic approach to conversion, tend to downplay or deny outright that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are genuine means of grace.[115] Thus, if conversion becomes a matter of the unbeliever "making a decision for Christ" outside of the means of grace, how much more will a synergistic approach be adopted when the church attempts to "reclaim" a man or woman who has earlier made that supposed "decision" and has since become inactive in the church? When a church first ignores the human depravity and adopts a synergistic approach to salvation, it will, in its attempts to reclaim the lost for Christ also surely, once again, ignore the means of grace.

3. The Church Growth Movement appears to view growth
    primarily, if not exclusively, from a positive, success-
    oriented perspective. Results *will* accrue if one expects
    the church to grow, commits oneself to that end, and
    takes seriously the promise of Christ: "I will build my
    church, and the power of hell will not prevail against it." ...
    The church must and will grow, internally and externally, if
    this positive view is embraced![116]

While a positive attitude is commendable and any successes that the church has are helpful to general morale, it important to remember that the

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[114]Ibid., 41.

[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid., 45.

measurement of growth in the church is markedly different than the

measurement of growth by worldly standards. Biblically and confessionally

true church growth is the work of the Spirit not of a well-polished sermon or

well-orchestrated program which pushes all the emotional buttons and "thrills

the heart." True church growth is Christ-centered. It is theocentric not

anthropocentric. And the Christ who gives the growth has also said, "Take up

your cross and follow me"[117] rather than "come sit at my right and left

hands and enjoy the kingdom prepared for you."[118] This leads us to the

final point in this review of the CTCR document on Church Growth.

> 4. As they apply Law and Gospel to the needs of God's
> people, Lutherans must avoid all forms of triumphalism, as
> well as pessimism concerning the Lord's mission. ...
> Nurturing members of a Christian congregation with the
> Word and sacraments to a mature faith is a challenging
> task. Growth is often slow. Pastors and congregational
> leaders must resist the temptation to manipulate others to
> bring about the effects or results which lie in God's
> providence alone.[119]

Triumphalism, whenever it occurs, is counter to the way of the cross. The

church today would do well to heed Luther's words. He wrote,

> A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of the crucified
> and hidden God) teaches that punishments, cross and death are the
> most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the
> Lord of this theology himself has consecrated and blessed, not
> alone by the touch of his most holy flesh, but also by the embrace
> of his exceedingly holy and divine will, and he has left these relics

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[117]Matthew 10:38.

[118]Matthew 25:34.

[119]Evangelism and Church Growth, 45.

here to be kissed sought after and embraced. Indeed, fortunate and blessed is he who is considered by God to be so worthy that these treasures of the relics of Christ should be given to him; rather, who understands that they are given to him.[120]

How then do Church Growth advocates propose reaching the lapsed? After a careful reading of many Church Growth books and literature over the years and in preparing this paper, it is this writer's opinion that Arn and McGavran's definition of Church Growth is in many respects an overstatement of a true understanding of Church Growth and its methods of reaching the lost. It is an overstatement to say that Biblical and theological positions in most Church Growth literature take precedence over anthropological and sociological insights. To the contrary, it appears to this writer, in many instances, anthropological and sociological insights are the primary supporters of Church Growth methods. Frequently Church Growth appears to present a theology of church growth that hardly flows from a genuinely careful examination of the Scriptures that is faithful to a doctrinal confessional position. Generally speaking, the theological presuppositions of Church Growth are of Reformed Christianity. The picture of genuinely confessional Lutherans seeking to reach the lapsed and adopting uncritically Church Growth methods, as understood from its own literature, is simply not possible. While this writer does find that some Church Growth observations are helpful in ministry, he also believes that frequently these insights followed

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[120]Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses," Luther's Works, Vol 31 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 225-226.

to their natural conclusions, without proper Biblical controls, compromise the

Scriptural/confessional position that he has promised to uphold. In view of

this, the concluding remarks in the CTCR document are to be appropriate.

> Dependent on the promises of God given through the means of
> grace for growth and on the power of the Holy Spirit who bestows
> on it his manifold gifts, the church accepts with thanksgiving all
> methodological insights and wisdom that will enhance and facilitate
> the proclamation of the Word. In Christian freedom, though with
> Biblically tested criteria, the church will gladly make use of methods
> and techniques designed to accomplish this end.[121]

More to the point and certainly more forthright from a Lutheran perspective is

the following from the same document,

> If Lutherans use Church Growth materials, they must realize
> that the means of grace and mission methods serve different
> functions and purposes. Only the means of grace truly build the
> church. Organization is clearly not a means of grace and therefore
> does not itself build the church or cause it to grow[122]

If Lutherans choose to use the anthropological and sociological insights

gleaned from the Church Growth Movement literature, let them do it being

fully aware that these insights frequently assume positions that are in direct

conflict with Biblical/Confessional positions. While it may be possible to

"Lutheranize" some, and while many are common sense practices and issues,

many of the presuppositions of the Church Growth Movement literature

provide little theological substance that confessional Lutherans may adopt.

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[121]Ibid., 50.

[122]Ibid., 41.

Indeed, confessional Lutherans do reject many theological positions of the Church Growth movement.

Church Growth: Is Anything Usable?

Does that mean Church Growth material is not, in any fashion whatsoever, usable for confessional Lutherans? No, indeed! The Church Growth Movement possesses such broad encompassing points of view and various fields of study that to suggest there is nothing that can be used without violating Biblical/confessional principles would be foolish. What then is usable according to Biblical/confessional principles? What is the "wheat" and what is the "chaff" of Church Growth?

At this point it will be helpful if we examine some of Robert Koester's observations regarding Church Growth and Lutheranism from his book Law and Gospel: Foundation of Lutheran Ministry. Although Koester, a Wisconsin Synod pastor, earned his Doctor of Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary, he can hardly be considered a Church Growth Movement advocate. Still he does have several helpful insights which not only define the differences between the Church Growth Movement and the Lutheran church but also provide some suggestions where Church Growth may be implemented in a congregation which attempts to be confessional. His key diagram[123] from his book is presented below.

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[123]Robert J. Koester, Law and Gospel: Foundation of Lutheran Ministry (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993) xi.

ILLUSTRATION 1

Evangelical/Reformed   Lutheran
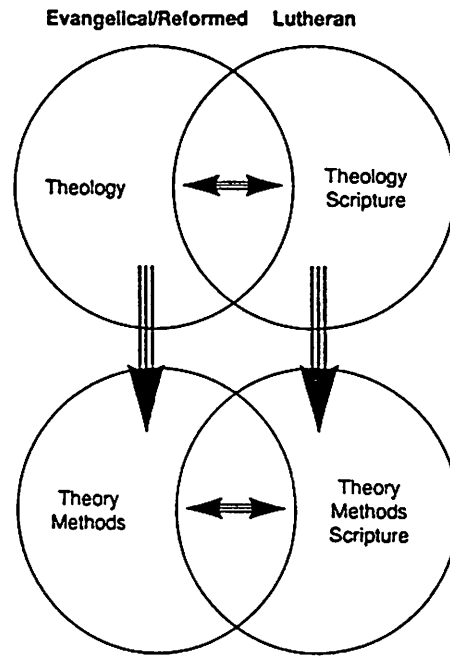
As Koester explains the diagram, the two upper circles represent the

theology of the Reformed and Lutheran churches. The lower circles

represent the "theory" and "methods"[124] that these two churches use to

carry out their theologies. The horizontal arrows within the intersecting

portion of the circles "represent the shift that has occurred in Protestant

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[124]Koester defines "methods" as "everything we do in evangelism, worship, education, social functions, and so on." xiii.

Christianity."[125]   The arrows pointing downward indicate that practice flows

out of one's belief. According to Koester the intersecting sections of the

upper circles indicate that "the theologies of the two churches are not totally

distinct, but they share certain teachings in common."[126]

Finally, Koester defines the lower intersecting portion of the circles as

indicating that "some Lutheran churches look more like Evangelical/Reformed

churches in their church life, and some Evangelical Reformed churches look

more like historic Lutheran Churches."[127]   Regarding this last observation,

Koester is undoubtedly correct that the lower overlapping portion indicates

how churches look, yet it is obvious to this writer that it symbolizes more than

that. If the intersecting portion of the upper circles (Theology, Scripture)

indicates that the Reformed and Lutherans have some teachings in common,

the intersecting portion of the lower circles (Theory, Methods) which flows out

of the upper circles must also indicate that the two have more in common

than merely how various Reformed or Lutheran churches look. The

intersecting portion of the lower circles also indicates that there are some

things within the lower portion that may be shared or are, at least, usable

regardless of whether one's theological position is Reformed or Lutheran,

even as in the upper circle certain theological positions are shared and usable

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[125]Ibid., xii.

[126]Ibid.

[127]Ibid.

between the church Reformed or Lutheran. What might some of the

acceptable shared methods be? As a tool to help come to some

understanding of what some of these "shared methods" might be, I will use

Koester's listing of those elements of Church Growth that challenge all

churches and clergy. He writes,

> Church growth leads every pastor to deal with the following topics:
> (1) the desire to grow, (2) the place of visions and goals in church
> planning, (3) whether we should use the "felt needs" emphasis in
> outreach and (4) the place of science and technology in the growth
> of God's church. Each of these topics is basic.[128]

Church Growth's Desire to Grow

Koester identifies the desire to grow as,

> the most fundamental issue Church Growth has raised. What
> should be the attitude of the pastor and people about growth of the
> church ? They answer: The pastor and congregation should want
> the church to grow.[129]

The problem with this statement, according to Koester, is not that God does

not want the church to grow, but that whenever and wherever growth

happens, the growth, according to the Scriptures is not the result of a Church

Growth attitude but because of the proclamation of the Gospel. It is, in other

words, the Gospel itself that brings the growth. Speaking of the early church

and Church Growth, Koester says,

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[128]Ibid., 118.

[129]Ibid., 120.

They didn't worry about actual growth or lack of it-although they certainly wanted God's Word to produce fruit. They simply did what they were able to do - preach the Word.[130]

Koester is undoubtedly correct about the emphasis in Church Growth on human power or ability to produce the growth, yet he ignores some of the realities of the Biblical record. Paul did not haphazardly go about proclaiming the Gospel. Although we are not always certain of the exact rationale, we do know that Paul stayed only a short time in Thessalonica due to opposition to the Gospel. It is implied that he and his companions stayed longer in Berea and would have stayed even longer because of a positive response had they not been harassed out of the city.[131] According to Acts 18 it appears that Paul stayed in Athens only a short time while Scripture says he stayed in Corinth a year and a half.[132] So likewise Paul mentions to the Ephesian elders that he stayed with them three years.[133] Why these different time frames? Certainly it was to give the Apostle time to thoroughly proclaim the Gospel. And, yes, sometimes it was through a direct command of God, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia

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[130]Ibid., 129.

[131]Acts 17:1-14.

[132]Acts 17:16-18:11.

[133]Acts 20:17-21.

and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."[134]

However, it seems just as certain that the Apostle's stay was also influenced by a positive response to the proclamation of the Gospel with which he was engaged. We may say that it was because he was able to see the results of his preaching that he found, both in Berea and Ephesus, a mission field that responded more positively to the Gospel and thus remained there for a time. Thus, one of the shared acceptable attitudes of Church Growth for a confessional Lutheran is the truth that God does want the church to grow, and God even expects us to recognize opportunities for that growth, with the proviso that we remember that growth comes from God through the proclamation of the Gospel by the means of grace and not by human efforts or imagined ability to decide for Christ.

It is important for anyone attempting to minister to inactives or seeking to "reactivate" them to remember that it is indeed God's will that His church grow and His lost children be found, even those who willfully turn their backs on the bride of Christ. Remembering that all godly growth comes through the means of grace, it may be said, with caution, that Church Growth rightly accents this important scriptural theme.

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[134]Acts 16:6.

The Place for Visions and Goals in Church Planning

The second area of Church Growth that challenges the church,

according to Koester, is that of visions and goals in church planning. He

notes that Church Growth "places a high priority on visions and goals but not

within the sphere of responsibility that God has given to man as understood

by Lutherans."[135] How so? He writes,

> My concern regarding visions and goals are related to those
> regarding the desire for numerical growth, as that desire has
> surfaced in the Church Growth Movement. At the heart of this issue
> lies the paradox that must remain intact if we are to maintain our
> understanding of the gospel as objective justification. We know that
> God wants all men to be saved and that he alone saves them. We
> know that people can resist his will. But we do not know why one
> person is saved and another lost. Nor can we penetrate the
> mystery by placing the blame on God or giving credit to man[136]

He uses another diagram to picture the proper limitations that visions, goals,

and methods have in ministry. In this diagram the limitations set for man are

confined to the solid inner circle with the message of justification at the

center.[137] The arrows,

> represent goals, visions, and methods. We work with these
> concepts, but only within the sphere of our understanding of
> justification. In other words, we work within the sphere of our
> understanding that the nature of the gospel forces us to focus on
> preaching the gospel.[138]

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[135]Koester, 138.

[136]Ibid., 144.

[137]Ibid., 135.

[138]Ibid., 135-36.

ILLUSTRATION 2
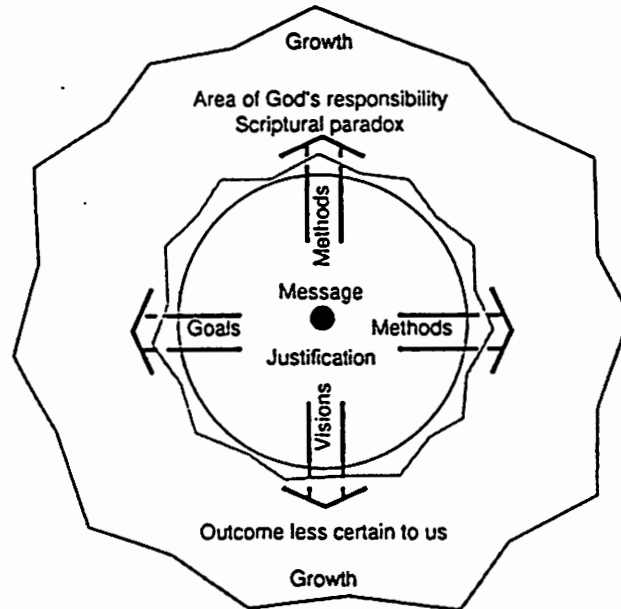
As a summary explanation for the above diagram, Koester explains,

> What this diagram also illustrates is that Lutheran theology does not
> preclude visions, methods, and goals. Nor does it undermine our
> desire to see the lost saved - numerical growth, if you will. It places
> the entire matter in the proper perspective by anchoring it to the
> gospel and relating our activities to the nature of the gospel. In
> short it forces us not to go beyond our responsibility. At the same
> time, it forces us to maintain a desire to find the lost.[139]

Koester then notes that those who adopt the Church Growth Movement
theology essentially adopt one of two non-Scriptural positions instead of
staying within the limitations set by Scripture.

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[139]Ibid., 136.

(1) we must proclaim, as do many in the Church Growth Movement, that they have received their vision directly from God (e.g., Paul Cho). (2) or we must understand that our vision is, by God's permission, based on our subjective imagination (e.g., Robert Schuller).[140]

The first alternative basically declares that the person has a direct pipeline to God, *extra scriptura*, as it were. No confessional Lutheran should accept that premise. The second alternative circumvents the paradox and declares that the person by his/her subjective vision has penetrated the mystery of why some are saved and others are not. In lieu of these alternatives Koester summarizes his position thus,

> Is there a place for visions and goals and the planning that must accompany them? I would say, yes. But referring to the diagram I presented at the beginning of this chapter, Lutheran and scriptural theology leads us to have visions within the "circle" of our responsibility. Visions become objective, even though they may be personal. They are objective because they enable us to "see" ourselves *preaching the word* in one way or another. To envision a method that reaches people with the message of forgiveness, to envision a church building in a city where God is gathering people into his church, to envision a program to help people study or teach God's Word - are all visions that rest on the work God has given us to do.[141]

What is the difference then between Church Growth visions and faith goals and the visions and faith goals of a confessional Lutheran? The visions and goals of a confessional Lutheran always focus on the proclamation of the Word.

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[140]Ibid., 144.

[141]Ibid., 145.

> The teaching of justification by faith will remain the place where my work is 'pinned' and while, I want to grow, I will concentrate on the message itself. This means using visions, etc., as structures within which I can become more effective in *preaching the word*. It will limit the scope of my planning to *preaching the word*.[142]

Secondly, whatever the goals are, they are always "tempered with the humble prayer, 'Lord, if you will.'"[143]

Thus, it is this writer's position that visions and faith goals are limited to being formed and carried out within a limited area of responsibility, that is, in the proclamation of the Gospel and the proper administration of the Sacraments. In seeking to reclaim the lapsed, visions and goals would be appropriate so long as it is God who has defined the means of achieving those goals. Remembering that all godly growth comes through the means of grace, we may cautiously say, with Koester, that Church Growth's emphasis upon visions and goals may be adapted to a Biblical/confessional use.

Church Growth and Felt Needs

The third area is "felt needs." C. Peter Wagner defines "felt needs" as

> the conscious wants and desires of a person; considered to be an opportunity for Christian response which stimulates within the person a receptivity to the Gospel.[144]

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[142]Ibid., 147.

[143]Ibid. 146.

[144]C. Peter Wagner, Your Church and Church Growth (Pasadena: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1982), 290.

Koester sees "felt needs" as the main evangelistic strategy of Church

Growth,[145] and it too is unsuitable to Lutheran theology.[146] There are two

major problems with the "felt needs" approach to evangelism according to

Koester. (1) "It transposes law and gospel."[147] How?

> Rather than teaching law and gospel in that order, love itself (both
> human and divine) is used first to try and make the object copy that
> love himself and so find a blessing for his life. Outside the context
> of first preaching God's justice, the "tug" of love is the moving force
> that leads the prospect to desire the *ability to love*, and so to find
> meaning and fulfillment in life.[148]

Thus the result of the "felt needs" method, as Koester sees it, is that

forgiveness is lost as the person is forced in upon him/herself to maintain that

proper love that brings blessings. (2) In the "felt needs" approach

"sanctification becomes the means to fulfill the prospect's needs for

acceptance, fulfillment, and a better life through victory over sin." [149] Rather

than understanding sanctification as something that God has done for us in

Christ, to which then the believer responds, sanctification becomes something

we do largely on our own, perhaps with a little help from the Holy Spirit.

As a sort of evaluation of this section on "felt needs," Koester

reemphasizes the importance of being faithful to Biblical theology regardless

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[145]Koester, 151.

[146]Ibid., 154.

[147]Ibid., 171.

[148]Ibid.

[149]Ibid., 172.

of the methods of others that bring apparent success.

> God can use the ulterior motives of people to lead them into the
> church, but we are not given the license to copy his ways and
> means. God may use the ills of a person's life to lead him to see
> his sin, but our message must not copy his to the extent that we
> imply that Christianity is the means to his overcoming his ills. Our
> responsibility lies in the work of preaching the word - the word of
> forgiveness that God will use. When we attempt to copy the
> methods God in his wisdom uses, we, in our foolishness, will
> always give people the wrong impression. . . .
>
> I believe we ought to worry about the work of preaching and
> teaching, fashion our evangelism work after the overall pattern
> given us in Acts and other places of the New Testament, and leave
> the rest up to God's providence.[150]

According to Koester, is there anything "useable" in the "felt needs"

approach? As can be seen from the quotation just above, he sees very little

if anything at all. While this sounds harsh, it should be noted that this

criticism is not based on a personal preference. It is based on what he

believes to be a solid Biblical position. He also spends a great deal of time

positing what he believes to be a Biblical approach in contrast to the "felt

needs" approach of Church Growth. Koester suggests using the term "points

of contact" which he believes can be used properly rather than "felt needs."

He defines "points of contact" this way,

> It is important to make a clear distinction between the "felt needs
> approach" and what we might term "points of contact approach."
> The former contains elements that are inimical to the gospel. The

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[150]Ibid., 174.

latter is a desire to find an opportunity to talk about law and gospel by using various situations in people's lives.[151]

What makes "points of contact" acceptable and "felt needs" unacceptable is not that there is a distinct difference between the two, but in the attitude one has about them. He asks ... and answers,

> How does one determine when a program is based on the felt needs approach and when it is merely seeking a point of contact? The matter hinges on one's understanding of faith. Faith that is solidly rooted in an understanding of law and gospel, the purpose of the church, and the nature of conversion will have no trouble remaining within the proper bounds.[152]

Thus, it appears to this writer, that while Koester thoroughly rejects the Church Growth term "felt needs" and the theology behind it, he gives in its place a positive alternative which is acceptable to confessional Lutherans.

Points of contact, then, instead of "felt needs," according to Koester, may be used by faithful Lutherans to reach out to the community in order to present the Gospel. It is the position of this writer that with the matter of dropouts, in many cases, over the years too few points of contact were employed. This reduced the proclamation of Law and Gospel to the dropout to a few perfunctory (from their point of view) worship occasions. If we understand the matter of faith correctly, that it needs nurturing, much and often, then we can understand how limiting the points of contact with members, potential dropouts, to a few worship occasions has not fully served

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[151]Ibid., 182.

[152]Ibid., 182-83.

to build them up in the faith through the means of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit but has left them bereft of the spiritual aid they need. The practice of the early church, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer,"[153] may well be the best answer we have to the problem of effectively checking the flow of dropouts. Congregations seem to best emulate the Biblical example when they offer a number of worship services at various times throughout the week, have a strong calling pastoral and Elders/lay-calling program, take a firm and positive position on members being not only hearers of the Word in worship, but also students of the Word in Bible class, and engage sponsors to shepherd new members through their first year of membership. Thus, daily, or at least frequent regular personal contact between the pastoral and lay leadership of the church and the members could well be a major portion of the answer to stemming the flow of lapsed members.

The Place of Science and Technology in the Growth of God's Church

In his evaluation of Church Growth, Koester, states that Church Growth sees itself as scientific in the matter of determining why some churches grow and others do not. He quotes Wagner who says, "the scientific aspect of church growth is vitally interested in understanding and describing all the factors which enter into the cases of failure and success in evangelistic

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[153]Acts 2:42.

efforts."[154] This view that growing churches can be scientifically analyzed, certain growth factors isolated, and later these factors reproduced in other churches of a similar nature leading to evangelistic growth is consistently taught by advocates of Church Growth such as McGavran, George Hunter, Kent Hunter,[155] and others.

The issue, however, is not whether the Church Growth people are correct in their analysis of certain factors that are present with growing churches and absent in declining churches or not. Undoubtedly, there are commonalities in growing churches and likewise commonalities in declining churches. Nor is the issue whether many of the Church Growth insights regarding growing churches should be implemented. Many are common sense observations such as adequate parking, hearing devices for the hearing impaired, bulletins with readable print. While on occasion relatively important, these common place observations do not really deal with the heart of the matter regarding the place of science and technology in the growth of God's church. The argument that all Church Growth is really a matter of common sense is simply not true. The real issue is, as Koester notes, a theological one.

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[154]Wagner, 43.

[155]Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 215; Bill Hybels, Becoming a Contagious Christian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 39ff.; Kent Hunter, "Megachurch and the Real Issue: Megagrace," Issues in Christian Education 29, (Winter 1995): 7.

The real issue is that Church Growth makes the growth of the church a science and so elevates sociological help to the level of a power for growth. It is not common sense suggestions that I object to. Rather, it is the Evangelical/Reformed theology which, as I have argued, rejects the gospel as the means of grace and infuses a heavy dose of sociology into the conversion process itself.[156]

So, is there a place for science and technology in the growth of God's church, or do confessional Lutherans reject all science and technological "insights?" The answer to this question is important. To reject the Church Growth position that there are certain sociological, psychological, scientific facts that increase the receptivity of the unchurched is highly unpopular. It flies in the face of, not only reformed theology which rejects the means of grace as the tools by which God affects conversion, but also in the face of the old Adam's understanding of the conversion process as well: that a person is capable of cooperating in his own spiritual rebirth. To accept wholeheartedly the Church Growth position is to reject the Biblical and Lutheran position that salvation is secured by grace alone as is clearly taught in the "Formula of Concord."

> Against both these parties the pure teachers of the Augsburg Confession have taught and contend that by the fall of our first parents man was so corrupted that in divine things pertaining to our conversion and the salvation of our souls he is by nature blind, that, when the Word of God is preached, he neither does nor can understand it, but regards it as foolishness; also, that he does not of himself draw nigh to God, but is and remains an enemy of God, until he is converted, becomes a believer [is endowed with faith], is regenerated and renewed, by the power of the Holy Ghost through

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[156]Koester, 202.

the Word when preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any cooperation of his own.[157]

So, once again the question is asked, is there anything that confessional Lutherans might "borrow" and still remain faithful to the Confessions of the church? Koester has some helpful words.

> God calls us to preach the gospel of justification and to pray that the Lord will always keep our hearts humbly trusting in the gospel alone to bring people into his family. Having done that, we will find ourselves with the wisdom necessary for deciding whether or not to use what the world has to offer. I might add that a good indicator of where a person stands is how much he is willing to agree that the Bible contains everything he needs to know about the dynamics of his faith and the performance of his ministry (2 Timothy 3:16). . . .
>
> In my ministry I will want to remain as current as I can in all tools available for studying the Word and presenting it to others. Our modern world is a treasure house of electronic tools to broadcast the Word, and we can use the printed page as never before. By God grace, the knowledge of this world (science) can contribute much to our ability to extend the spread of the Word.
>
> At the same time, I do not want to tap into science in any way that makes it a power for conversion and forces it out of its position as the handmaid of the gospel. I will put my confidence in what Paul tells Timothy - namely, that the Bible contains everything I need to be a fruitful Christian, which in my case includes being a pastor (2 Timothy 3:16,17).[158]

Now, while Koester's observations regarding the "borrowing" of Church Growth insights is somewhat vague, it is, sufficient. For it is not really a question of whether certain sociological or psychological insights seem to play a role in the growth of the church. But, rather, it is a question of what role.

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[157]Concordia Triglotta, "FC." Art. II., 5.

[158]Koester, 205, 206-207.

Do the scientific insights of Church Growth attempt to supplant Scripture, or do they serve Scripture? If these insights are recognized as only describing how the growth is taking place and are not regarded as prescriptive for the growth of the church, then they remain, as Koester calls them, "the handmaid of the Gospel."[159] And if, as Koester advocates, justification by grace through faith remains the means by which lost souls are converted and through which the forgiveness of sins is won and heaven attained, and the sociological and psychological insights of Church Growth are confined to the sphere of phenomenalogical and common sense, then there will be no major problem dealing with Church Growth *per se*. The difficulty with that scenario, however, is that such an understanding is not the understanding Church Growth has of itself. Thus the faithful confessional Lutheran will always remain vigilant and extremely circumspect in his adoption and use of Church Growth methods.

Conclusions

There is no denying that Church Growth is having an impact on the Church catholic and hundreds of parishes and pastors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. However, if one accepts its program non-critically, one is accepting a theology with presuppositions that undermine essentials of the faith. This writer senses the powerful psychological "old Adam" draw that

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[159]Ibid., 201.

Church Growth has, namely, power, glory, and prestige through my own efforts! That is what Church Growth offers, and that is just what must be rejected.

On the other hand, as has been shown above, in attempting to reach the lapsed, the shared methods of figure one,

> (1) the desire to grow, (2) the place of visions and goals in church planning, (3) whether we should use the "felt needs" emphasis in outreach and (4) the place of science and technology in the growth of God's church[160]

may be adapted, revised, or amended to help the faithful pastor and congregation in their task of proclaiming the Gospel of justification by grace through faith.

Specifically, what may be done? It is exceedingly difficult to create an itemized list of acceptable and unacceptable Church Growth practices. While such a list would be helpful, it is impractical for as soon as the list was created, there would already be new variations which were not covered in the list. Rather what needs to be done regarding the use of Church Growth methods is to be certain that both pastor and congregational leadership are informed as to the differences between Lutheran Biblical theology and the erroneous presuppositions and theology of the Church Growth Movement.

Church Growth is exceedingly seductive. Who can be against the desire to grow? Isn't it God's will that the church grow? Doesn't Jesus says that?

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[160]Ibid., 118.

How can visions and goals be wrong; don't businesses operate with them? Why does the Bible talk about them? Aren't people's needs important to God? Shouldn't they also be important to the church? What's wrong with applying the scientific method to help us plan for church growth? Isn't it science that has brought us the cure for polio and small pox? Can't science also be used in the church?

A confessionally minded pastor and congregation, rather than ripping into the evils of Church Growth, need, rather, to be certain that they are well informed about correct Biblical doctrine, the differences between the Church Growth Movement presuppositions and theology and confessional Biblical theology. While it is not impossible to have a Bible class that examines Church Growth and exposes its errors, it would be far better for the average person if the Biblical position were expounded and the errors exposed as a matter of course in the context of regular preaching and catechesis. Such a method can avoid the pitfall of a Bible class becoming an "attack class" where most of the class time is spent destroying a position without providing positive Biblical content. In dealing with this most subtle and popular heresy, pastors and congregations need to be exceedingly wise in their methodology and teaching so that the theological differences are clearly delineated without destroying the good that may be gleaned from the modified Church Growth methods.

In focusing upon the lapsed and attempting to reach out to the lapsed,

the congregation and pastor must bear these things in mind.

1. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, while the desire to grow through reclamation of the lapsed is good, it should be remembered that actual growth is accomplished through the means of grace, the faithful proclamation of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments. All too frequently, calls on the lapsed focus on the "We've missed you" motif rather than the lapsed's need for the Word and Sacraments. Both elders and pastors in their desire to not offend frequently avoid making the Scriptural point that neglect of Word and Sacrament is fatal to faith. Such truth, while difficult to proclaim and perhaps more difficult to hear by the fallen, must be said clearly and often.

2. While visions and goals are commendable within their sphere of working, it should be made certain that the goals and visions adopted by the congregation are clearly worded so that no unbiblical expectations are created that take the work of repentance and regeneration away from the Holy Spirit.

3. Points of contact between the lapsed and the members of the church need to be reinforced. In most congregations pastoral and elder calls need to be increased. However, more than pastors and elders need to be involved in the work. All too often those who are in danger of falling away are neglected until their delinquency becomes a hardened habit. Points of contact need to be created in which members can visit, make phone calls, mail notes or

letters to the endangered. A high priority needs to be placed on encouraging members to work on reclaiming the lost through verbal encouragements by the pastors in sermons and other public occasions, bulletin articles relating instances of successful calls, requests for volunteers to participate in low commitment but needed points of contact with the lapsed. Training for the elders and other lay volunteers needs to be provided periodically. In seeking out possible points of contact, those who do the planning will make sure that those who are making contacts keep their conversation Law and Gospel oriented and not just engage in idle "chit-chat" with little spiritual content.

4. About the use of science and technology in reaching the lapsed, the question really revolves around the decision as to which (science and technology or the Gospel) will be the driving the force in reclaiming the lost. Training for callers and Bible classes, among other things, should emphasize the positive benefits of science and technology. Data regarding members' church attendance, past participation, family members, jobs, income level, interests, hobbies, and friends are much more easily stored and accessed today through the use of computers so that pastors and callers can "know" the lapsed better. Our improving understanding of the human psyche and sociology aids us in making the points of contact more meaningful on the human level. What else needs to be emphasized, however, is that while these things are helpful in understanding the lapsed, they have no part in the actual conversion process. It is Word and Sacrament, Law and Gospel alone

that will bring about the needed repentance and faith.

Koester's final comments in his book draw together quite well what the

pastor and congregation need to remember as they use some of the Church

Growth methods to seek and to reclaim the lapsed.

> In the end, we'll find that the answer is not so much in methods as
> in the Word we preach. To those who begin their work with a clear
> definition of the gospel, the Lord will give wisdom to develop
> appropriate methods to serve as vehicles for that gospel.[161]

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[161]Ibid., 221.

CHAPTER 6

TWO CURRENT SOCIOLOGICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEWS
OF FAITH AND FAMILY DROPOUTS

PART 2

A Brief Introduction to Systems Theory

We now turn to a theory that has been applied to the church just in the last few years. Systems theory addresses the problem of dysfunctional behavior in a way that suggests that some of its insights may be useful in approaching church dropouts (certainly a dysfunctional behavior from an organizational perspective and from a Christian perspective as well).

Systems theory was first proposed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1940's. Bertalanffy proposed a model for all living systems which he especially applied to the behavioral sciences. His model stressed the relationship between the various parts instead of viewing the parts isolated from each other.[162] Thus, a "system" has been defined as a "set of

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[162] Irene Goldenberg and Herbert Goldenberg, Family Therapy: An Overview, 3rd ed. (Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1991), 60.

interacting units or component parts that together make up a whole

arrangement or organization."[163]

> There are solar systems, ecosystems, systems of law, electronic systems, and so forth. In each case, the components interact so that each influences and in turn is influenced by other component parts, together producing a whole - a system - that is greater than the sum of the interdependent parts.[164]

Goldenberg who applied the concept to humankind sees "system" operating

naturally in families,

> with properties all its own, one that has evolved a set of rules, is replete with assigned and ascribed roles for its members, has an organized power structure, had developed intricate overt and covert forms of communication, and had elaborated ways of negotiating and problem solving that permit various tasks to be performed effectively. The relationship between members of this microculture is deep and multilayered, and is based largely on a shared history, shared internalized perceptions and assumptions about the world, and a shared sense of purpose. Within such a system, individuals are tied to one another by powerful, durable, reciprocal emotional attachments and loyalties that may fluctuate in intensity over time but nevertheless persist over the life time of the family.[165]

Becvar describes systems theory as a unifying theory. "Instead of studying

objects and people discretely, we now have a means of studying them in

relationship."[166]

> According to systems theory, it makes no sense to analyze any person independently. To understand each person in a family, one

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[163]Ibid., 331.

[164]Ibid., 35.

[165]Ibid., 3

[166]Raphael J. Becvar, and Dorothy Stroh Becvar, <u>Systems Theory and Family Therapy</u> (Lanham, Md: University of America Press, 1982), 5.

must study how each is in relation to every other family member. To study one apart from the others, out of the context of the family relationships, is to know that person relative to the new context (the context in which he or she is studied) but not in the context of his or her family relationships.[167]

Thus, systems theory does not view individual behavior, family behavior, or any organizational behavior as a simple "cause and effect" in which A causes B or in which $A + B + C + D = E$, (linear behavior), but rather it understands behavior in which A, B, C, D are,

> interdependent with each other. Each part of the system (including the effect itself, "E") is connected to or can have its own effect upon every other part. Each component, therefore, rather than having its own discrete identity or input, operates as part of a larger whole. *The components do not function according to their "nature" but according to their position in the network.*[168]

By way of comparison figure 3. (A, B, and C) compares the two forms of linear behavior with that of systems thinking.

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[167]Ibid., 6.

[168]Edwin H. Friedman, Generation to Generation Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 15.

ILLUSTRATION 3[169]
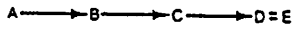
FIGURE 1-2. Linear causation.
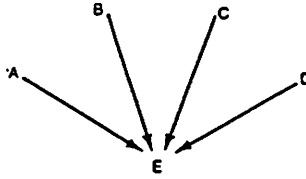
FIGURE 1-3. Multiple causation.
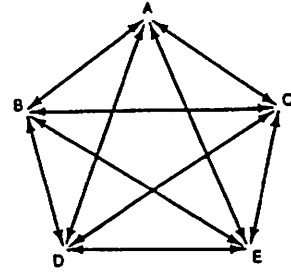
FIGURE 1-4. Systems thinking.

Becvar summarizes Family Systems thinking this way, (Figure 4).

ILLUSTRATION 4[170]
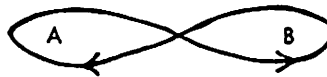
The systems perspective moves us to a reciprocal or circular notion of causality, that is, A and B are in dynamic interaction as expressed in the following,

> When I treat you like a child, you behave like a child, and then I treat you like a child even more and you behave even more like a child. We sure have a vicious cycle going, don't we.

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[169]Ibid., 16.

[170]Becvar, 7.

When I behave like a child, you treat me like a child, and then I behave like a child even more and you treat me like a child even more. We are sure caught up with each other, aren't we.[171]

Joseph Perez, relying heavily on Jay Haley another noted systems therapist, includes the following as some of the more important principles of the family systems therapy.

1. The systems person views therapy not so much as a method as a "new orientation to the arena of human problems"

2. In the systems approach family members are given "equal weight." No member is more important than any other member. The systems therapist views individual dynamics as a product of intrafamilial relationships.

3. The systems therapist views "the present situation as the major causal factor and the process that must be changed."

4. The time spent in diagnosing family problems is time wasted. The view here is that a diagnosis per se does not help the family.

5. During the therapy hour the therapist is an important part of the family's dynamics. The therapist includes himself in the "context of treatment."

6. Confrontations, interpretations and encouragement of ventilation of feelings are not an integral part of the systems oriented therapist's method. On the contrary, the systems view of hostility is "to resolve the difficulties in the relationships which are causing the hostility."

7. Flexibility in procedure or technique is a keynote of systems therapy. Indeed, to the systems oriented therapist "any set procedure is a handicap."

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[171]Ibid.

8. The systems therapist encourages all the members to tell, to interact with each other, and to become intra-familially involved.

9. The systems view is that permanent alliances in therapy result in poor outcomes. When the therapist allies with a family member he makes it clear to all that the alliance is temporary.

10. The systems person believes in live supervision. The trainee is observed participating in therapy.

11. The systems person's focus is on outcomes, and the therapist changes and alters procedure and technique if there isn't positive change in the family.[172]

While the preceding are principles of family therapy, they also illustrate the

"wholistic" posture that systems theory operates with regardless of the context

with which one is dealing - family, business, church, and so forth. Or as

Perez says,

> The view here is that each family member contributes to the family dynamics, to the family personality. Each member of the family can affect or be affected by the needs and aspirations, by the ill health and good health, by the conscience or lack of it, of the other family members. In short, a family's capacity to afflict or heal is dependent upon the interactive patterns developed within the family construct.[173]

Key Concepts

There are also several key concepts of systems theory that demand

attention. One is homeostasis. Homeostasis is defined as " A dynamic state

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[172]Joseph F. Perez, Family Counseling: Theory and Practice (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1979), 20-21.

[173]Ibid., 22.

of balance or equilibrium in a system, or a tendency toward achieving and maintaining such a state in an effort to ensure a stable environment."[174]

Parsons and Leas note the tendency of homeostasis toward useful rigidity when they define it as,

> the tendency for a system relationship, or organization to mold the behavior of others into predictable patterns, making it possible for us to "get along," to do work, to find safety, to trust. Without this tendency, every time we came together in a relationship we would have to invent the relationship over again.[175]

Everyday examples of homeostasis might include the automatic tendency of our body to maintain a steady body temperature, a tightrope walker who is in constant motion in order to maintain balance, the various ways a family maintains peace when a quarrel erupts between two children (parent scolds, lectures, punishes both or just one). Each is an attempt to return the system to its previous balance or equilibrium.[176] Closely related to homeostasis are two other terms, morphostasis and morphogenesis. Morphostasis may be thought of as stability. Morphogenesis may be simply described as change. Becvar describes the interrelatedness of all three terms.

> In a healthy family system morphogenesis (change) and morphostasis (stability) are both necessary. . . . While either extreme of the morphogenesis-morphostasis continuum would probably be dysfunctional, in healthy families, a balance will be

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[174]Goldenberg, 325.

[175]George Parsons and Speed B. Leas, Understanding Your Congregation as a System (n.p., The Alban Institute, 1993), 7.

[176]Ibid., 38.

maintained between the two. That is, the rules of the system will allow for change in the rules governing the system.

> In times of stress, morphogenesis is probably desirable. However were change permitted too frequently or to too great a degree, the stability of the family would be threatened.[177]

Parsons and Leas note the relationship between all three concepts this way:

> In healthy relationships, either extreme—being too tight or too loose—for too long can be a serious problem. If we have no idea what is going to happen next, if we can't get dependable commitments to or from one another, then we have no system or organization. If we have too much order, too much dependability, too much status quo, then the organization will not adapt to changes in the environment; it will inhibit the growth and development of group members.[178]

Assuming that systems theory is correct. We must affirm that life problems are not simply of a linear arrangement, but that they consist of interdependent factors each of which interact upon each other. Then, given that church dropouts are one of the life problems that clergy and congregations are challenged with we must also affirm that they are also due to a variety of interdependent factors. Yet we still need to ask, what might some of the advantages be in adopting a systems approach to the problem of church delinquency? And, just as important, is it compatible with a Biblical/confessional approach to church dropouts?

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[177]Becvar, 16.

[178]Parsons, 7.

Systems Theory Within the Church

From an examination of the literature in this field, (systems theory and

the church) both its advantages to the traditional linear understanding of

dealing with problems within the church and its compatibility with the Christian

ethos are highly touted. Friedman, while not speaking specifically of

dropouts, notes that systems theory has certain natural advantages in the

church to bring about health and healing.

> Ultimately, healing and survival depend on existential
> categories; on vision, for example, on hope, on the imaginative
> capacity, on the ability to transcend the anxiety of those about us,
> and on a response to challenge that treats crisis as opportunity for
> growth.[179]

Thus the clergy and the church should find that a de-emphasis on pathology

and an emphasis instead upon healing, positive growth, and change as

presented in systems theory are more agreeable in that this approach

provides to clergy and congregational care groups a pastoral care model with

less emphasis on sickness and more on healing and growth.[180]

A second major factor Friedman points out is that the clergy are "in a

better position to foster these existential encouragements to healing"[181] than

virtually any other profession of our society. The clergy, "because of the

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[179]Friedman, 5.

[180]Ibid.

[181]Ibid.

unique entree into family systems our community position has given us"[182]

are especially well suited to using systems theory.

Friedman also sees an advantage to the "simplicity" of the systems

theory. He states,

> Instead of trying to analyze the infinite variety of A-Z connections in a system, it once again treats the structure as a whole and tries to correct problems not by eliminating or fixing the "bad part," but by inserting new input designed to cancel out what has gone wrong.

One writer explains the importance of this insight this way:

> Often by keeping the focus on the symptom bearer, the family — whether it be nuclear, congregational or institutional — can deny the very issue that contributed to making one of its members symptomatic. This denial will ultimately harm the entire family.[183]

We should add that in dealing with delinquents it is all too easy to identify

them as the "bad parts" without ever examining the circumstances

surrounding their inactivity.

Another factor Friedman sees as being advantageous in systems theory

operating in the church is the observation that in reality everything that is

applicable to the family is also applicable to the church.

> They function as organic structures in their own right, according to the rules and models of family life. . . .
>
> religious institutions not only function like families, they also contain families. Indeed, they often derive their very structure from families. Thus, emotional process in religious organizations not only mirrors

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[182]Ibid.

[183]Kline Roberts, "Pastoring in the Nineties: Can Systems Theory Help?" The Harding Journal of Religion and Psychiatry 10 (1991): 4-5.

emotional process in personal families, but also, both types of systems plug into one another.[184]

Finally, Friedman says that systems theory leads to a "highly moral approach to change"[185] in that through the interconnectedness of the human relationships we all have with one another, a change in one ultimately leads to a change in the system. However, in the systems theory model, it needs to be noted that such "concepts" as right or wrong, good or bad, confession and absolution are essentially eliminated and are replaced by a better utilitarian functioning system. In conjunction with this relativized view of morality and truth, Becvar adds this comment to the discussion of systems theory, change, and truth.

> With a systems perspective, therefore, our view of "reality" would have us perceive with Bronowski (1978) a "constantly conjoined universe" in which ultimate knowledge, or truth, is not accessible to us. The theoretical relativity which is part of this framework would describe good and bad in all frameworks but no one absolute good.[186]

While Friedman may be correct in his evaluations regarding the usefulness of systems theory in the church, his assertion that it is "highly moral" cannot go unchallenged. While the results of systems thinking might, from a Christian perspective, be preferable to other alternatives, the morality must be questioned, first of all, because systems theory is in reality amoral.

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[184]Ibid., 195.

[185]Friedman, 17-18.

[186]Ibid., 7.

Contrary to Friedman's assertion about the highly moral nature of systems theory, in reality it possesses a generally negative attitude towards sin/sickness. This hardly fits a Lutheran Law/Gospel orientation. Further, systems theory does not necessarily seek moral positions (since truth is relative) but rather seeks to alleviate the pain and suffering of the clients.

While most of the time the alleviation of pain and suffering is preferable to the alternative, the mere relieving of pain and suffering is not necessarily "highly moral" if one operates with a specified code of ethics such as the Ten Commandments as his/her set of moral standards.[187] Secondly, granting for the sake of argument that it does have solutions to problems, it needs to be determined what is meant by "moral." Here also systems theory falls short of the Christian standard because systems theory possesses a morality based on the Law and not on the Gospel. It is a morality which addresses the outward act but does not address the inner man. Thus its morality would always fall short of God's perfect Law. The end result, Biblically and confessionally, is not a Scripturally more pleasing system but a system that is operating with less stress and strain. Thus, in systems theory, when the change means less pain and suffering, with the system "working better," regardless of its adherence to the Ten Commandments, it is viewed in a positive light. While such relief might be seen from a human/sociological

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[187]C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), 110. Also, Acts 4:18-20, Romans 8:18, II Corinthians 4:16-17.

perspective as preferable to the alternative of increasing pain or suffering, from a Biblical/Confessional viewpoint such change in one's feelings or behavior falls far short of what the Lutheran pastor and congregation seek in their members.

> Here our adversaries object that our teachers are opposed to discipline and mortification of the flesh, as Jovinian. But the contrary may be learned from the writings of our teachers. For they have always taught concerning the cross that it behooves Christians to bear their afflictions. This is the true, earnest, and unfeigned mortification, to wit, to be exercised with divers afflictions, and to be crucified with Christ.[188]

Thus, while systems theory might view a particular solution as especially positive because it brings relief into a painful situation, say an abortion due to rape, the Lutheran/Biblical position would be to accept the stress of carrying the child to term as one of the crosses that Christians, like their Savior, are called to bear.

Peter Steinke, an LC—MS pastor, sees the Biblical record supporting systems theory in several respects. He says,

> 1. Many parallels exist between 'system thinking' and the biblical record. Most notable is the interrelatedness of all things. . . . Trinitarian faith, for instance, sees all reality in relationship. God is three *separate* persons-the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-yet one. Boundaries make them distinct. The historic creeds of the church indicate that the three persons of the Trinity are not fused. There is diversity in unity[189]

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[188]Concordia Triglotta, Augsburg Confession, Art. XXVI, 30-31.

[189]Peter L Steinke, How Your Church Family Works (n.p.: The Alban Institute, 1993), 117.

2. In the biblical narratives we see the twin yearnings of separateness and closeness, their extremes of cut-off and fusion, and self-definition and lack of it.[190]

3. The interrelatedness of life means that we will always deal with emotional processes. ... And what was operative in the biblical world is at work today. The stories are mirrors, reflections of our own world. Church families, therefore, subject to emotional processes, will have their Cains, Davids, and Alexanders.[191]

4. Sustained and strong anxiety tests the church family at the deepest point of its life together - the responses of faith and love. . . .

   Nowhere is the tension more challenging than in the sphere of who we are and what we are about as a Christian community - forgiveness. . . .[192]

5. We need, therefore, to see forgiveness more as a process than an event, a discovery than a fiat. It takes time to let emotional heat to cool down and to move from survival to 'sober judgment." God's forgiveness is a free gift. There are no 'strings attached' - that is, 'you must change' (so I can feel less anxious) or 'I must give up self' (so everyone else feels less anxious). God's forgiveness cannot be fiddled with, modified, or altered. It is irreversible. It is *there.* Human forgiveness is slower and more erratic.[193]

Steinke's observations about systems theory are very positive and in this writer's view also very much on target except for his comments about forgiveness being more of a process than an event. When Steinke speaks of the two sides of forgiveness (God's once for all act of forgiveness and my

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[190]Ibid., 119.

[191]Ibid.

[192]Ibid., 122.

[193]Ibid., 124.

forgiving another) there is the danger of mixing the two and concluding that forgiveness takes place only when the two sides of forgiveness are complete. Thus, while God forgives, that forgiveness is complete only when I also forgive. While this writer does not believe that is what Steinke intend to say, the possibility of that impression is there. As written, the above quotation is confusing and needs clarification lest God's forgiveness be equated with my feeling of being forgiven.

In their book <u>The Equipping Pastor</u>, Stevens and Collins clearly believe that systems theory is compatible with Biblical theology, especially "the theology of the Body of Christ, the family of God, and covenant.[194] They identify these similarities,

1. First, the whole is more than the sum of its parts in both systems and covenant thinking.

2. Second, the irrevocable belonging is experienced both in systems and covenant thinking.

3. Third, in both systems and covenant thinking, unity is enriched by diversity.

4. Finally, both systems and covenant thinking presuppose that health and growth come from members relating interdependently.[195]

Of greatest importance for Stevens and Collins, however, is the Biblical concept of "the Body of Christ." In systems theory, because the whole is

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[194]R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, <u>The Equipping Pastor A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership</u> (n.p., The Alban Institute, 1993), 93.

[195]Ibid., 97-98.

always greater than its parts, there is an interrelatedness that is present in families no matter the length individuals may go to disassociate. They support their view by quoting Galvin and Brommel,

> Divorce and death do not dissolve family systems; rather they alter them. These altered systems may become involved in a second marriage, necessitating the interweaving of three or more families into a remarried family system. The organizational complexity of such systems is often staggering as the systems and subsystems interweave to form a new whole.[196]

Thus it is so in the church. Christians readily affirm that death does not separate believers. For generations believers have sung,

> When here our pathways part, We suffer bitter pain;
> Yet, one in Christ and one in heart, We hope to meet again.[197]

So, also, it may be argued that termination of membership or dropping out of the church does not, or should not, automatically separate or dissolve that earthly relationship with the church militant which is a shadow of that spiritual relationship created by God between believers by Holy Baptism. While a dropout's membership may be terminated, and, indeed, should be if he/she unrepentently continues to despise the means of grace, yet should not the church grieve and lament over the loss of one of its baptized ones and seek ways to reclaim him/her as long as there is life? It cannot be denied, indeed, it must not be denied that because the church is the Body of Christ, there is

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[196]Ibid., 97.

[197]John Fawcett, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), #464.

an inevitable interrelatedness between the various parts and the Body and its head - Christ. There ought to remain with the Body of Christ, even in dealing with lapsed, a memory of what was and a longing of what still could be by the power of God.

Systems Theory, Dropouts, Observations

What might systems theory have to say regarding "the reason" and "remedy" for dropouts? Within systems theory, because of its basic rejection of "linear cause and effect," some other explanations need to come to the fore to explain the dropout problem in individuals, families, or groups of individuals. In other words, "blame laying," admission of guilt, repentance, and absolution do not rest only with the lapsed individual. Rather, the system itself must be examined and corrected as well. As Becvar says,

> (the) therapist does not do individual therapy, that is, try to fix a person. Rather, the therapist interfaces with a person or the context of the person (family) whose symptoms or problems evolved in that context.[198]

Since from a systems' framework the primary context is the family and "all other systems, such as school, work or church (are) secondary contexts,"[199] the focus of the matter of church dropouts largely needs to be examined from the family perspective.

Friedman notes that the family systems theory can be applied to multiple

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[198]Becvar, 59.

[199]Ibid.

situations. He believes that,

> even where there is little or no personal family involvement, work
> systems that deal with the basic stresses of life, particularly medical
> or law partnerships, labor unions, psychiatric clinics or hospitals,
> and to a lesser extent school systems (but especially private
> schools), all are particularly susceptible to the rules of family
> process, including those rules that govern who in the family is likely
> to become ill. Of all work systems, however, the one that functions
> most like a family is the church or synagogue.[200]

But still, what is to be done? Can systems theory assist the church in its
attempt to reach the lapsed? This writer sees several tentative positive
applications.

1. Recognize that the reason people become dropouts is more
than an individual issue. The "blame game" is very popular in society and the
church as well. When the church deals with those who lapse, frequently the
questions revolve around how the person did "this or that" or how someone in
the church offended him or her. And, while these things might have
happened, in looking for reasons why people drop out of the church, the
pastor and leadership would be advised to avoid placing all the blame on
particular individuals. While certain "reasons" might be brought to the fore, in
systems theory, linear and multiple causation are rejected for the
understanding that some in the system are attempting to maintain
homeostasis. While this concept sounds rather far-fetched, this writer's
experience in dealing with the lapsed is that frequently homeostasis will be

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[200]Friedman, 197.

maintained no mattrer what the church does. After agonizing with the Board of Elders over the loss of a member who departed in a particularly blaming fashion and examining all the "reasons," usually some experienced elder will comment, "Pastor there's nothing you/we could have done. It just seems that they were determined to leave." Why? Systems theory would suggest it happens not because of a particular sin, error, or misunderstanding on the part of an individual but because the system needed "adjusting." Now, while sin, error, or misunderstandings may be the presenting cause of the lapse and do indeed need to be addressed, it does seem there may be truth to this assessment.

2. Recognize that in an instinctive desire to maintain homeostasis, some members "understand" that they will drop out. For balance to be maintained in the system, sometimes certain members must give of themselves and become dropouts. While this understanding is not specifically articulated in the church, it might be suggested when some pastors, out of frustration no doubt, ask their Junior Confirmation class "Well, who's going to be the first to drop out after confirmation?" Whether the homeostasis is being exclusively maintained in the church or not is moot. The member might be dropping out to keep the family together or to keep from being too religious because the family already has a religious person in it, and two would be one too many, thus upsetting the balance. Regardless of which system or how many systems the homeostasis is serving, the dropping out by the lapsed serves a

purpose larger than his/her merely leaving the church. All of this simply emphasizes the importance of the shepherd knowing the flock that such patterns of behavior might be noted and addressed before the loss occurs.

3. Recognize that homeostasis also suggests that some lapsed members in unrecognized loyalty to their system and in an effort to keep that system in balance will resist all efforts to return to the fold. Seemingly inexplicably, some members not only drop out, but even after the church "discovers" the stated reason and remedies it, the former member still remains inactive. With linear thinking we inevitably attribute this behavior to pride, or lack of forgiveness, or insincerity. Using system thinking, perhaps we can also see this behavior as an attempt to maintain balance in the system and not just the negative attributes above. We should understand, however, that this does not negate the negative reasons for dropping out, but rather adds to them the understanding that the lapsed cannot be reclaimed just by "fixing" the presenting problem of the lapsed. The homeostatic reason must be addressed as well or else the dropping will continue with someone else.

4. Recognize that alienation/sin by certain members of the church is as much a result of the system as it is of the lapsed being sinners. Neither the lapsed nor the church are free from sin or guilt. Each in his/her own way contributes to the problem of alienation and sin. The church needs to understand that the lapsed, in their sinfulness, are no different than the active in their sinfulness. While faith may or may not be present, depending upon

the person, the existence of sin in the lapsed, the active, and the system itself must not be forgotten. The ongoing problem of the lapsed cannot be separated from the ongoing problem of sin in the sanctified. Does not Jesus even suggest this attitude when he observes that frequently there is more than one person involved when an individual sins? "But if anyone *causes* [italics mine] one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."[201]

5. Recognize that according to systems theory some members will be expected to drop out perhaps because the reason they became members has ceased to be a factor, and they have to move on for they have no other purpose for belonging. A church that maintains a large parochial school needs students for the school and parents to man the various programs that the school maintains. After children have graduated from the school, many times the church/school helps plan for their inactivity by failing to provide new meaningful areas of service and activity for the parents and children. When attempts are made to provide these activities, some of the parents and children will continue to resist efforts to remain a part of the church as their understanding of the church and their role in it is different than that of those who are trying to reduce the number of dropouts.

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[201]Matthew 18:6.

6. Recognize that the Body of Christ concept is negated, or at best diminished, when those who drop out are ignored. While the lapsed appear to want to be ignored, it should be noted that in reality some unknowingly understand that they are filling a role within the church by being inactive. Thus, such inactivity deserves recognition. The church cannot ignore the lapsed or else it denies the Body of Christ concept and in reality declares to the lapsed, "We really don't want you as a member." While it may demand different skills than the traditional ones used to reclaim the lapsed, the investigation into the thinking of the lapsed which led to their dropping out may well provide better results if changes are made to the system that address their inactivity.

Conclusions

Systems theory, despite several weaknesses for a confessional Lutheran, does seem to offer the church some helpful suggestions regarding the problem of church dropouts. However, systems theory operates differently. Systems theory, instead of imputing the problem of dropouts to particular practices or attitudes within the church or the lapsed, or ignoring the lapsed, which most churches seem to be very adept at doing, suggests that the church might consider how the delinquents help keep the congregational system in balance. For example, while the stated desire of the church is that all confirmands and parents would remain active in the church, what would happen if all the Jr. confirmands remained active after confirmation and

graduation from the day school? What would happen if their parents continued to attend and remained an active part of the church? How would the equilibrium, the homeostasis be upset? Surely over the years, the continued participation of parental units and the additional participation of their children would have a profound impact on the church. What changes in scheduling, budgeting, pastoral time allotments, board priorities and the like would have to be made to handle the influx of active teenagers and their still concerned and active parents? How would such a scenario impact a congregation which is reluctant to make any changes? How would this reluctance impact the life of the confirmands and parents? What if the congregation became divided on the issue of more active confirmands and their parents? What sort of negative consequences might ensue? How would the congregation deal with additional youth and active parental members? What pressures on the church budget would arise? How would that affect the household budget of members? How might these changes threaten longstanding programs or pastoral and lay leadership positions? How would the use of facilities have to be adjusted? Would additional staff have to be hired, or could the additional programs be handled by volunteers? Given that homeostasis seeks balance, morphostasis likes a stable predictable situation, and that most churches that are in a declining or plateaued position are reluctant to make radical changes, the amount of effort (morphogenesis) it would take to affect significant change in the system

where more confirmands remain active and their parents continue to be involved in the life of the church is truly staggering. Part of the challenge certainly is how these changes can be brought about without provoking an extraordinary crisis in the church. But can that be done? Systems theory by definition does not supply answers to these questions. However, it does seem to this writer that the consideration of these questions and possible answers through a congregational study of systems theory would be time well spent in the church.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCHING THE PROBLEM

Conducting the Survey

Thus far we have dealt largely with the theoretical. That is, except in theory, we have not dealt with those whom we are concerned about because of their drift away from Christ. Now, however, the time has come to examine those who are lapsed. The time has come to listen to them and to approach them gently, evangelically, and attempt to determine from them the reasons, as they see them, for their delinquency. In order to accomplish this in an orderly way, several steps were necessary.

1. A list was drawn up of the parents of those confirmed and graduated from Trinity Lutheran School for the years 1984 and 1985 who were no longer members because of delinquency or transferring out or because they had joined a church of another confession. Because of the limited number of persons who could be located within this time frame, several lapsed or former members were added to that list representing the years 1986-1990. This enlarged list consisted of a total of twenty five parental units.

2. An initial introductory letter was sent by the president of the congregation to each of the persons on the list informing them of this writer's

intent to conduct the survey, and that the survey would be received by them in a few days (actually about ten). He encouraged them to complete it and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

3. After about ten days a mailing composed of an individually addressed letter, signed by this author, the survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to each lapsed parent.

4. After three weeks a second letter was sent, with the survey included again, asking those who had not responded to the initial survey to please do so as soon as possible.[202]

The survey and interview were written with certain assumptions. The following are the major ones:

1. It was assumed by the writer that, despite the recipients' inactivity, they would welcome the opportunity to participate in the survey given the opportunity to "vent their spleen" at the church, pastoral and congregational leadership. Hence, a good return on the surveys and a general willingness to be interviewed was expected. While the response was acceptable, it was far from this ideal.

2. A second related assumption was that many of the responses would be blaming and accusatory. This writer imagined responses being handled

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[202] Samples of the two letters and the survey are included in the appendix. All references in this chapter to the survey use the same numbering system used in the original survey, and more details of the survey may be seen in the appendix.

with asbestos gloves because they would be so "hot." This was not the case at all.

3. Perhaps the major assumption was that the responses themselves would provide major understanding of the problem of delinquency. While the responses did eliminate some areas of church and school ministry from "the problem list," they did not clearly reveal the respondents' reasons for lapsing.

4. A fourth assumption, verified somewhat, was that many of the lapsed would see their lapsing due to a lack of connectedness to fellow believers. As a result of the surveys and interviews there are some indications that this was a factor in their lapsing.

5. Finally, it was assumed that several of the respondents would make a clear abjuration of the Christian faith. Wrong again! All those interviewed clearly still consider themselves Christians, despite their almost total lack of participation in Word and Sacrament.

Some of the general information regarding the persons receiving the survey follows:

1. All but one of the parental units surveyed were considered active members of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church at the time of their last child's confirmation and graduation from Trinity Evangelical Lutheran School. The exception to the above rule was an individual who later joined Trinity and subsequently lapsed.

2. Twenty-five parental units were sent all of the above mentioned material.

3. Of the twenty-five parental units who received the survey, seven consisted of a husband and wife who were or had been members and were also lapsed.

4. Four consisted of one spouse of a married member couple who was now either lapsed or removed.

5. Eight were single parents at the time of their children's confirmations.

6. One was not a member at the time of his child's confirmation, later joined, and was subsequently removed.

7. Five consisted of husband and wife where one of the spouses was not and never became a member of Trinity.

Following the sending of the second letter and survey, the recipients were given another month to return the survey. After one month the results were tabulated. The following are the combined responses to the survey questions:

Of the twenty-five surveys sent out, a total of eleven were returned for a response rate of 44%. Five of the eleven respondents also agreed to an interview at a later date for a response rate of 45%. Of the surveys returned, the following replies were given:

Gender: Four respondents were males.

Five respondents were females.

Respondents by ages were

40-44 - 1
45-49 - 4
50-54 - 2
55-59 - 3
60-64 - 1

The responses to the survey questions were as follows:

1. How did you become a member of Trinity?

    __2__ Baptism as a baby/child
    _____ Junior Confirmation
    __3__ Adult Instruction Class
    __6__ Transfer from another Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
    congregation

2. For approximately how many years were you a member of Trinity?

    __8, 11, 12, 15, 20, 21, 22, 22, 45, 57__

3. How would you characterize your membership at Trinity?
    (Responses in parentheses)

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1
(2)	(2)	(5)	(1)	(1)

4. If you were a member at another church <u>prior</u> to your membership
    at Trinity, how would you describe your membership there?

NA	(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
	5	4	3	2	1
	( )	(3)	(4)	(1)	(1)

5. If you hold membership in another church <u>now</u>, how would you
    describe your membership there now?

NA	(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
	5	4	3	2	1
	(1)	(1)	(1)		

__(8)__ Presently, I do not hold membership at any church.

6. Did you attend Trinity Lutheran School? Y (1) N (10)

    If "Yes" which grades: K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
    (1)

7. a. If you had children at the time of your membership at Trinity, did they attend Trinity Lutheran School?

    Y   N
    (10)   (1)

    b. If "Yes," how many years were you associated with the school?

    Years   2,   7,   8,   12,   15+
             (1)   (2)   (3)   (2)   (2)

    c. If "Yes, how would you describe __their__ time at Trinity __School__?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1
(6)	(4)			

    d. If "Yes," how would you describe __their__ time at Trinity __Church__?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1
(7)	(2)	(1)		

    e. If "Yes," how effectively did the teachers contribute to __your__ faith and life?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1
(5)	(4)			

f. If "Yes," how effectively did the pastors contribute to your faith and life?

(Very satisfying) (Somewhat satisfying) (Neutral) (Somewhat unsatisfactory) (Very unsatisfactory)
    5   4   3   2   1
  (5)   (4)   (1)

g. If "Yes," how effectively did the members contribute to your faith and life?

(Very satisfying) (Somewhat satisfying) (Neutral) (Somewhat unsatisfactory) (Very unsatisfactory)
    5   4   3   2   1
  (2)   (4)   (2)

8. At the time of leaving Trinity membership, did any of the following contribute to your inactivity?

	A great deal	Quite a bit	A Little bit	Not at all
Family Problems		1	3	3
Marriage Problems		1	1	3
Health Problems	2	1		4
Financial Problems		1	2	3
Disagreements with members of the church		1		6
Disagreements with Pastors		1	2	4
Disagreements with Teachers				6

9. Please list any elected or appointed offices you held while a member at Trinity.

    a. Parent-Teacher's Board
    b. Served on the committee that helped establish Lutheran High School

  c. Secretary to the Sunday School
  d. Parent/Teacher Association President

10 List any other ways you were involved or participated at Trinity.

  a. Choir
  b. Brownie Troop leader
  c. Usher
  d. Room Mother for school

Reflections Regarding Survey Responses

Obviously, with eleven responses, all conclusions must be tentative. However, in conjunction with this writer's pastoral experience of twenty-five years, eighteen of them in the same parish where the survey was conducted, and some common sense, some light might be shed on the matter of dropouts at Trinity. The following observations are made in view of the responses of the survey and this writer's parish experience.

1. There seems to be an irregularity between the respondents' answers and their inactivity or membership experience at Trinity. That is, only two of the eleven respondents indicated that their membership time at Trinity was a slightly negative experience (question 3). If membership at Trinity was generally positive, why did they become dropouts? Are the responses regarding their feeling towards the church being given less weight than the respondent truly feels? Or are there other matters not considered in the survey? Is it true, as some suggest, that the school's quality education system attracts students and members only for as long as it serves their purposes? Or is the overwhelming positive feeling about the school coloring

the respondents' attitude about the church? While these are possibilities, the ordering of the questions would seem to preclude that. During the interviews, this anomaly will be discussed.

2. On the other hand, such a positive response is encouraging regarding the ministry of Trinity Church and School. Remembering that these persons are losses to the church, one would expect more negative responses. In as much as they are generally positive, the task of reducing the losses ought not to be regarded as insurmountable.

3. The inconsistency of generally positive responses with the fact that the respondents are dropouts is brought out even more when one considers that the majority of responses to the questions in item seven are positive as well. In answer to the question, "How would you describe your children's time at Trinity School" - all answered in the positive (10 of 10 responses). So likewise they described their children's time at Trinity Church. Nine of 10 responses answered in the positive and one neutral. So again the question arises, why did that time come to an end so abruptly?

4. The perception of the parents regarding their student's time at Trinity is further positively enhanced by their generally positive perception of membership at Trinity School. In answer to the question, "How effectively did the teachers contribute to your faith and life?" Nine of 9 answered positively. In answer to the question, "How effectively did the pastors

contribute to your faith and life," 9 of 10 answered positively, and 1 answered neutral.

5. Of some interest is the fact that three respondents were single parents at the time of their child's confirmation and graduation. This return ratio represents a 27% return, one fairly close to the 32% that single parents represented in the mailing. However, not one single parent agreed to an interview. Why? No information is available at the present time as to the ratio of lapsed single parents and that of lapsed married parents, but this writer does feel that in the future this information might be helpful in addressing the problem of parents and children who lapse after confirmation and graduation.

6. Finally, the relationship of the lapsed with members of Trinity is generally seen positively in that 6 of 8 were positive and two somewhat dissatisfied.

So why are these eleven respondents dropouts? To be a dropout and to express a positive experience for both the children and for themselves does not appear consistent. It seems safe to say, either the respondents (a.) were not telling the truth, (b.) did not understand the questions the same way the writer intended, or (c.) becoming dropouts had nothing to do, either way, with their experiences at Trinity School and Church. Assuming that the respondents were being as honest as they could be regarding their own perception of dropping out, we are left with the latter two possibilities. Did the

respondents understand the questions differently than the writer? Perhaps their inactivity was related to matters that either the church did not address at the time of their membership and hence was not "blamed" for. Were there perhaps certain personal matters, viewed as too sensitive or shameful to discuss which were at the root cause of their inactivity? Or perhaps they were just overwhelmed with personal problems and absented themselves from the Body of Christ due to the stress of the situation, and this absence became habitual.

The possibility of this latter scenario, while not absolutely confirmed, is strengthened by the answers of the respondents to question number eight which asks them to list contributing factors to their inactivity. While the "Not at all" category received a considerable number of responses, it is important to remember that each respondent could check as many boxes as he/she chose, and that not all replied to each category. It does not take many such negative factors in one's life to contribute to a person becoming overly stressed, despondent, delinquent, and the like. In fact, it would be highly unlikely that a respondent would indicate problems in more than one or two of the categories. A brief perusal of the returned surveys confirms that generality. The fact that "A Great deal," "Quite a bit," and "A Little bit" in the top four categories received a number of marks (sixteen of forty-five checks or 35% of those checked) would indicate that problems outside of Trinity

School and Church contributed heavily to their inactivity. During the interview this area will be pursued.

Are these responses consistent with this writer's experiences and common sense? He believes so! While such responses do not tell us what the exact problem was that contributed to their lapsing, they do tentatively confirm that many times dropouts are not dropouts because of bitter negative experiences they have had at church. Rather, because the church was not able to minister to them at the time of their crises (either due to ignorance of the situation or inability to minister), or, equally regrettable, because the church did not have the wherewithal to help or the attitude to provide help, they left. In reflecting on this more, the responses given in this survey have the ring of truth. For many years this writer has attempted to visit delinquent members and determine the cause of delinquency. He is well aware of the reluctance of many (especially the lapsed) to confide, even with their pastor, about the nature of problems listed in the survey. More often than not, the pastor is the last to know about family, marital, financial, and interpersonal problems with other members of the church.

Follow Up of Survey Responses Through Interviews

Five of the eleven respondents to the survey indicated a willingness to participate further through a personal interview. Since the respondents indicated their willingness to provide their names, it is possible to make a few observations regarding them.

The following consists of some general information regarding the persons participating in the interview section of this undertaking:

1. Three males and two females indicated a willingness to be interviewed. This represented two couples and one male whose wife is still a member.

2. One of the female interviewees became a member of the church through infant baptism. One of the males became a member as a child when his family joined. One male joined the church through adult confirmation after his wife had joined, and one female and one male joined the church through transferring in from a sister congregation of Trinity.

3. Four of the respondents had children in the confirmation and graduating class of either 1984 or 1985. One respondent had a child confirmed and graduated from Trinity in 1987.

4. One couple no longer held membership at Trinity because they joined a Lutheran church of another fellowship. One of the couples was still on the membership roster at Trinity but had not attended for years. One person had been removed from membership due to lack of attendance.

5. The two male spouses, while not indicating in the returned survey a willingness to participate in the interview, were present at the interview, and at that time they indicated their willingness to participate. Their responses to the questions are included in the results.

Interviews

All five of the interviews were conducted in the homes of those surveyed. They were pleasant meetings which lasted about an hour and a half each. The following questions were asked in the home interviews with the two couples and one individual. Not all answers will have five responses because sometimes there was no opinion. In the case of couples, the answer was frequently given by one of the spouses for both. The writer attempted to draw out the less talkative partner and determine if that was indeed his/her opinion as well.

1. How many members were in the immediate family at time of graduation of your child from Trinity School?

     3, 4, 5

2. What was your length of time of membership at Trinity?

     5, 7, 13, 25, 48

     A. Were you a active member of a church(s) prior to your membership in Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church?

          Y   N
          (4)   (1)

     B. What was the quality of your relationship in a church prior to Trinity?

          (Positive, good, good)

3. What was the length of the relationship with Trinity Lutheran School and your child?

     4, 7, 18

4. How many children attended Trinity Lutheran School?

    <u>1, 1, 3</u>

5. How many of your children matriculated from Trinity Lutheran School?

    <u>1, 1, 3</u>

6. How satisfied were you with the education your child(ren) received at Trinity?

    Very Dissatisfied   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfied

                                              (5)

    Comments:

    "We were dissatisfied with one teacher."

7. In your opinion, how <u>thorough</u> was their instruction in religion?

    Very Poor   1   2   3   4   5   Very Thorough

                                        (3)   (2)

8. After attending and graduating from Trinity School, in your opinion, how practical was the religious education your child received?

    Very Impractical   1   2   3   4   5   Very Practical

                                (1)   (3)   (1)

    Comments:

    "The religion class was too idealistic. It didn't deal with the real world. Our daughter did not go to Lutheran High School, and she got in the wrong crowd. We should have sent her."

    "Very practical."

    In asking what practical meant, one respondent was told "usable in daily life."

9. How would you characterize <u>your</u> social participation in Trinity prior to your child's graduation?

Very Low   1   2   3   4   5   Very High
                  (1)   (2)   (3)

Comments:
     "I traveled a lot and was on the road."

10. How would you characterize <u>the regularity</u> of your personal devotional life prior to your child's graduation?

Very Irregular   1   2   3   4   5   Very Regular
                  (3)   (2)

Comments:

     "We did our prayers but not Bible study."

     "Mostly self-reflection, not structured."

11. How would you characterize <u>the quality</u> of your personal devotional life prior to your child's graduation?

Very Dissatisfying   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfying
                  (1)   (2)   (1)   (1)

12. Assuming every Sunday attendance as the norm, how would you describe your attendance at church prior to your child's graduation?

Very Low   1   2   3   4   5   Very High
                       (1)   (2)   (2)

Comments:

     "I tried to attend every other Sunday."

     "We tried to go more when she was in school. We traveled a lot on the weekends."

13. Sometimes family/marriage/job problems contribute to activity/inactivity in the church; how do you see that affecting your activity in Trinity?

Very Little   1   2   3   4   5   A Great Deal
                                   (1)   (3)   (1)

Comments:

"I was remodeling houses - that took up my weekends. I had to put kids through college."

"I'm usually where my husband is on the weekends. He has dual residency. "

"I had to work on Sundays."

"We were gone almost half the weekends."

14. How would you characterize the quality of your family life prior to your child's graduation?

Very Dissatisfying   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfying
                                     (2)   (5)
Comments:

"We've always been happy."

15. How would you characterize the quality of your family life now?

Very Dissatisfying   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfying
                             (3)   (4)

Comments:

"No kids."

16. How many close friends, within the congregation, would you say you had at the time of your child's graduation?

> 0
> 0
> 0
> 0
> 4

Are you still socially active with them?   Y   N - 1

Comments:

> "Trinity is very cliquey. We're very busy."

17. Was your inactivity at Trinity influenced by problems you observed in the church?

Not Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So
                   (3)   (4)

Comments:

> "Cliquey."

18. Sometimes problems with or among the staff contribute to activity/inactivity in the church. Do you see these affecting your participation?

Not Very Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So
                   (5)

19. At what point in your spiritual journey at Trinity did you decide that you did not want to be a member at Trinity any longer?

Comments:

> "I never decided to not be a member; I was removed."
> "The hymnal controversy did it. 1983. They just didn't want to change."

20. If you could reflect on the positive aspects of Trinity, what would two or three of them be?

> "I did enjoy the friendliness of the members."

> "The ambiance of the building."

> "The change in the method of communion distribution."

> "The school - a good educational system."

> "The principal."

> "The sports program."

> "All the people, the members and the leadership work to promote the church."

> "They are there if you need them. I could call for help, whatever."

> "They don't hound you."

> "The Saturday service. It's casual."

What would two or three of the negative aspects be?

> "The sermons were too long and boring."

> "Cliques."

> "The church was not friendly enough."

> "I get the feeling the people weren't looking for spiritual growth.

> "We never felt accepted. Never got to know people. We were there, but did not feel that we were a part of the church."

21. Did you ever seek assistance/advice from one of the pastors for a personal problem?

Y   N
(2)   (3)

If "Yes," did his response/non-response influence your decision to attend services at Trinity?

Not Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So

(2)

Comments:

"The pastor didn't help me very much when I was trying to deal with the death of my mother."

22. Did the pastor's relationship with you influence your attendance at the Lord's Supper or church attendance?

Y   N
(2)   (3)

Comments:

"If the sermon was too long - why go to communion?"

"He made you feel special."

23. Prior to the graduation of your child from Trinity Lutheran School, how effectively (meaningfully) did the pastors/ other members of the church contribute to your faith and life?

Not Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So

(1)   (1)   (3)

24. Did your relationship or lack of relationship with other members influence your attendance at the Lord's supper or church attendance?

Y   N
             (5)

Comments:

"It did affect other ways - socially. Going to church is not a social event, so it did not affect that way."

25 If you could name three things that would help others from becoming inactive at Trinity, what would they be?

"Be involved."

"Get a job where you don't have to work on Sundays."

"Be more friendly; speak to all people."

26. If you could suggest three things that the congregation could do that would help it retain its members, what would they be?

"Reach out to new people. Make them feel welcome."

"Get them involved."

"Be friendly."

"Sit in different pews."

27. Are you currently attending a church?   Y   N
                                                    (5)

If yes: About how many times a month?

If yes: What would help you become more active there?

If No: As you think about your church membership, when are the times that you would like to reactivate it?

"I have a guilt complex."

"Haven't given it any thought."

"We are seldom in one place long enough to do much on weekends."

"Apply self to a set schedule."

"I wish we went all the time."

"Easter."

28. Perhaps there is a question I did not ask or something that you might want to say that would address one or more of the questions I have asked you today. Please feel free to ask or to state your concern.

> "I do not remember getting any notification that I was removed from membership."

Observations from Interviews

Considering the fact that both the surveys and interviews were conducted with inactive and former members, it is surprising how cordial the interviews were and how mild the answers on the surveys were. In particular one would expect that a face to face encounter might elicit some antagonistic responses. Even in the context of the comments about Trinity being "cliquey" and the hymnal controversy (all coming from one couple), the conversation remained pleasant. It was obvious to this writer that the persons being interviewed understood the interviews, not as a time to argue or blame, but a time to reflect and help. This writer was grateful for that attitude on the part of those interviewed. Several observations do seem in order following the interviews.

1. Once again, the positive comments about Trinity School and Church, coming from inactive and former members, seem out of place. It would seem that the inactivity of these people largely did not have anything to do with any major problems they experienced at Trinity School or Church. Although several problems were mentioned, none of them alone seemed to be the cause of inactivity.

2. In discussing their inactivity, those interviewed seemed to have no particular embarrassment about being inactive, removed from membership, or inactive in their present church. To them, they thought their reasons for inactivity were thoroughly understandable. In all five instances, work schedules, relaxation time, and vacations seemed to take precedence over worship life. With the couple that complained that Trinity was cliquey, the observation was made by them that their present church (which they are now not attending either) is not as friendly as it had seemed to be at first. While they did not specifically say they didn't come to church because they had no vital relationships there, it was certainly implied. On the other hand, this was the couple that was always gone on the weekends. It was implied also that the weekends were out of their control. Regarding the second couple, his work schedule posed a problem on Sundays. That they could attend regularly on Saturdays did not seem to occur to them until the Saturday service was mentioned. With all five people, the importance of the means of grace in the life of the believer did not seem to be understood.

3. Throughout the interviews, inactivity was frequently represented as something that the respondents had no control over despite the fact that for many years Trinity has had a Wednesday noon service, a Saturday evening service, and two Sunday services along with Wednesday Advent and Lenten services. The comments in questions 12 and 13 capsulize quite well the rationale for low attendance.

4. In two instances comments about alternative times of worship came up and were seen as potentially positive alternatives to Sunday worship. In this writer's view, while the lack of concern on their part was troublesome, the interest in other times of worship was encouraging. While these persons may not ever again worship at Trinity, it does seem that there is good reason to consider another worship time suitable for those who work full weekends, cannot attend the Wednesday noontime service, or must be out of town on weekends.

5. Further, in discussing their inactivity it seems that the matter of their spiritual lives outside of the church environment is relevant. All five of those interviewed indicated that their personal devotional lives were, at best, irregular and the quality of the same rather mediocre. Whether this is inconsistent with those who are active members or not, it does seem to be an important consideration.

6. In answering the question about their worship attendance prior to their last child's confirmation and graduation (question #12), we find the respondents grouped in the middle with four of five in the average to above average range of attendance. One of the advantages of long tenure is that a pastor can reflect back on questions like this and also formulate an answer. Let this suffice: Memory has been kind to the respondents.

7. Another aspect of their inactivity seemed to be their lack of positive friendships within the congregation. This is also an important factor in Church

Growth literature. While such friendships might not keep people coming to church (as evidenced by the one person who had several good friends as members of Trinity), the lack of friendships certainly does seem to be a factor in the minds of some of the lapsed. The lack of friends, the lack of friendliness, and the perceived cliquishness of the congregation certainly do not help to attract or retain members.

8. While there was some expressed concern about their spiritual lives, this writer found little understanding on the part of those interviewed regarding the importance of the means of grace in their spiritual lives. The worship service, rather than being seen as the fountain from which God's grace flows, seemed to be viewed as just another obligation making demands on a person's time and activities; it was not nearly as important as one's rest and relaxation time at that.

9. In the minds of those interviewed, there seemed to be a rather vague distinction between the school and the church. The practical importance of the school, the value of the education received for their children, and the importance of the children receiving religious education seemed important to these parents. However, the importance of practicing one's spiritual values through personal devotions and regular worship did not seem to be as important. While the spiritual dimension of the school was touted for the children, the interviewees' devotional and worship lives were lackluster, and the importance of making sacrifices for the sake of Word and Sacrament for

themselves was not evident. One cannot help but wonder what their children's spiritual lives might be now if the parents had set a positive example in worship and personal devotions as they did in choosing to send their children to Trinity School in the first place.

Conclusions Regarding Interviews

What have we learned from the lapsed through the surveys and interviews? First, it appears, that anger and hostility toward the church is not necessarily, as had been assumed, the primary reason people drop out of the church. While there was mild agitation evident over what was called "the hymnal controversy" and a teacher who seemed to be a problem for one family, it could hardly be called anger. Further, except for one couple, no controversial issue was even raised. Some would argue that time has soothed the hot tempers, but from this writer's perspective and interaction with the lapsed, that is not the case. This writer has made too many calls on delinquents wherein extremely old wounds and heartaches seemed to have occurred just yesterday to give credence to the saying "time heals all wounds." Perhaps the reason for low 'scores" in the anger responses is that their anger is a factor that cannot be appropriately dealt with by those interviewed.

Secondly, this writer sees a profound lack of understanding, appreciation, and concern for the means of grace on the part of the lapsed. While those interviewed occasionally expressed a desire to return to worship,

it seemed to be more of a desire to return to a building or to a social life than to the place where God's means of grace are distributed and the life-giving words of salvation are proclaimed.

Thirdly, because the means of grace are also present in the private devotions and Bible readings conducted at home, the poor devotional lives of the lapsed seem significant as well. While no comparisons have been made between the inactive and those who are have an active worship life as to the regularity and quality of their devotional lives, the absence of a devotional life among the lapsed seems does seem significant. However, it ought to be noted anecdotally that many presently active persons in the congregation admit to a similar lack of regularity and poor quality in their own devotional lives. This, of course, raises the question whether these individuals also are among the potentially lapsed.

Finally, the lack of meaningful relationships with other members seems to be a significant factor in the lives of the lapsed. The term "cliquey," the comments that the church wasn't friendly enough, and "we never felt accepted" stand out for consideration as a genuine factor in active members becoming inactive.

What can the church do with this information? While the survey and interview cannot be said to prove that inactivity is a result of the last three conclusions, there are a host of Biblical and Confessional studies regarding the importance of the means of grace in the life of each believer. The secular

world also provides ample studies, surveys, inventories, and the like that support the contention that these three factors are among the most significant in the retaining of members.   The church would be wise if it made a conscious effort to inculcate the importance of the means of grace and made extraordinary efforts to change the public persona of the church to a warm, caring, compassionate, sensitive, concerned gathering of believers.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTION

At the beginning of this paper we expressed concern over the problem of
the lapsed. Christendom, at large, and Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
and School, in particular, have a problem with inactives. The loss of members
through dropping out in the church catholic and Trinity congregation is
shocking! This problem at Trinity is particularly vexing as many of these
families represent those who have been catechized, confirmed, and
graduated from Trinity's well-respected grade school. Despite a relatively low
rate of inactivity through the final year of elementary education, many of the
confirmed youth and their parents in less than ten years are thoroughly
inactive.

Before we could really begin addressing this problem, it was necessary
to establish the theological underpinnings by which we would determine, if
possible, a proper approach to the lapsed. This we did in chapters two and
three. In the first of these chapters we saw that adhering to a strict
confessional position was necessary not only because such a position is that
of the church body to which we belong, but because it is the only adequate
safeguard to the moral and theological relativism rampant in the church today.

In chapter three we showed that those who are of the church and fall away from the means of grace are lost eternally because it is only by the converting work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace that faith is created and sustained. Our concern for the lapsed, therefore, is more than academic or numerical. In chapter four an additional element was added. This chapter asserts that the lapsed can be clearly identified by their despising of the means of grace, and it is only through proclamation of Law and Gospel that they will be converted and returned to the loving arms of the church.

The important question chapter four raised was whether it was appropriate to speak of an additional element, in addition to Law and Gospel being proclaimed, that could be used in reaching the lost. We conclude that the Confessions do provide reasonable and adequate latitude within the confessional strictures so that the needs of the people may be addressed. The importance of paying attention to the needs of the people and using all of the resources available is clear. While the particular needs of the people or "where they're at" may be vague expressions, it is appropriate to use these terms and be confessional, provided it is understood that they are always used with a view to spiritually ministering through Word and Sacrament/Law and Gospel. (And if they are lapsed, of course, they need to be reclaimed by the same means.)

Building upon the position that the Confessions do allow orthodox Lutherans more latitude in addressing the needs of the people than some

would seem to suggest, chapter five examined Church Growth from a Lutheran perspective. While there are a number of serious theological errors in Church Growth which seriously hamper its use by confessional Lutherans, this chapter concludes that some of the major components of Church Growth may be adapted for use by the confessional Lutheran. Following Koester's insights and distinctions, we may say that the confessional Lutheran may adapt certain terms or methods of Church Growth without violating the doctrinal position of the church. This is especially significant as a major emphasis of Church Growth is getting people to come to church by meeting their felt needs and using the proper sociological insights. And getting the lapsed to worship and to hear the Word proclaimed is a significant step in the reclamation process.

Chapter six addresses systems theory. Although systems theory is not as familiar a term or concept as Church Growth, it too has been applied to the church with a view of helping the church function better, deal with conflict, adjust to change, and maintain its health. As with Church Growth, this writer has found some elements of systems theory to be unacceptable to the confessional Lutheran. On the other hand, some of its insights are extremely relevant and helpful to the church in dealing with the lapsed. This writer enthusiastically suggests that systems theory ought to be carefully examined by confessional Lutherans, and every attempt ought to be made to understand the concepts and apply them to the parish as the leadership

seeks to retain members and reach the lapsed.

The seventh chapter in this paper consists of a survey and interview conducted with lapsed or former members. The tentative conclusions of both of these instruments blend quite well with the positions taken earlier in the paper regarding attempts to reach the lapsed through acceptable Church Growth methods and systems theory.

Preparing for the Future

But what will the direction be that is taken at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in the future in dealing with its lost sheep, especially those who along with their parents dropout after Confirmation/graduation? In view of this work, what will the pastoral and lay leadership do to influence that direction?

First, among the pastoral staff and lay leadership, more attention needs to be given to develop a proper understanding of confessional subscription and its importance as confessional Lutherans. Further additional attention needs to be given to the means of grace, and the proper proclamation of Law and Gospel within the congregation. If a congregation is to be a truly confessional Lutheran congregation, its pastor and lay leadership need to be well informed on what is Biblical and what is not. It is apparent from the interviews of the lapsed that there was little understanding about the importance of the frequent use of the means of grace and how neglect of them was fatal to faith. While the lapsed interviewed clearly identified themselves as Lutheran, they, also, did not understand that their habitual

neglect of the means of grace negated the idea that they were truly faithful Lutheran Christians. One can only guess what the understanding of the average member is regarding these topics. But this writer believes that it is not significantly different. While this writer has been studious on his own part in continuing to study and grow, has taught several classes on the Confessions and makes efforts to incorporate appropriate citations in other Bible classes as well as in sermons, it is obvious that the job is far from done. Much more needs to be done within the congregation to inculcate the truth that the confessional writings are the teaching of the Bible and that the means of grace are God's only tools for conferring and strengthening faith. A truly proper understanding of these tools on the part of the congregation would, undoubtedly, help lessen the dropout problem within the church. Bible classes for new and older members, bulletin inserts, and newsletter articles which emphasize the importance of the means of grace need to be consciously planned. Training for the Elders in the Confessions of the church and devotional articles and addresses for organizations which emphasize confessional subscription and the means of grace, likewise, need to be part of the regular agenda of these means of communicating.

Secondly, given a proper Lutheran understanding of Church Growth and its methods, certain aspects of those methods need to be included in the "warp and woof" of the fabric of the congregation programs.

1. Brief addresses to organizations, parts of sermons, and Bible class

topics on the topic of Church Growth should abound. Why certain Church Growth methods are not acceptable and others are acceptable needs to be explained clearly and succinctly to the congregational leadership and general membership as is appropriate.

2. Bible classes and topics that relate to the concerns of youth and parenting need to be offered regularly on Sundays and during the week. Alternative creative methods of Bible study and family or private devotions need to be encouraged and taught as well.

3. The congregation needs to adopt a confessional vision statement for this area of youth ministry which clearly delineates the area of responsibility that the congregation has with the youth and their parents.

4. Because such a sizable number of the lapsed are connected with youth and their parents, it seems especially important to work on the points of contact with both child and family. Since participation in the church at this time is so important, plans need to be made that include present and future activities. For the youth there ought to be frequent special Junior High youth activities, service days, and spiritual retreats. Parent meetings which provide encouragement, information, exchange of ideas and interaction ought to be held several times a year as well. Providing interaction between parent and child should be encouraged as well. Mother/daughter banquets and father/son retreats need to be held. Every effort ought to be made to increase the points of contact between the youth and parents and the church.

5. Professional and lay leadership that relate well to youth, are well trained, and have the spiritual maturity suitable for recruiting other adult leadership ought to be secured as well.

6. The wise use of science and technology as a servant of the Gospel ought to be encouraged. In this area the insights of sociology, psychology, emerging trends among youth, emotional, physical, and spiritual development of youth need to be encouraged.

Third, systems theory, as had been said earlier, needs to be studied seriously by the leadership of this congregation. While systems theory does have some elements unacceptable to Christians, many of its insights seem to be especially applicable to congregational life.

The following are some specific suggestions that a special systems theory committee might consider as it seeks to make recommendations to the congregation changing the congregational dropout problem especially as it relates to post-confirmation students and parents.

1. Systems theory emphasizes the interrelatedness of all its parts. Examination needs to be made of the various areas of ministry within Trinity and how the congregation seeks to meet the full range of needs of each area. It is very possible that one or two areas are receiving a preponderance of money, personnel, and attention, and thus, without saying so, communicating

that others (high school youth and their parents, for example) are not as important.

2. If the Body of Christ concept is to be truly implemented in Trinity then each age grouping of Trinity needs to be considered equally important and worthy of attention. Congregational boards and committees, according to their job description, need to clearly state how they implement the Body of Christ concept in their vision/goal statement.

3. Trinity congregation being a mature and well established congregation, needs to examine the balance it has achieved between morphostasis and morphogenesis. Has it developed a too resistant attitude to change? Are the forces of change held too tightly in check thus eliminating those persons who might represent that change?

4. Although the survey and interview indicate that the parents of the confirmed and graduated youth were well satisfied with the education they received and fairly well satisfied with the church, according to systems theory there are systemic reasons for the lapsing of so many. That is, despite the words of concern within the congregation, are there attitudes and forces at work in the congregation that encourage members to lapse? Particular attention needs to be given to this question by the special committee.

5. Does the congregation genuinely encourage full participation in the decision making process of school families thus fully incorporating them into the life of the congregation, or does it practice a restrictive participation thus,

in essence, eliminating them from participation after graduation?

6. Is individual initiative encouraged, or does the congregation rely too heavily upon corporate decision making thus allowing "progress blockers" an excessive amount of power?

Final Thoughts

The problem of the lapsed is challenging. The opportunities, given a strong Biblical/confessional base with a wise and appropriate use of natural wisdom are awesome. The hope of this writer is that this paper will further that endeavor. While more effort needs to be expended in this generally neglected area, Trinity Church and School are doing many things well if we are to believe the interviewees. All involved in the life of the congregation should rejoice in that! However, more is needed than merely rejoicing. All those involved in the life of the congregation should resolve to move forward as confessional Lutherans using appropriately all of the tools with which God has blessed us in an earnest effort to retain the faithful and reclaim the lapsed.

APPENDIX

<div align="right">November 9, 1995</div>

1~
2~
3~

Dear 4~

In a few days you will be receiving a special confidential survey from Rev. Micheal Strong, Head Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church. This survey is prepared for former members of Trinity. You are receiving it with the hope that Trinity congregation might more effectively serve and keep its members. Pastor Strong is sending this survey out in conjunction with a paper he is completing at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Why am I telling you in advance? For several reasons.

1.) As a former member you might be surprised when you receive this mailing from the pastor and wonder what it is all about.

2.) As a former member it might help for you to reflect on your membership at Trinity before you receive the survey. Such reflection may help you answer some of the questions addressed to you in the survey.

3.) Pastor Strong's paper has the approval of the congregation, and your response will be held confidential by him. It is important for an accurate picture that we have high participation from those who are receiving this survey. I hope you will participate. It will take only a few minutes of your time.

Again, if you have any questions do not hesitate to call me after 6:00 p.m. at 787-5765.

<div align="right">Sincerely in Christ,

Richard Koopman, President</div>

November 9, 1995

1~
2~
3~

Dear 4~

Thank you for participating in this survey. It should take less than a half an hour to complete. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your opinions. This is a confidential survey, and your name will not appear anywhere in the results. If you would like a copy of the summary results, I will be happy to provide you with one if you include your name and address on the three by five card enclosed. The results will not be available for several months, however.

In addition to the survey I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience. When the survey is returned to me, I will open it personally and deal with each one personally.

I am excited about this survey, and I hope that your participation and that of many others will help Trinity congregation more effectively serve and keep its members. In anticipation of your participation, I thank you.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Micheal M. Strong

SURVEY

(Circle One)

Gender   M   F

(Circle One)

Age: 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80-84

1. How did you become a member of Trinity?

    ___ Baptism as a baby/child

    ___ Junior Confirmation

    ___ Adult Instruction Class

    ___ Transfer from another Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation

2. For approximately how many years were you a member of Trinity? _____

3. How would you characterize your membership at Trinity?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

4. If you were a member at another church <u>prior</u> to your membership at Trinity, how would you describe your membership there?

NA (Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

5. If you hold membership in another church <u>now,</u> how would you describe your membership there now?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

    ___ Presently, I do not hold membership at any church.

Comments:

(Circle One)

6. Did you attend Trinity Lutheran School? Y N

If "Yes" which grades: K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

7. If you had children at the time of your membership at Trinity, did they attend Trinity Lutheran School? Y N

If "Yes," how many years were you associated with the school?

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15+

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

If "Yes," how would you describe their time at Trinity Church?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

If "Yes," how effectively did the teachers contribute to your faith and life?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

If "Yes," how effectively did the pastors contribute to your faith and life?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

If "Yes," how effectively did the members contribute to your faith and life?

(Very satisfying)	(Somewhat satisfying)	(Neutral)	(Somewhat unsatisfactory)	(Very unsatisfactory)
5	4	3	2	1

Comments:

8. At the time of leaving Trinity membership, did any of the following contribute to your inactivity?

	A great deal	Quite a bit	No Effect	A Little	Not at all
Family Problems					
Marriage Problems					
Health Problems					
Financial Problems					
Disagreements with members of the church					
Disagreements with Pastors					
Disagreements with Teachers					

Other: (Please specify)

9. Please list any elected or appointed offices you held while a member at Trinity.

10 List any other ways you were involved or participated at Trinity.

11. Would you be willing participate in a brief follow-up interview with me for the purpose of additional information? (Please check below.)
        Y   N

    If "Yes," please include your name and phone number below. Thank you!

    Name _____

    Phone Number _____

Home Interview Questions

1. How many members were in the immediate family at time of graduation of your child from Trinity School?

2. What was your length of time of membership at Trinity?

   A. Were you a active member of a church(s) prior to your membership in Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church?

      Y   N

   B. What was the quality of your relationship in a church prior to Trinity?

3. What was your length of relationship of you and your children with Trinity Lutheran School?

4. How many children attended Trinity Lutheran School?.

5. How many of your children matriculated from Trinity Lutheran School?

6. How satisfied were you with the education your child(ren) received at Trinity?

   Very Dissatisfied   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfied

   Comments:

7. In your opinion, how <u>thorough</u> was their instruction in religion?

   Very Poor   1   2   3   4   5   Very Thorough

   Comments:

8. After attending and graduating from Trinity School, in your opinion, how practical was the religious education your child received?

Very Impractical   1   2   3   4   5   Very Practical

Comments:

9. How would you characterize your social participation in Trinity prior to your child's graduation?

Very Low   1   2   3   4   5   Very High

Comments:

10. How would you characterize the regularity of your personal devotional life prior to your child's graduation?

Very Irregular   1   2   3   4   5   Very Regular

Comments:

11. How would you characterize the quality of your personal devotional life prior to your child's graduation?

Very Dissatisfying   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfying

Comments"

12. Assuming every Sunday attendance as the norm, how would you describe your attendance at church prior to your child's graduation?

Very Low   1   2   3   4   5   Very High

Comments:

13. Sometimes family/marriage/job problems contribute to activity/inactivity in the church; how do you see that affecting your activity in Trinity?

   Very Little   1   2   3   4   5   A Great Deal

   Comments:

14. How would you characterize the quality of your family life prior to your child's graduation?

   Very Dissatisfying   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfying

   Comments:

15. How would you characterize the quality of your family life now?

   Very Dissatisfying   1   2   3   4   5   Very Satisfying

   Comments:

16. How many close friends, within the congregation, would you say you had at the time of your child's graduation?

   _____

   Are you still socially active with them?   Y   N

   Comments:

17. Was your inactivity at Trinity influenced by problems you observed in the church?

   Not Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So

   Comments:

18. Sometimes problems with or among the staff contribute to activity/inactivity in the church. Do you see that affecting your participation?

Very Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So

Comments:

19. At what point in your spiritual journey at Trinity did you decide that you did not want to be a member at Trinity any longer?

Comments:

20. If you could reflect on the positive aspects of Trinity, what would two or three of them be?

What would two or three of the negative aspects be?

21. Did you ever seek assistance/advice from one of the pastors for a personal problem?

       Y   N

If "Yes," did his response/nonresponse influence your decision to attend services at Trinity?

Not Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So

Comments:

22. Did the pastor's relationship with you influence your attendance at the Lord's Supper or church attendance?

     Y   N

     Comments:

23. Prior to the graduation of your child from Trinity Lutheran School, how effectively (meaningfully) did the pastors/ other members of the church contribute to your faith and life?

     Not Much   1   2   3   4   5   Very Much So

     Comments:

24. Did your relationship or lack of relationship with other members influence your attendance at the Lord's Supper or church attendance?

     Y   N

     Comments:

25 If you could name three things that would help others from becoming inactive at Trinity, what would they be?

26. If you could suggest three things that the congregation could do that would help it retain its members, what would they be?

27. Are you currently attending a church?   Y   N

If yes: About how many time a month?

If Yes: What would help you become more active there?

If No: As you think about your church membership, when are the times that you would like to reactivate it?

28. Perhaps there is a question I did not ask or something that you might want to say that would address one or more of the questions I have asked you today. Please feel free to ask or to state your concern.

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