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INTEGRATING THE ADULT CONFIRMAND INTO THE
LOCAL CONGREGATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THE INTRODUCTION	1
II. BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS IN INTEGRATING THE ADULT CONFIRMAND	6
The Source	6
The Goal	13
The Result	15
III. INTEGRATION OF THE CONFIRMAND INTO THE CONGREGATION.	29
IV. PROGRAMMING FOR THE NEW MEMBER	54
V. CONCLUSIONS	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	65

CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTION

The reason Jesus came into this world was singular. It is best expressed when He had that important conversation with Zacchaeus, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). After He was finished with His work and was getting ready to depart, He made His purpose our purpose, declaring, "As my Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).

The Christian congregation still exists for the purpose of carrying out the great commission of our Lord, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19,20). So that the great commission may not be the great omission, we must work diligently at seeking and saving the lost.

For almost two thousand years the Church has been confronted with the gigantic task of a world-wide mission so that all may know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. And with God's blessing it has done an adequate job.

But the Church cannot be so occupied with the task of winning and bringing them in that they neglect the other task of "teaching them to observe all which I have commanded you," that as fast as we welcome them in the front door, they are ushered out the back.

The President of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, Dr. J. A. O. Preus made this encouraging report to the church, "The number of adults gained by baptism or confirmation in our church during 1975 was 27,758, the highest gain in this area since 1969. Another encouraging sign is that "back door losses" (removal from church rolls) "were down somewhat."¹ Hopefully we will not earn the title, "The Church of the Holy Sieve."

But this will not just happen. Not only must we be aware of the problem, but honest effort must be expended to maintain those who have been gained. Are we willing to expend as much effort in keeping our membership as we are in gaining it? The "gathered" church at 11:00 A.M. on Sunday morning is just as vital as the "scattered" church on Monday morning and during the rest of the week as it witnesses to its faith in the world and to the world.

They are to be active members. The Bible speaks of the active Christian in the church as "lively stones" and "an holy priesthood, who offers up spiritual sacrifices." Paul says, "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men. Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:2,3). And Peter comments, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

¹J. A. O. Preus, Blessed to Serve (St. Louis: Department of Public Relations of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod), p. 4.

The royal priesthood of believers, then, is to function. It is not a human contrivance but rather a divine. This paper hopes to show from Scriptures that methods and programs do not motivate but the Holy Spirit through the witness of God's Word.

Methods of activating and integrating into the church will be touched on so that by any means we might save some. But this thesis will not satisfy all who read it. For it does not claim to have investigated all the programs or tried to define what an active member is. Probably the closest that this paper will come to that answer is that a person must center his life in and around the Word and the Sacraments. While many subjects will be treated, such as preaching, counseling, working with youth, evangelism, stewardship, psychology, personality and doctrine, none of these will be an exhaustive treatise. Methods may change but the great commission is still the same. The Word must be communicated to people through people.

The Biblical implications in working with members and keeping them active in the work of the church will center around three points. First, it looks at the source of all that makes a member active. An active member is not necessarily one who is busy in a program, but one who recognizes that Christ is his only source for life and activity in the church. No program that does not involve people around the Word is worthy to take up the valuable time of God's chosen people.

Secondly, we will look at the goals that we want to accomplish in the life of those who are in the local congregation. When a person is activated he should show forth the glory of his God Who loved him and gave Himself for him.

Also, we will look at the results Scripture expects in the life of the active church member. Several qualities are mentioned, but it certainly is not an exhaustive list. Nor will this be considered a minimum list which everyone is expected to show forth in their life.

In summary, it is hoped that many valuable lessons will be learned from this study. But basic is the fact that we are saved by "grace" and not anything that we do. God's working in our lives is purely undeserved and acts done to His glory are not in payment for what He has done for us.

There is also a tendency to equate church membership with Christianity. Too many people are brought into the church who are not Christian. Just because they are members does not mean that we must treat them as Christians. Maybe we should be treating some of our members as non-Christians as we deal with them.

Another thing we have to consider is that the Old Adam is very real in trying to get us to neglect the Word and to accomplish goals in the church by means other than God has given us.

Person to person relationships are re-emphasized and small group study helps people to become acquainted and not to feel threatened.

Much of what I am saying is pictured by Bel Kaufman's book Up The Down Staircase. It concerns a teacher in a New York high school who repeatedly makes the mistake of going up a staircase intended for downward traffic. The metaphor aptly describes the typical church member in this paper: he is intent on going up a staircase of Christianity that God designed for down traffic.

When a teacher is open to God and man, when he reflects a spirit of freedom and conviction, his pupils are drawn toward his faith. But the parents or teacher who is occupied with no-noes either repels the young person by his distortion of Christianity or gains a convert for the crowd going up the down staircase.²

²Merton P. Strommen, Five Cries of Youth (New York: Harper and Row, c.1974), p. 85.

CHAPTER II

BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS IN INTEGRATING THE ADULT CONFIRMAND

The Source

Let us look into God's Word to see what the source is for integrating members into the local congregation.

The Gospels and Christ are very clear in this matter. As stated in the Word of Christ, the sum total is always the same, "Without Me you can do nothing." In His encounter with the devil Christ explains what a man alive in God is, namely, "Every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). In His Sermon on the Mount He explains that it is the Word that moves men to do and act. He shows what faith in Him does. It moves him to serve both God and man. In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, the Gospel makes it clear that the woman was motivated by Christ's conversation, or preaching, to call her neighbors from the nearby town. They in turn declare that they do not believe merely because of her words, but because they have met the Christ. John 9 reports that the man whose eyes were healed believed on Jesus and that this moved him to worship Him. Christ explains in John 10 that because the sheep are known of Him and in turn know Him, they follow Him. He insists in John 14 that the believers will be moved by their faith to do His works and will, explaining that the power to be motivated will come, and can only come, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, whom He will send. In John 15

Jesus informs us, that the very reason we have become workers in His Kingdom is that we have been ordained by Him to be active in this way, for the motivation found in the believers has its very source in Him. When He meets His disciples after His ordeal on the cross and His resurrection, we are told that they were very glad. The Christians' gladness and happiness is to have only one source, that which flows from what God in Christ has done for those who love Him and from the encounter with the Christ, who is the very Resurrection and the Life. The closing lines in the 20th chapter of John inform us that the whole reason for the recounting of this Gospel is that we may read and hear this wonderful story and, in so doing, may be led to believe in the Christ who is presented.

Luke also very forcefully shows in the story about the Emmaus disciples, that it is the recital of the glorious Gospel message by the risen Lord Himself which creates faith in the despairing hearts of His disciples. Such faith then in turn moves them to run to Jerusalem to bring the glorious message of the resurrected Christ to the disciples who, they thought, did not know this discovery of, and their joy in, the risen Lord to move toward others. Thus it is clear from the words of the Christ of the Gospels that the only source of Christian motivation is faith in the risen Lord.

Let us now look into the inspired teachings and writings of the Apostles. To the Romans Paul says that it is the mercy of God that motivates us to will and to run in Him (Rom. 9:16). To the Corinthians he writes that all power to conquer, when adversities meet us in kingdom work, flows through the Holy Spirit in Christ. He urges the

Corinthians to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the Lord," because God has already given them the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord and that they would, therefore, labor with success (1 Cor. 15:58). Having preached to them in power, he reminds them that his motivation has its source in the light, which has been given to him from above (2 Cor. 4:6). He goes from country to country, from city to city, preaching Christ and Him crucified and warning men of the end of all things, not for his own glorification and honor; instead, it is the love of Christ that constrains him. This is the compelling power in his whole life (2 Cor. 5:14). Men may admire the zeal, his fastings, his utterances, his life under all sorts of conditions, but he takes no credit for any of it, for God has called him into the ministry and continues to send him from place to place (2 Cor. 6:3-10). His preaching always proceeds from the source of faith in Him who sent him from the road to Damascus out into the whole world (2 Cor. 2:13-14). He claims to be an able minister of the New Testament, because God has made him that and because God continues to drive him on by his love for Him who has begotten him into this faith. He holds before the Corinthians the high possibility of holiness in a world of sin, because they have the eternal promises of their Lord (2 Cor. 7:1). He speaks at great length about the motivation to give. He speaks of it whether it is to chide their slowness in keeping their last year's promise, or to praise their liberality in behalf of the needs of the Lord's work. In both cases He knows only one way to bring about the sought for goals: thanks to God for His many mercies, love to God for all that they have in Jesus Christ. To this, and this alone, he turns again and again.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul says he is certain of this, that the power he has as an Apostle of the Lord is never of his own making, but of Him by whom he lives, Jesus Christ his Master, who gave Himself for him, the least of the Apostles (Gal. 2:20). The Ephesians (4:32) are exhorted to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving of one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them and shown them everlasting kindness. God's actions are always such that he wishes to motivate His children. The power to act is always a power which is a gift of God given to men through and in the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, brought about through the preaching of the Word (Eph. 2:4-17). It is the love of Christ that controls. He makes us conformable.

Paul, directing the young Timothy in his ministry, reminds him that all his ability must come from God. The source of this ability is the Word of God with which he has been intimately acquainted since the days of his childhood (1 Timothy). He reminds Titus that, left to himself, he would be foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving all kinds of lust and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating, but that when the kindness and love of God in Christ Jesus came, this would lead him to do just the opposite of what he did by nature. Having seen the blessed sacrifice of the Son of the living God, he would be ever zealous in behalf of the interests of the Kingdom of the Lord.

The writer to the Hebrews very ably presents the source which motivates Christians. He leads us to see our complete and final redemption in Christ and shows us how we are now moved to hold fast the faith, for we have seen the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Having seen His works in our behalf, we will be moved to seek mercy and grace

from His throne of grace in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16). Instead of neglecting the teaching we have heard, we will be moved to learn ever more of the deep things of God, to become stronger in faith day by day, feeding on Him, the Word (Hebrews 6). When we serve the living God in our holy lives, we will remember that we are acting because of Him who shed His blood for us (Hebrews 9). Never are we to forget that we have access to the Father, through the offered body and shed blood of His Son. Remembering this, we will be moved to draw near to Him with a true heart in the full assurance of faith. We will be ever-loving, attend the Christian services, and do the work of evangelists (Hebrews 10). Through the 11th and 12th chapters he shows Christians that they will be able to stand up under all persecutions and be faithful under all circumstances of life, for they have the faith that makes all these things possible. Even today this can be done as it has been in the past, since the beginning of the world. If doubt arises at any time, they are to remember the heroes of faith.

Peter also has some pertinent things to say about the source of Christian motivation. In the greeting of his first letter he shows that the grace of God, His abundant mercy, the lively hope of the resurrection, the hope of an incorruptible inheritance, reserved in heaven for us, motivate us to rejoice in the Lord. The suffering of Christ, for us, causes us to follow in His footsteps. We will avoid sins and live righteously, because Jesus bore all of our sins (1 Peter 2:21-24). The gifts received through the Holy Spirit will motivate us to minister unto others in Christ's name, and to practice good stewardship. Looking at our received ability to speak and serve, we are moved to glorify God,

the Giver. Should we be asked to partake of the suffering and shame of Christ, we will find, in our very suffering, a reason for joy in the Lord (1 Peter 4:7-13). Because we believers have been made, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, we will remember that we were once not a people, but now we are the people of God; that once we were without mercy, but now we have obtained mercy; and then we shall show forth the praise of Christ, who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Finally, let us take a look at the First Epistle of John. John urges believers not to sin, for thus we know we are in Christ. Being in Christ, we are motivated not to sin. For he who meditates on love, from and to God, wants to be pure, as God is pure. This love of God will even move us to be willing to lay down our lives for Him and fellow believers.

Thus we learn from the Word of God that Christian motivation is not something a man gradually develops in himself, by himself, as he moves to ever higher goals of achievement. Only the man who has been made alive spiritually by the Holy Spirit through the call of the Gospel, who is enlightened from on high to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, can, through the power of the same Holy Spirit, be filled with Christian motivation. Such motivation will empower him to do all things for Christ, so long as that same man continues to hear the Word and to believe in Him who redeems him from all sin and condemnation. His faith in Christ, the hearing of the Word, will fill him with love to God and move him, in the spirit of Christ, to do the works of Him who has called, enlightened, sanctified and kept him.

Man can never say that he of his own volition and searching finds God. God always finds man. Man cannot, of himself, reach out to God. Through His Word God is ever reaching out to man. God always assumes the initiative. It is the redemptory truth of the Gospel that reveals the saving action of God. Thus Christian motivation is always inseparable from revelation. In this revelation God intervenes actively in human life to manifest His redeeming power and love. It is this revealed Word that creates the inescapable decision "I must do the works of Him." It is this Word of revelation that brings us to faith, so that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. It is the living Christ who reveals His great love. This love moves us to love Him in return and also the world that He loves so much that He gave Himself for it. So we move out in His power. Who can be against us?

Christian motivation, then, is

the living expression of the total content of the Christian faith as outlined in its theology in terms of the threefold Christian creed, faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. From the doctrine of creation we derive the concepts of God's sovereignty and our trusteeship and responsibility. From the doctrine of redemption we derive our insights into the grace which restores sinners into fellowship with God and awakens the gratitude, joy, and love, which motivate us to give our lives to our Redeemer. From the doctrine of sanctification we derive our understanding of the living faith which, drawing upon God's resources, bears fruit in obedience and dedicated service.¹

To use Kierkegaard's language, it is a double movement of eternity, God's movement to us in grace and our movement, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to Him in surrender. Faith is an open palm in which day by day

¹T. A. Kantonen, A Theology for Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1958), pp. 9-10.

and moment by moment we receive our life from the hand of God as a gift, and day by day and moment by moment give it back to Him as a sacrifice, but never enclosing possessive fingers around it as though it were our own.

It takes the almighty power of God to bring us to our knees to accept eternal life as a pure gift. How He is to do it in each individual case, whether abruptly or gradually, whether through an emotional crisis or through an educational process, whether in the church-school or the school of hard knocks, is not for us to prescribe. Using every available method, it is for us to reach all sorts and conditions of men, confront them with Christ, and keep them in confrontation so that the miracle of the new birth may have a chance to take place.²

The Goal

Let us look at the goal we want to accomplish as we integrate members into the local congregation in the light of Scripture. Paul reviews all that God has done for him, in Christ Jesus. Because of what he sees, he is moved to love and glorify God. God becomes the object of his motivation. Having received the ministry, he moved toward the goal to persevere in that which was given by God (2 Cor. 4:1). He will do his work. It is not done to please men, but his objective is the revealed will of his God (Eph. 6:6). He charges Timothy before God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his holy angels to see that the goal of his ministry always remains this, to do a job that is pleasing to his Master (1 Tim. 5:21). He himself wants to work in the kingdom of his Lord in such a way that his work is never done in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). He reminds the Corinthians, at great length, that when they

²T. A. Kantonen, The Theology of Evangelism. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1958), p. 81.

come together to have a Christian service, thus motivated to worship Christ, their goal must always remain the edification of the congregation and the glorification of God.

Christ advises men to let their light shine before other men. Through this He points out two things. Men are to see their good works. Through the works God is to be glorified (Matt. 5:16). When asked who His father, mother, sister, brothers are, Jesus replies that it is they who do the will of His Father in heaven. Simon Peter was again moved to go fishing, though he had fished all through the previous night. The motivation came from the Word of Christ, in whom he believed, saying, "At Thy Word I will let down the net." His goal was to please God and to do the will of His Savior (Luke 5:5). The goal of all mission work must always remain the same. Believers are to be moved to evangelize the world, to preach Christ, to teach the Word of life, to confront the people with the great love of God in Christ Jesus (Matthew 28).

Paul points out that, because men believe in the Christ, they are moved to pray to God. The goal of such motivation may be temporal or spiritual need, the need for forgiveness, the alleviation of suffering, and so forth. Such motivation flows from the Holy Spirit, who leads men to pray, who is active in their prayers and who though the goals may be clouded by weakness of faith, makes the needed goals a reality in the hearing of the Father in Heaven (Romans 8). To all this Martin Luther says,

Where there is a Christian, there is the Holy Ghost, who is always engaged in prayer. For though the Christian does not continually move his lips to utter words, nevertheless the

heart is beating and pulsating, like the arteries and the heart in the body, unceasingly sighing: O dear Father, may Thy name be hallowed, Thy will be done among us and all people, etc. And as the attacks, trials, and troubles press and crowd harder, also such sighing and begging becomes more urgent, even audible. So then, you cannot find a Christian man who is not always praying, as little as a living person is without a pulse, which never rests, but beats continuously, though the person may be sleeping or is occupied otherwise, so that he is not aware of its beating.³

Thus you can see that the goal of the pastor may be different than the goal of the member in integrating him into the local congregation.

The Result

Let us now look at the result that the Christian pastor would like to gain as he integrates the new member. This permits us to consider more carefully the final product.

The first result is holiness. The Lord's Word here is, "Be holy, for I am holy." Man, in Christ, knows the holiness of God. He has learned that, since he now believes in this holy God, he has become one with Him in His heavenly family. He will seek ways and means in his life to be holy also. He realizes that in Christ he is holy, though, as Luther expresses it so well, he is "saint and sinner" to the end of his days. In his daily life he will seek out the many ways in which he can express himself in holy living. He will see the sinful actions of unbelievers around him daily and will by deliberate acts of faith avoid such sins. He will face each temptation to worldliness and sin by asking himself the question, "How then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" In his dealing with his fellowmen he will avoid

³Martin Luther, Luther's Works (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), 8:363.

all evil so that men, seeing his holy life, will be drawn to the very thing he is and stands for in his daily life.

There is also practical value in the Christian's daily life in his home and in business circles. In his home his holiness of life will cause his children to follow his example. He will be kind to his wife and will be considerate to all whom he meets. In business circles he will be faced with many problems which only a man, in whom Christ is in control, can solve. As a businessman he will suffer gladly, even when such honesty causes him some losses. If he is a builder, men will know him as one who can be trusted (2 Peter 3:17).

The world is filled with opportunities where the Christian man can give the example of true holiness of living. To him it will be the natural thing to do.

Another result that one would hope to find is in our personal relationships with others, such as members in the Christian congregation. We will watch every action and word in our own daily life. We will ponder, as we set out to do anything, whether or not we are giving offense. By word and action we will be careful that children be not offended. Then there is the brother who also belongs to Christ. Perhaps what we eat or drink or what we do may give offense to him.

Paul states,

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling-block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through my knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother offended (1 Cor. 8:9-13).

What does this mean for us in this our day? Well, today we find many among us doing things which in themselves seem innocuous and not directly forbidden by God's Word, such as smoking, drinking in moderation, dancing, and so on. Yet if any of these actions or others that might be named, would prevent the Holy Spirit from working through the Word in people on account of one's actions, then it would be wrong.

I believe that a Christ-controlled person will have a strong feeling for the brethren who are in danger of condemnation. I refer to Matthew 18. The Christian will not permit a brother to drift out of the Church through lack of church, communion attendance and other sins, without wanting to do something about it. He will see the sin and be truly concerned to go after them, with one thought only, namely to win them and save them for the kingdom, through personal admonition. This will always be done by "speaking the truth in love." Doing this we would serve Christ and His brethren.

The third result is the carrying out of our privileges in the local church. When a person claims to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior we can expect certain results. Does he not claim to be motivated by the Holy Spirit? They who have the Spirit will prove this, among other things, in church attendance. If they do not, the Savior Himself set up the dictum, "He that is of God hears God's Word." These words are so plain, one wonders why the modern church is not terribly frightened by the rest of this Word of Christ, "Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

Further, it is difficult to find men and women who will take on the privilege of leadership and service! We find that a certain small

group is almost forced to keep things going by taking on the burden of leadership year after year. How often the voters are faced with an incomplete list at the annual elections, when, actually, there should be a double slate! Are we not concerned that through our preaching and teaching not enough people in a congregation have been motivated, through love to God in Christ, to come forward to take on these honors which the Lord, through the Church, is asking us to take?

A fourth product closely related to the third is the evangelization of the world. Christ, after His resurrection, informed His disciples that they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. In the moments before His ascension He reminded His beloved of the source of all their power to come. It was to be through the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. He directed them to the fruit of this power. His words are, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The desire to evangelize the world is sorely lacking in the modern church. How can we reach the people? What programs can we devise? Maybe our whole approach in teaching and preaching has to be restudied. Obviously, there must be something wrong with these two areas of our life. It is here that we are personally handling the Word of life. Is our method, approach, spirit, and way of presentation such that the Holy Spirit truly has the best opportunity to reach the hearts of our people? In so many instances our sermons are not producing the Christian motivation that is needed to bring forth the fruit necessary for an ongoing church. Our teaching, whether in the Bible classes or

in the confirmation classes, both children and adult, are not what they should be to produce dedicated, working and sacrificing Christians.

Too many of our confirmands, whether children or adults, are not becoming what we hope and pray for in our innermost hearts. This calls for heart searching, repentance, renewal and renewed dedication on the part of leaders.

Let us assume then that we can find better ways to present the Lord Jesus and His love. Let us believe we can once more reach the heights where we can, through preaching and teaching of the Word, bring an ever greater number to the fruitage we are longing for. What a change would come over the church in our time! Perhaps to do this we will have to be even more earnest in fostering our spiritual programs rather than our financial programs.

What would such a program produce in our midst? What would a greater tapping of Christian motivation bring to our people, our congregations? We would be truly heartbroken over the fact of the lack of church and communion attendance. We would recognize these maladies for what they really are. Instead of considering people hopeless, we would be thankful for the patience of God and move in to reclaim. We would instead set up a loving movement to show the privilege of serving the Lord. We would gladly take on any burden, if we can think of it as passion to seek the brother out, once more to win him, through a presentation of God's love in Christ, so that he again have the longing to attend the divine services and to commune at the Table of his Lord. And those who are motivated out of love to Christ and His cause would

find themselves growing spiritually day by day. They would be surprised at the things they have been enabled to do for their Savior.

Then congregations would also find themselves looking toward Samaria and the uttermost parts, that is their own neighborhood and the whole world. The lack of interest in world missions, the lack of interest in evangelism programs in our churches, is due to the lack of interest in the eternal welfare of the brethren who belong to the local church. Could we cure this, we would automatically find our congregations demanding a sustained evangelism program for the local church, and individuals would on their own, in their day by day contacts with neighbors and strangers, remember the cause of their Master. Christians would naturally think of the lost conditions of the world. What joy there would be in heaven over such a condition! How the bells of Christendom would ring out if this would happen!

This may seem idealistic to many but God says, and this is not idealism, "All things ARE possible through Christ." This so-called ideal which the Old Adam ridicules can be attained if God's Word is true and God is not a liar, for He reports in the Old Testament that at the building of the tabernacle and the temple the people had to be restrained from giving more than was needed. Have we not even a greater goal in our present age--the building of the body of Christ, the adding of living stones to the temple of God? Just because we have such a great task, which seems impossible, but is possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can, even today, reach such heights of fervor and production for the Lord. Paul leads the way we must go. It was true nineteen hundred years ago in the midst of a sinful and perverse

generation, amid great trial and affliction, and is still true. We can abound unto the riches of liberality and to our power, and even beyond our power, to do the work of the Church of God, if we, as did the Corinthian Christians, willingly give ourselves to the Lord Jesus. As He redeemed them, purchased them, called them and gave them a place in the colony of heaven here on earth, with a hope of a home in heaven, so He also has given us all these things in Him, through the indwelling of that Comforter whom He also has sent us.

Which now brings us to a fifth result: giving. The lack of this product lies over the world-wide program of the Church like a mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb from hell and its fall-out. The Church, blessed with the pure Word, sound doctrine, mighty numbers, healthy growth, can fail to show in its giving that it fully realizes the glorious riches we have in Christ Jesus, who became poor that we may be rich. I do not believe that our great lack of funds stems from the rising cost of living. Neither is it because there is such a great competition for our dollar. Nor is it because those who have been giving have reached the point of exhaustion or have run out of funds. This thing has become a malignant cancer that is gnawing away deep down in our church life.

What can it be? Let us look into God's Word. In the Old Testament God puts the blunt question, "Would a man rob God?" Again He says in Psalm 50,

Every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fulness thereof. Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the most high.

The Lord reminds the children of Israel,

The Lord your God will bless you in your produce, and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God . . . and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you (1 Chron. 29:11,12).

It is good for God's people frankly to admit that all belongs to Him. Even when we do give to Him, we are but returning a portion of His own. David confesses that it is God who receives His own from our hands when we build Him a house, saying, "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building Thee a house for Thy holy name comes from Thy hand, and is all Thy own" (1 Chron. 29:16). We are not surprised when, later on the New Testament reminds us that our giving must be based on "as the Lord hath prospered," and also stresses, "We are not our own."

There may be some who say that, after all, we have earned our daily bread and we are, therefore, entitled to the fruit of our labors. This is true, but the writer of Deuteronomy says, "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth." We must, therefore, confess that our getting and our giving are intimately connected with the living God in whom we believe through Jesus Christ.

Let us again turn our thoughts to the fruits the Christian pastor wishes to gain as he integrates the new member and, in particular, on what makes giving acceptable to God. There is the story of Cain and Abel. Though both brought a sacrifice that could be seen, still the one was not a sacrifice, for Cain's heart was not right. Or

take the story of Jesus sitting over against the treasury. The rich came and gave large amounts, and perhaps the counters of the money, when the noisy money rolled down their cubby-hole, praised the givers. On the other hand, those who saw a widow come in and place two, scarcely noisy, coins in the offering place spurned the little, and the counters below despised the amount. Unknown to them all was One looking on and looking in who knew all about the givers and their lives. He saw the rich with their dissatisfactions, their frustrations, their foibles, their waste, their inherent stinginess, their lack of faith and trust, putting in large sums, as the world judges sums, but in the eyes of Him who looked in the gifts were so pitiful. They showed the inner poverty of spiritual lives that were already dead. Then the same On-looker saw a woman come in. He saw her loneliness, her poverty, her deep sorrow of widowhood and, this above all, her deep and abiding faith in an almighty Father in heaven, who would help her in all trouble. His judgment was that the first really gave nothing, for the gifts were from nothing. The second gave her all. It was a small gift in the eyes of those who saw, heard and counted, but in the eyes of Him who sees all these two mites were magnified till they became a fortune of grace. Of such givers the returning Lord in the Judgment will say, "Ye have done it unto Me!"

Is it not common knowledge that in many congregations one-third does nothing or very little for the Lord? Do not many congregations, therefore, fail because of this condition to come near to the amounts of money needed to carry on the work of the Lord? And, is it not true that there is at times impatience and some resentment among the upper

third toward the lower third? These questions produce two thoughts. On the one hand we must, once and for all, remember that the lower third must be a very great concern for us, not because they do not produce the money needed for the Lord's work, but because of the deep spiritual illness in which they lie. We must recognize that further drives, new explanations, new brochures, new movies or filmstrips, are not the answer. Just now they do not have to understand the story of the congregation and its needs. They need the love, patience and kindness of God's people to bring them, once again, the story that Paul presses home, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." And if they have forgotten it, and many have, then we must treat them perhaps as spiritually dead or, at least, as little children who need the milk of a mother. So we must again press on them in all love and patience the "sincere milk of the Word," that they may grow thereby. One dynamic force that is seldom understood is the life-changing awareness of God's forgiveness. This is one of the possibilities that troubled families need to discover.⁴ This is the only mode of cure. On the other hand, one may pride himself as being the upper third, and this includes churches, and he must search his own heart. Has pride taken over? Are we irked by the lower third, since we do not like the burden we are made to carry, because of their lack of giving?

A sixth result, vital to the Church, is the continued desire, through the ages, to bring unity into the visible church. In referring

⁴Merton P. Strommen, Five Cries of Youth (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, c.1974), p. 50.

to this one might apply it specifically and personally. This is not intended. But not all mergers are God-pleasing. We hear of power and prestige, of strength of numbers, of compromise of truth, and many other things. Here the Old Adam may be speaking, but not the voice of Christ. Unions must be God-pleasing. They must not compromise the truth in any way. The Word of God must make the decision for us, for only when we clearly hear the Word, "Thus says the Lord," can we move in the direction of union. Also in this field, brethren who think they have better insight than others should be patient with the other brethren. Calling them names is not going to bring peace into the visible church. After all one has a choice of two roads in this matter. One can leave the others behind and join whatever group is theologically comfortable for him, based on what the Lord says to him. He may also do another and perhaps far better thing. He can remain with the brethren in a state of confession. Remaining, working, and living together, if we think we have the clear truth, is the great act of love. Speaking the truth in love is the greatest power known, for it is a power generated by God Himself in His Word. Less impatience and more love would move us all toward God-pleasing mergers, about which the angels in heaven would sing songs of praise to God for showing this insight and kindness to blood-bought, but sinful men. Whenever we feel irked by the slowness of others, or the pushing and hurrying in others, let us remember that the beloved Paul is always ready to say, "And there is now a better way," and then read and ponder His great hymn of love--1 Corinthians 13. Thus we will all learn to bear one another's burden in the Lord and be kept truly motivated in all our attempts to

bring about the ideal of oneness, which our Savior wishes for all those who love Him here in this vale of tears.

Let us now turn to the seventh and last result of integrating the member of the local congregation. From the Word of God we learn that,

The Christian life is not just our own private affair. We have been born again into God's family. Not only has He become our Father, but every other Christian believer in the world, whatever his nation or denomination, has become our brother or sister in Christ . . . This is a glorious truth.⁵

In Christ there is to be no East or West. There is to be no color line, inside or outside of the Church. When there is true Christian motivation, we will not resent men of different color moving in next door and going to school with our children. We will naturally feel, because we know God's teaching in the matter, that such people, regardless of race or Christian creed, or no creed, will have the same rights we have. We will constantly be aware that, "our neighbor of another color," is among those whom God loved, when He sent His Son to the cross. When the Book of Acts states that Christ died for all, we will not gear our mission outreach to a certain kind or color of people, whether in the local or world-wide outreach. We will be interested in people as people, who need the knowledge which makes them wise unto salvation. For a man nurtured on the source of all Christian motivation this will be as natural as breathing. He will be "color-blind" under all circumstances.

⁵John R. W. Scott, Basic Christianity (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1953), p. 12.

Having studied the source, goals and the results of integrating the member into the local congregation, we may ask the very pertinent question, "Why has there been so much failure in this field through the ages? Why does such failure appear in a church body that claims to have the Word of God in all its truth and purity?" Paul once more comes to our rescue and gives us the complete answer,

I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? (Rom. 7:18-24).

This is truly a soul in agony, a soul that knows God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the Old Adam that is eating at his Christian vitality. Luther reminds the Christian to remember his baptism and informs us that we must, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and again a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever. He also points to Paul, Romans 6, "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Paul in Romans 7, points to the ultimate source and help saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Christians must then be fully aware of our enemy within. Pastors and people must recognize that, when we fail to have the Christian motivation to carry out the will and plans of God, our Old Adam has taken over, making us sluggish and lazy in the Lord's work.

We must recognize him for what he is. Wherever his sordid head pops up, we must flee to the only source that can down him with all his evil desires, lusts, diversions and plans. We must again turn to the power that is available--the Word. We must implore the only Power who can empower--the Holy Spirit.

Do we always recognize, as did Paul, that it is the Old Adam who is active and obstructing the will and plans of God. Nothing pleases this devil's advocate more than when the Church and the individual reaches out to use secular motives rather than the Christian. He chortles with glee when he sees a goodly portion of church members failing to use the means of grace. The Old Adam is a busybody clogging the avenues of communication between the believer and His Lord, the Christ. The less attention we give to God's Word and the needs of His Church the more mud the devil can throw into our eyes, so that the heavenly vision of the will of a loving God is obscured in the very lives that ought to be poured out to Him, who has redeemed them in His wondrous love. This enemy from hell we carry in our earthly life until the end. Only constant vigil will keep us free and faithful to Him who is everlastingly faithful to us.

CHAPTER III

INTEGRATION OF THE CONFIRMAND INTO THE CONGREGATION

We are most interested in the adult. By this I mean any person that would be confirmed in a class other than one's regular children's confirmation class. This could include teenagers as well.

Some believe that age and problems of adolescence would not interfere and that the extra year or so of maturity increases the element of personal choice.¹

Let us look at the disciples themselves. They had received three long years of intensive training from their Lord Himself. Even before the confirmation, Judas became a drop out. Peter was very close to the same when he denied his Lord in the courtyard of the high priest. All the disciples fled when Jesus was captured. They were confused at Jesus' willingness to be taken by the mob in the Garden of Gethsemane. They hid and trembled behind closed doors not willing to endanger their life. Thomas doubted Jesus' promise, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

We need to consider also the whole question of lifelong commitment, especially in relation to the totally different sociological environment in which children and young people are growing up today. Not only are they subjected to rapid and continuous changes in attitudes

¹The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, Confirmation Crisis (New York: The Seabury Press, c.1968), p. 12.

towards religion and morality on the part of human society, but there is no longer the same family and community solidarity that existed a few generations ago.² Ought the Church therefore to demand from anyone at any age lifelong commitment to a particular series of intellectual propositions or to a particular interpretation of morality?

During forty days after His resurrection, Jesus instructed them concerning things pertaining to the kingdom of God, promised them the Holy Spirit, and commissioned them to make disciples of all nations. Suddenly inspired they become men with powerful convictions, working in fearless action, mighty in word and deed.

Viewing the Church in the early centuries, we see her withstanding persecution of every kind and observe sacrifices that astound us in our age and find her victorious over a pagan world within three centuries.

We watch men arising in every age to come to her rescue, whenever she seems to falter in her objective to make "the kingdoms of the world the kingdom of her Lord." We hear voices rallying Christendom that come from such seemingly weak sources as a back-country preacher in Africa, Athanasius, or an insignificant monk in a monastery in Germany, God's man, Martin Luther. And how is it that God would even bless those few men and women of our own church body?

When young people or adults are confirmed, on that day they are asked, "Finally, do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the rule of the divine Word, to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, to walk as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word,

²Ibid., p. 76.

and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?" And they answer, "I do so intend, by the grace of God." Here we have a partial answer to our question. "The grace of God" is prominent in deciding whether an individual will be "faithful unto death and receives a crown of life."

I sometimes wonder, however, if

our insistence on vows and pledges for this, that, and the other in Church life is not a tacit recognition that we stand on such uncertain ground that it is necessary to bind people in this way lest their integrity should lead them in other directions!³

But what makes the many little people heroes for the Gospel? Not only does every age, but every congregation have them. And we shall not know all their names. However, God does. And that is important. It may be said that commitment happens slowly like the growth of a tree, not abruptly, like that of felling a tree. To identify the making of a serious commitment to Christianity with a brief ceremony is a vulgar error like that of identifying the making of a marriage with the public ceremony which manifests it.⁴

Thus was built the kingdom of our Lord. And the work still goes on throughout the world. Men and women are standing up against atheistic ideologies, remaining faithful to their Lord and Savior in the midst of stress, risking their lives that others may hear of the redemption in Christ and the hope of the life to come. Why does all this happen?

But there is a far larger number who are not kept. In the Book of Acts there was the lie of Ananias and Sapphira; there was Mark who

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 83.

precipitated a quarrel between Paul and Barnabas; Demas we are told loved this present world. There were the great doctrinal controversies of the first three centuries; the denial of Christ by many under persecution; the striving for power in the church through all ages; the separatistic tendencies and movement in Christendom; the great losses to the Mohammedans; the controversies among the Lutherans and the Protestants; the schisms throughout the church of today; the liberalism found in many quarters of the church, the lack of church and communion attendance in our churches; the constant lack of means and money in our church to meet the world-wide challenges facing the church; the fact that the Church today is losing ground, percentage-wise, as far as the growth of the Church and the growth of the population of the world is concerned. All these things and many others draw a very dark picture. And again we can ask ourselves the question, "Why?"

Positively speaking, we can say there are many things that the Church is doing right. We should try to improve and re-emphasize these happy things. Negatively speaking, we have not met the needs of all members. This has caused concern and produced those dark pages in history.

When you have gained an adult for the Church by the blessed working of the Holy Spirit, what can be done to integrate that person in the body of the congregation so that, say, ten years from now, you can still point to them as another of those insignificant persons who are doing heroic work for the Lord.

Can we use the natural man in order to gain Christians to do service in His Church? Can our appeal be made to him? If such appeals enlist a person to activity, is it therefore justified?

A pastor would most certainly be remiss in his duty, if in his sermon work and counseling he leaned too heavily on psychology, a field that is constantly changing and has been wrong at times. His preaching, teaching and counseling must be based on the Word, not on finite and sinful man. "The Christian view of man is not anthropocentric. Ultimately it never matters what man thinks of himself, but what God thinks of him."⁵

Appeals to natural man would stress the member's duty. It will be a feather in one's cap. One has the extra time or money. You owe it to others. It is income tax deductible and you will receive credit. You will be honored. It will serve your best interests. When you are in need, then you will be helped. These are selfish reasons.

Others appeal to pride in the natural man. Pride causes him to send his son to a given school, because of the prestige it will give him and his family. He will be kind because someone has been kind to him. Just as easily he will strike back because he hates. He responds to an appeal when great need is pointed out. He may help a neighbor because the neighbor has helped him, or he hopes to receive help from him at some time later. He will take on arduous tasks because of the honor the position will give; because it will further enhance his social position and business interests.

Thus you can see that much of the work that is done in the church today is achieved because men have been motivated by the natural man. Often the goals achieved are valid and valuable.

⁵Paul Meehl and others, What, Then, Is Man? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1958), p. 76.

In the sphere of psychology our understanding of the developmental tasks of adolescence is far greater than it used to be. We know now that young people throughout adolescence are involved in many tasks which produce many needs. They are not always consciously pursued and the needs are not always felt but this is possibly a greater reason for the church's being sensitive to them, so that the path towards real maturity can be as smooth as possible. Every young person needs even more acutely than the adult to be accepted both by his contemporaries and by the adult world. He needs to find a home, to discover a group to which he can belong. He needs to begin to make his own contribution to life, to express his creative instinct, and to be good at something. He needs to feel that he matters to people. He needs opportunity for experiment in discovering his own identity and testing various potential facets of his own make-up. The formulation of a philosophy of life is a task which does not just happen: it is a long-term task which takes most young people a large number of years.⁶

The problem, though, of the psychologists is that the great majority look on man as a mere animal. However,

In recent years increasing numbers of the clergy have come to realize that there is a high incidence of 'psychological' problems among the members of their congregations who come to the pastor seeking personal and spiritual counsel.⁷

Simultaneously with this trend, psychological practitioners outside the church have shown a somewhat greater interest in the religious life of

⁶The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, p. 102.

⁷Meehl and others, p. 1.

their patients and in the role of religious belief and practice in mental health and illness.⁸

While it is wise for a pastor to be thoroughly at home in the field of psychology and use some of its insights in his work, yet one should be careful that he does not rely first on his psychological insights, but rather to turn to careful theological study of Scripture to see just what causes people to do what they do, especially, the Christian.

Speaking of natural man, Paul writes in 1 Cor. 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Thus he contrasts the condition of natural man to the man in Christ Jesus. Theology distinguishes between the righteousness of the Christian and that of the unbeliever, calling the latter civil righteousness. Civil righteousness refers to the natural desire to help one's associates, to serve man through an esteemed profession, and to contribute to harmony in the various communities. God wills such activity out of His concern for the welfare of all His creatures. Thus God may use even natural religion to help create good will.⁹

Therefore, on a purely phenomenal level, both Christians and non-Christians produce good and evil works, though the dynamics of the two kinds of lives are qualitatively different. Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees, who gloried in their self-righteousness, applies here:

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 252.

"The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31, RSV).

Today we are accustomed to saying,

Impression without expression leads to repression. This psychological maxim can be aptly applied to Christian people in Christian congregations. We have told them of the fantastic opportunities and challenges of our age for soul-winning and -keeping; but when we do not enlist them and train them to carry out this work, we tacitly imply that they are not "the type" needed to carry out the program of our Lord. In short, they become "repressed" Christians.¹⁰

One opportunity especially singled out by the low-esteem of youth was this: "I would like to find a way to deal with my lack of self-confidence." Next was a related item: "I would like assistance in understanding myself and the reason for my problems."¹¹

A pastor's personality will attract or distract from the church being God's people in action. A faithful pastor will cultivate certain divinely prescribed virtues essential to an effective ministry.¹²

J. E. Herrmann in his book, The Chief Steward, goes on to enumerate such qualities as: love, wisdom, patience, humility, courage, zeal, sacrifice, faith, liberality, and self-discipline.

If a pastor is to be the kind of leader that God wants him to be, he will necessarily evaluate himself every so often. He will ask such questions as: "Do I have long term and short term goals?" The short

¹⁰Guido A. Merckens, Organized For Action (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1959), p. 3.

¹¹Merton P. Strommen, Five Cries of Youth (New York: Harper and Row, c.1974), p. 28.

¹²J. E. Herrmann, The Chief Steward (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, c.1951), p. 33.

term goals should be specific enough that at the end of a period of time he can measure to see if he has failed or succeeded, whether he was realistic or too optimistic, if there was any cause in his own person that caused him to fall short and in which he could improve himself. One might consider confiding in a fellow pastor for help in evaluating one's ministry. This is too infrequently done.

The work to be done is not done just by the pastor. He carries out his vision of the work in the place that he was called in cooperation with his people. In the Anglican practice one may note the absence of sponsors and of any charge to the local congregation.¹³ The pastor needs to convince his people that his conception of the work to be done is shared by the rest of the congregation. When people share a common goal, you will find that they more readily than will commit themselves to active service.

Commitment today cannot be an unquestioning acceptance of an established account of revelation. However, it seems appropriate that the Church should draw the attention of its members to this new situation by demanding of them an explicit and public profession of faith.¹⁴ But commitment must be something else, namely a dedication to the task of discovering new truths and of engaging in the turmoil of grappling with new situations and arriving at the best possible decisions, wherever this task may lead and whatever changes of approach it may evoke.¹⁵

¹³The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, p. 85.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 85-86.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 101.

God supplies the necessary talents to do the work that is necessary. It is often a false humility that causes people to say that they are unable to fulfill the task. They are not capable. But the question is, "Who is able?"

No one is sufficient of themselves. Prayer will be vital in knowing what the will of God is in any particular situation. Read and search the Word in order to know the Savior better. Meditate on the things our Savior did to attain our salvation. Jesus often went apart himself to pray and in so doing was strengthened to finish the goal for which He came to earth. He will empower you and bless your efforts carried out in His name. You will triumph in Him and through Him.

In summary, the pastor will preach and teach with the goal in mind that God's work is done through the personal commitment of the members to Christ and the tasks of His kingdom.

Baptism and confirmation are separate and distinct. Because of this separation the idea gradually emerged during medieval times that confirmation was a complement to Baptism.¹⁶ To Luther, baptism did not actually play an important role. His interest took a different tack. He was concerned primarily with catechetical instruction. To understand Luther we must hear what he has to say about Christian instruction. Perhaps of even greater importance was Luther's emphasis that all Christians, young and old, needed to be instructed so that they could partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.¹⁷

¹⁶Arthur C. Repp, Confirmation in the Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1964), p. 14.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 18-19.

If baptism and confirmation are separate and distinct, how can we justify speaking of a renewal of the baptismal covenant in confirmation? In holy baptism, God makes a covenant with the infant. It is a unique covenant in every respect. It is unique not merely because the righteous and holy God makes an agreement with a sinner but also because the agreement established is a covenant of grace. If the covenant does not refer to the covenant of grace, is it perhaps being confused with the vow of the sponsors to renounce the devil and all his ways?¹⁸

The different types of membership which an organization may devise for the sake of order or its own efficiency, such as baptized, communicant, and voting memberships, do not indicate third-, second-, and first-class members in the church of Christ but are convenient tags to indicate various levels of rights or responsibilities that the members have accepted. The term "full membership," used frequently at confirmation to indicate communicant membership, is a misnomer; it implies bestowal of some privilege or right that adds to or completes the membership given in Baptism.¹⁹

As Prenter points out, it is just because the baptismal covenant implies the necessity of a lifelong exercise of man's faith under that covenant that there is need

for a continuous sanctifying activity of the living Word, not in competition with, but in consequence of the regenerating activity of the living Word in Baptism. In this sanctifying activity preaching, absolution, and above all the Lord's Supper assume necessary functions.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 160.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 167-168.

The Lord's Supper is an indispensable help in the lifelong struggle of the sinner-saint.

Similarly the tension is felt when other matters related to confirmation come under consideration; for example, the objectives, the curriculum, the length of the instruction period, and the needs of post-confirmation youth. Yet the tension has value. It can serve as a wholesome check on extremists in either direction.²¹

Christian instruction must be directed at the total personality of the learner--his understanding, his emotions, his skills, and his behavior patterns, which includes his will. It is true that the Scriptures say, "This is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3), but this knowing is not to be understood in the Greek sense, where it is limited to the intellect, but is to be understood in the Hebrew sense, which involves the whole person, the fusion of all the facets of the human personality. The objectives for confirmation instruction will therefore be concerned not merely with understanding but also with the attitudes, skills, and behavior patterns of the learner.

The program of a congregation can be divided into two parts. Those things that the pastor does alone and those things which require congregational activity. The sermon preparation and preaching must dovetail with that which is engaged in by the congregation under the leadership of the pastor.

Nor can one solve the problems that people have or manipulate their growth. Pastors can only supply conditions for growth, such as

²¹Ibid., p. 178.

the warmth of caring spirits, inquiring minds, and awareness of God's message.²²

There are many family difficulties. Unfortunate as divorce may be, more discernible tension is associated with difficulties posed by prolonged illness, unemployment, death or injuries, or personal problems. Youth living under such pressures are more troubled with respect to all family relationships.²³

An even more sensitive nerve is touched by the fact that a youth does not get along with his father. "Surprising as it may seem to armchair psychologists, difficulties with father are twelve times as likely to predict family disunity as the fact of divorce."²⁴

The adolescent needs to be treated as a maturing person--one his parent speaks with rather than to. He needs a parent who is consistent and firm in discipline while remembering what adolescence was like. Trust is the essential element, a two-way street which must involve the child as well as the parent.

Reasons Why So Few Members Are Active

1. It appears as though the congregation can get along without them.
2. Most members are passive, yet in good standing. The average member says "That's good enough for me."

²²Strommen, p. 32.

²³Ibid., p. 37.

²⁴Ibid.

3. They do not understand church membership in any other terms but church-going, attending Communion, contributions, attending church functions.
4. They do not feel qualified. In this opinion they are sincere, and therefore they consider their inactivity as justifiable.
5. They are not interested in church work.
6. They know they ought to do something, but their heart is given to other things which interest them more.
7. They have never been asked.
8. They have never been approached in the right way.
9. When asked they did not understand just what they were supposed to do.
10. Faithful service on the part of church workers is rarely recognized publicly and therefore does not seem important.
11. They live in an age of specialization, and work generally is given to specialists.
12. They were not given an opportunity to do church work as children or young people.
13. Church officers at times give the impression as though they needed no help.
14. Church boards and committees are jealous of the spheres of activity and resent it if others would help them.
15. The organizational work is taken care of by persons who are often re-elected time on end and little opportunity is given others to serve in that phase of church work.
16. The erroneous idea that the spiritual work in the church is the prerogative of the pastor, the teacher (s), the Sunday School teachers.
17. The general appeals for more workers are rarely followed through.
18. People are not asked to serve in that type of work for which they have special aptitudes.
19. There was a time when they first became members and were ready to serve, but the church was not ready to use them. They were considered too young or not spiritually mature.

20. In large congregations we failed to integrate them into the congregational family and so they never have really felt as one of the group. No one seemed to care for them, so why should they care much how the group fares.²⁵

God intended that people be together on this earth. He placed them into families. He urges us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. God wants His church to be a mutual edification society. The general programs and specific efforts should be geared to assist the local parish in achieving an edified, well-integrated group of lay people. In the pages that follow I am going to list some of the successful ways in which youth counselors have operated.

Foremost should be a faithful use of the means of grace. Jesus says, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 7:21). In other words the person who is a child of God will do His will. Paul reminds Titus,

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ: Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority (Titus 2:11-15).

Paul insists that the preaching of the Gospel, the good news of a gracious God who brought salvation to men, through the redeeming love of Christ, is the motivating power that brings men to the place where they will joyously, willingly and lovingly turn from their former ways to live a God-pleasing life.

²⁵Herrmann, pp. 80-81.

One of the questions directed to the skills exercised by successful church youth workers was, "What ways of approaching youth have you found helpful?" Responses revealed six groups of skills:

1. **Building Relationships**
 - Knowing them--home life, school friends
 - Exhibiting deep, sensitive, personal concern for them
 - Showing them courtesy
 - Participating with them as an equal
 - Showing appreciation for a job well done
 - Helping them if they ask
 - Sharing mutual experiences
 - Sharing my own feeling about life
2. **Being Genuine**
 - Being adult
 - Speaking in my own vocabulary
 - Being honest and open
 - Stating my convictions while leaving freedom for theirs
 - Boldly speaking out in radical situations
 - Admitting I do not know all the answers
 - Dealing with my own hang-ups first
3. **Being Available**
 - Going to their events when adults are welcome
 - Spending time with them and their friends
 - Working and playing with them in various activities
 - Taking kids to "away" games
 - Picking up hitchhikers
 - Inviting them to my home for dinner
 - Initiating interviews
4. **Showing Interest**
 - Remembering their names
 - Learning about their world
 - Being able to speak their language
 - Listening to their music
 - Adopting their symbols--beads, long hair, beard
 - Finding areas where I can be of help
 - Phone calls and letters re their accomplishments, interests
5. **Communicating**
 - Talking to them every opportunity I get
 - Slow, quiet listening; waiting for the chance to say something
 - Listening with the third ear for emotions
 - One-to-one counseling

6. Leading

- Discovering and using their talents and interests
- Involving them in planning, decision-making and executing activities
- Letting them find their own thing and do it
- Accepting their decisions
- Face them with the issues
- Holding unpopular positions which I think are best for them
- Giving them provocative, challenging books
- Offering them a host of options
- Presenting a better alternative by the way I live and act
- Getting them interested in trips, projects, studies to benefit them
- Getting them to camps, retreats
- Creating celebration and experiences for free expressions²⁶

It is important to be keenly aware of the autonomy of youth and other individuals and to be committed to techniques which would not violate this. Such things as evangelizing youth, controlling their environment, supervising their behavior, preaching the gospel to them, or other tactics that might be interpreted as applying pressure, were not spoken of. Instead statements like "I can listen," "I can communicate," "I can be a friend," "I can be a significant adult in their lives," and "I can share my happiness."

Thus in helping others you help yourself.²⁷ "They contribute to my goals." "They keep me young." "I can learn from them." But there was no evidence of self-aggrandizement at the expense of youth, only self-fulfillment as a consequence of helping others develop their potential.

Personal faith has an important impact on people. It is seen primarily in what you believe, value, and perceive. It affects their

²⁶Strommen, pp. 119-120.

²⁷Ibid., p. 119.

ethical behavior, stated concern for others, outlook on life, attitudes toward others and congregation, and sense of personal responsibility.²⁸

Faith does not make all of life easier; a mature perception of Christianity indicates that it is not meant to. Religious faith raises concerns as well as alleviating them. Distress over everyday problems does not vary with intensity of personal faith. Those who profess a faith are as bothered over lack of self-confidence, academic problems, personal faults, relationships, and national issues as those who do not.

The church attender and the non-attender part company when it comes to religious commitment. Large score differences show that attenders are more:

eager for help;
 conscious of their moral responsibility;
 conscious of a personal, caring God;
 positively oriented toward their youth group and church.
 Slight but statistically significant differences make it possible to add that attenders are more involved in social action and aspire with greater eagerness to a life of meaning and service. Non-attenders of church youth groups are less mature and more socially inadequate youth than attenders. If distinctions need to be made, they must relate primarily to religious interests. The distinguishing characteristic of youth who attend youth groups is the greater likelihood of religious commitment.²⁹

A personal faith needs the sustaining power of a supportive congregation. How can this be done? According to Strommen it is "First, to feel that one fits in well with some group in the congregation; and the second, to feel inspired at worship services."³⁰ In the worship

²⁸Ibid., p. 98.

²⁹Ibid., p. 101.

³⁰Ibid., p. 124.

service they want singing, a time for expressing happiness over what God has done and is doing. They also want to learn something new and to be stimulated intellectually by fresh insights into Christian truth. Another thing they want from the worship service is to participate and meet God in the presence of others. They want the service to impart a sense of warmth, love, and community.

Though this book is written for parents and youth leaders, it should not be assumed that adults have outgrown youth issues. On the contrary, the preceding analyses show how much adults are linked to youth needs.³¹

Low self-esteem is probably passed on from parents.

Family disunity centers in parental conflict. Social concern is characterized by youth's sharp criticism of congregational adults' lack of manifest caring.

Loss of faith is an issue that is no respecter of age.

A ministry to youth is best seen as a collaborative effort-- mutual seeking, helping, and working--in which adults freely admit their need to be helped in ways similar to youth. To believe that "no one has arrived" enables everyone, regardless of age or experience, to express the need for rebirth or renewal, for judgment and forgiveness.

The stance of common need reduces the age prejudice that characterizes most adults and mitigates the generational chauvinism of youth who feel superior to adults in such personal values as openness, honesty, and feeling for people.

³¹Ibid., p. 125.

Thus we can see two imperatives in a youth ministry--mutuality and mission. Youth of all subcultures want the warmth of an accepting group which is mutuality. They need activities which give them a sense of purpose; that is mission. Within these two polarities, there is powerful need for educational experiences for youth and adults that open minds, develop skills, clarify values, and encourage commitment.³²

In understanding his role as counselor, the minister needs to be aware of his limitations and advantages in this area of functioning. Here are his limitations: First there is time. As a general practitioner the parish clergyman must invest his time and emotional energies in a variety of functions which are essential to his total ministry. Then there is training. The minister's training must give him proficiency in a variety of functions. Thirdly, the minister has a limitation as to role. The fact that the minister is perceived as a representative of ethical values prevents some guilt-laden people from seeking his help. Again transference is a limitation. Counseling (particularly long-term counseling) often gives rise to the projection on the counselor of strong, archaic feelings of love and hate. Another point of limitation is payment. The fact that a minister ordinarily does not charge for counseling is a limitation on his effectiveness in some cases.

A minister has several strategic advantages as a counselor which he should utilize to the full, in order to maximize his effectiveness.

1. Trust: In our culture millions of adults have feelings of trust toward clergymen, often from early childhood.

³²Ibid., p. 126.

2. **Established relationships:** Like the family doctor, but unlike most professional counselors, the minister normally has a wealth of ongoing, established relationships.
3. **Family Contacts:** The minister's continuing contact with families in the normal course of his work is a major advantage over other counseling and psycho-therapeutic disciplines.
4. **Crisis ministry:** The minister frequently is present in such crises as bereavement, sickness, and accidents.
5. **Availability:** The fact that a troubled person can usually see a minister without waiting several days (or longer) and even without making an appointment is an obvious advantage in helping those requiring emergency counseling.
6. **Training:** As indicated earlier, the unique aspects of the minister's training give him advantages in dealing with philosophical, existential, and religious problems.
7. **Finally,** the fact that he is perceived as a representative of the value and belief structures of his religious community is a tremendous advantage in some counseling.

Inexperienced counselors need to be encouraged to avoid trying to "cure" the person or find answers to his problems, and instead to concentrate on understanding the person and his world.³³ The important factor in helping another person to esteem and a sense of identity is not problem-solving techniques or expertise. It is the empathic and warm relationship of a concerned person. In a sense, the words said or specific relating techniques used matter little, so long as the interaction establishes a warm relationship.

If the essentials in helping youth to a sense of personal significance are the human qualities of empathy, warmth, and genuineness, then untrained people, both youth and adults, can be helpful.³⁴

³³Howard J. Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, c.1966), p. 65.

³⁴Strommen, p. 31.

Thus, pastoral counseling has both an inreaching and outreaching mission to persons in conflict and trouble, wherever they may be.

To grasp the mission and significance of pastoral counseling, a minister needs a clear picture of the relationship between counseling and the basic purpose of the church.

Traditionally, the church's task has been divided into three categories--kerygma (teaching and preaching the gospel), koinonia (the establishment of a fellowship with a vertical dimension), and diakonia (the implementation of the faith in loving service). Although pastoral counseling is primarily an expression of diakonia, the ministry of service, it is also a means of communicating the gospel and establishing koinonia. For many people God is dead. The word "God" is an empty symbol for them. They are unaware of any relationship with him. They are unable to hear the good news. Counseling becomes a way of communicating the good news to some such persons by opening them to life and relationships. Until they have experienced accepting love in a relationship, it cannot come alive for them.³⁵ Until they are grasped by grace in a life-to-life encounter, the Christian message can neither touch nor release them. A counseling relationship is one place where this incarnation of grace can occur.

The clergyman's training should prepare him to counsel skillfully in this dimension. This is his ministry of meanings. He should strive to become an expert in spiritual growth--knowing how to stimulate it and how to help remove the things that block it.

³⁵Clinebell, p. 46.

Those who seek his help perceive him as a religious authority figure, the leader of a religious community, and a symbolic representative of the values and beliefs of his traditions. This means that he is a religious "transference figure"--that is, one whose symbolic role stirs up in persons a rich variety of early life feelings and associations. In his presence people may reexperience a welter of these feelings, including feelings about such matters as parents, God, heaven, hell, sex, Sunday school, death, funerals, church, right and wrong, and so forth. A minister who is aware of feelings has an opportunity to help people correct old distortions and acquire more mature attitudes.

Another avenue which is helping people into the congregation's mainstream is the small group or encounter group. Many people want to know basic questions. Who am I? Why am I here? What shall I be? Some have criticized the small group saying it is a pooling of ignorance. One must, however, understand that the benefits are not intellectual. It is a source of emotional support and love. Feeling is stressed. If we believe in the ministry of the laity then we have to share with them the ministry of Christ in the world. Change takes place more easily in groups than in individual counseling.³⁶

How do the members of the encounter group seek to grow personally? First, by providing extended periods of time for centering on questions of identity and growth. Also by providing structured experiences which give people permission to talk personally about negative and

³⁶Robert C. Leslie, Sharing Groups in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, c.1971), p. 29.

positive events in their lives. Thirdly, by deprivation of the protection of role and status. In many stranger groups the person introduces himself by his first name, and vocational role and status are not mentioned. Finally, by focusing on neglected dimensions of human spirit.³⁷

What are the potential uses of encounter groups in the church?

One can hold the following assumptions:

1. I believe the encounter group is a more powerful change agency than any previously known individual or group means.
2. It moves persons toward community, mutual love, depth, and intimacy in a short period of time. In a high mobility society this is a style of ministry which the church needs.
3. It opens up a possibility of mutual ministry, of the priesthood of all believers, and it allows people to let their needs for love and care become visible.
4. It facilitates a humanizing life-style of vulnerability and transparency in both leaders and members.
5. It exposes persons to the pluralism of values, goals, meanings, fear, anger, and pain that exists in a single congregation, and it provides therefore valuable learnings in dealing with conflict, confrontation and reconciliation.
6. It evokes a spirit of play, joy, and celebration, which has powerful implications for contemporary worship.
7. It is a training in personal and social creativity and perception which can help congregations get moving in new missional direction.

The encounter group

has great humanizing power as it addresses the rootlessness, fragmentation and meaning crises of persons in our church and in our society. It is opening up for millions of persons a new group of belonging, support, responsibility, wholeness and meaning.³⁸

³⁷Arthur L. Foster, "The Use of Encounter Groups in the Church," Journal of Pastoral Care 26 (September 1972):148.

³⁸Ibid., p. 154.

We need to discover a deeper, more basic meaning in our lives and we can do this only by talking with significant others--by sharing with them our deepest ideas, our deepest fears, our strongest doubts.³⁹

Closely related is the characteristic of challenge in the small group.⁴⁰ Feeling a responsibility for the accomplishment of the task as well as for a focus on the relational process, the group members learn to feel sympathy for those whose orientation is so task-centered that any deviation from the immediate task seems to be tangential and irrelevant.

Small groups, therefore, develop group therapy, group dynamics, and social action.⁴¹

From this chapter you can readily see the huge task that the pastor has in not having a single person fall away. To acknowledge this will help to live with the frustration. There are many different people, with a number of forces, at different times and age levels of Christian experience. Maybe all that is needed is just to re-emphasize the tools and pluses that are available.

Much, however, that has been said is generalizations. In the next chapter a few specifics are in order.

³⁹Otis E. Young, "A Reorientation to All of Life," Pastoral Psychology 18 (March 1967):22.

⁴⁰Robert C. Leslie, "The Uniqueness of Small Groups in the Church," Pastoral Psychology 15 (June 1964):33.

⁴¹John L. Casteel, The Creative Role of Interpersonal Groups in the Church Today (New York: Association Press, c.1968), p. 54.

CHAPTER IV

PROGRAMMING FOR THE NEW MEMBER

New members differ widely. They differ in regard to commitment and Christian experience. They have different needs and background. When adults are confirmed and received as members they are often not sure of what is expected of them.

A ministry (whether in home or church) which works toward greater self-esteem among youth and adults must create the conditions that are freeing and disarming to low self-esteem people. It must accent warmth and congeniality to counteract the chilling effects of an anxious and self-condemning spirit.¹

What is needed most are people who have found an identity in... life and are willing to share themselves with others. The primary qualifications for such adults center in what they incarnate and believe, in being sensitive to others and open to their possibilities. They must be people who can step into another person's shoes and just as easily step back into their own.

Even the new member's personality characteristics make it difficult for them to feel at home in the new group and will need a great deal of personal attention.

¹Merton P. Strommen, Five Cries of Youth (New York: Harper and Row, c.1974), p. 31.

Integration of the new member will ultimately bring him into a maturing relationship with Christ and His Church. In order that these new members may be active in the life of the congregation the following is a suggestion by the Department of Evangelism of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod:

1. Arrange for members of the congregation to attend the meetings of the pastor's class to become personally acquainted with those who are preparing to join by confirmation. Occasionally have a coffee hour after the class.
2. Have a special orientation meeting for them, at which officers of the congregation and representatives of the auxiliary organizations speak, and new members are given a "New Membership Packet," containing a directory of the congregation, a copy of the constitution, and appropriate tracts.
3. Have an impressive service of reception for those transferring their membership and those reaffirming their faith, as well as those being confirmed. Give them membership certificates. Have a reception line after the service and an informal coffee hour.
4. Post the names, pictures, and addresses of all the new members on the bulletin board. Give information concerning them in the congregational newsletter.
5. Hold a family night in honor of new members.
6. Arrange for at least two interviews between the pastor and new members within a three to six month period after they join to answer whatever questions they may have and to discuss the progress they are making in establishing the patterns and assuming the responsibilities of the Christian life.
7. Arrange for a series of visits by active members, such as the following:
 - A. Members of the church council or evangelism committee call on the new members to welcome them, to extend to them personal invitations to join the organizations of the congregation, and to give them the names and addresses of other members living nearby.
 - B. Members of the stewardship committee visit them to enlist their time, talents and treasures. They ask the people to fill out an enlistment folder and a pledge card, unless this was done at the orientation meeting.

- C. Members of the evangelism society visit them to inquire about their unchurched acquaintances. The new members are asked to make an appointment with their unchurched friends and to accompany an evangelism visitor to the homes of these people. In this way the new members are introduced to evangelism visiting.
 - D. The evangelism committee arranges for neighbors to make social visits.
 - E. The evangelism committee asks Sunday School teachers and representatives of auxiliary organizations to visit them.
8. Assign sponsors to the new members. The sponsors are to take a continued interest in the new members, pray for them, introduce them to other members, encourage them in faithfulness, resolve any difficulties they may have, and draw them further into the life and work of the congregation (Bible Class, evangelism society, voters' assembly, choir, auxiliary organizations, and so forth).
 9. Send new members a series of monthly letters during the first year of their membership concerning various phases of the Christian life.
 10. Send them greetings on their birthdays, holidays, and the anniversary of their reception into the congregation.²

Integration of the prospective member starts even before he has joined. It means that opportunities for fellowship will be provided before and after he joins. One must leave the impression that you care.

A climate of warmth encourages self-esteem in several ways.³ First, it frees the person to verbalize his feelings and to put into words the emotions churning inside. Once in words, feelings can be dealt with rationally, the person can be guided by good sense and sound judgment, instead of irrational drives.

²Armand H. Ulbrich, ed., Evangelism Resource Book: Reaching People for Christ (St. Louis: Dept. of Evangelism, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1970), pp. X-A-1 and 2.

³Strommen, p. 31.

Second, a congenial affirming climate encourages one to accept new and acknowledge strengths and weaknesses. In hearing and experiencing love and acceptance, self-perception changes.

An orderly reception will help make the day of confirmation memorable. Be sure to review with them the seating arrangements, processional, and all other procedures connected with the taking of the vow and the baptism of those not previously baptized. A few explanations will reduce worry and enable the new members to participate more fully in the worship. The membership vow should also be discussed thoroughly.

This meeting will also introduce them to certain customs that are observed in the church, especially in regards to Holy Communion. Share with them the history of the congregation, how it developed and future plans.

Discuss also what they might expect of the church.

The day of the confirmation service is a day of rejoicing.⁴ This will include intercessory prayers, the preaching of the Word, hymns and choir presentations. Details, such as flowers for each, picture of the group and a reception line, will help to make this day memorable.

Pastoral interviews will generate a closeness on behalf of the new members to the program of the church. During the instruction you have met with them on one plane. There is, however, a definite need for the constant defining of the common purpose which the pastor and

⁴Arthur E. Graf, The Church in the Community (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1965), p. 175.

his people share. The claims of Christ on His members needs to be restated again and again. This may be done each week with a group of ten to fifteen members with the entire congregation. In this manner all of the congregation is visited at least once a year. There will be interaction between the pastor and the group. They will get acquainted with a portion of the congregation that they probably did not know.

Lay visits are also important. Not only will the spiritual life of the entire congregation be strengthened, but calling techniques are gained by those who do the visiting. The entire congregation remains informed on vital matters and inspired to be faithful. Again the all-important fellowship and getting acquainted is taking place.

Failure to activate many members of the local congregation is because we assume that just because they are members of a Christian congregation, they are still Christian. In calling, when pointed questions about justification by grace through faith are asked in a pointed way the individual almost inevitably gives the wrong answer. According to Don Abdon most delinquents are no longer Christians.

What ought to happen with the delinquent is that he should become involved in a pastor's class once again. So often the point of the call is to get the delinquent back to church and communion attendance. We try to do this in an hour call when it should take up to sixteen weeks. If a person who has grown spiritually delinquent wanted to come to church and communion he would not have become delinquent and separated from his Lord in the first place. The group environment will be helpful to the delinquent because it is non-threatening.

Poor attitudes and excuses can be raised in a class setting and dealt with biblically without directly insulting the individual who holds that view.

We often do not understand how to manage an interview with a delinquent. People who have grown delinquent spiritually return to the bondage to the "flesh"; their motivation is self-centered. The "flesh," according to the Scriptures, is the seat of the scheming, conniving, self-centered attitudes of man. The last thing a person in bondage to the flesh wants to talk about is his relationship to God. The Word is realistic. Do not be deceived by "how nice the person is." If they have forsaken Christ, they have returned to the status of being God's enemy. The Scriptures also arm us with the love to win them back.

One of the early warning signals of potential delinquency is lack of worship and communion attendance. When people no longer cultivate an atmosphere between members for relating the Word and sharing the faith, they are in need of the support of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Most people who do come to church come unprepared and unaware of the sermon text, so they do not derive as great a benefit from the worship service, and the sermon in particular, as they could. It is questionable if the children are deriving as much as possible from worship.

People often feel lost in the congregation and feel the need to get to know others in small group settings where they can share their faith, biblical understanding and needs.

Three out of four want to be part of a caring, accepting group. Two out of three want a group that, in addition to offering acceptance, also confronts one another with an honest, frank sharing of personal feelings. They want small-group experiences that get at the feeling level and help them to come out from under their public posture.⁵

B.A.S.I.C. (Brothers and Sisters in Christ) is an approach which provides small group settings in which the text for the sermon on the next Sunday is studied and discussed in an informal Bible study. These groups may meet in homes where both members and non-members can be invited. Sessions can be held in the same home each week or rotated among the participants. This approach is recommended in "In-reach Evangelism" by Jerrold L. Nichols of the Board of Evangelism, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

The group that is designed for you has to be produced by you. No pastor, congregation or individual member is alike. What is presented is just a start in order to meet the needs of your priesthood of believers in your place.

⁵Strommen, p. 27.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

As I mentioned in the introduction, not everyone will be satisfied with this paper. I have not pretended to have all the answers, not even one or two. My thesis is that we need to do everything possible in order to assist the maturing process.

The danger in preparing this paper is that now I want to put it into practice. For many things have been learned that are necessary and helpful in order to integrate the new member into the active membership of the congregation. From the personality of the pastor and preaching, to counseling, working with youth, and in the areas of stewardship, evangelism, administration, psychology, and even understanding the relationship between confirmation and baptism.

In using the helps and knowledge gained, the methods, it is important to remember our goal of communicating the Gospel to people for the purpose of keeping them as members of God's kingdom, helping them to grow in faith and in the end to receive the crown of life that fades not away. It is the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit that does this.

The Word of God cannot be manipulated. You can only proclaim it. The Gospel is not a club to keep members in the church. You are saved by grace and that means solely by God's work. It doesn't depend on the member or the pastor. We are only the tools, the priesthood of

believers, those individuals who have exposed themselves to the grace of God. The law is not to be used to hold them as active members. When the law is used it only emphasizes our failure because we are uncertain that they will be and remain faithful. The Gospel is the power.

There are two things that the modern church must be constantly aware of. The first is, that there is a tendency to equate church membership with Christianity. Too many people are brought into the Church, without coming into a real and living relationship with the Christ who redeemed them. Too many in our congregations treat the church as though it is a country club whose services they can use when and how they wish. To them the church has become a nice place for certain functions, like baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other get-togethers. It behooves the church to restudy its system and reappraise its methods in such instructions. Much more individual care should be given to integrate such new members into the congregation.

The second thing which should be pointed out is the very real fact that the Church's people are constantly being pushed, by the Old Adam within them, to neglect the Word and sacraments, to tear down the unity of the church, to be filled with pride, to debase the neighbor, to use secular thoughts and methods to do things in the visible Church. This often causes chaos in the Church, deep concern in pastors and church officials, who in turn, are also affected by the Old Adam. In such a dilemma the whole Church may, and does, reach for man-made solutions, based on secular surveys and studies, and becomes enamored of budgets, methods and slogans, believing that the more carefully these are planned, the better the Church will fare. As a church reaches

for the worldly solutions, she becomes weaker and weaker. In the end, she will be in danger of losing the prophetic vision of what her real mission is and how she is to reach it, namely, through the preaching of the Word. She may even forget that her only help is a radical return to that which she knew of her best, that Christ is her Head. The Church is the body of Christ. The body will remain with the Head only as she is totally true to the Word, Jesus Christ, and His Word, the Bible.

The body nurtured on the pure Word, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will again be filled with love to Christ. Loving Him, from her will flow the motivation to do the whole will of her Lord who has bought her with a price.

Are we willing to expend as much energy in keeping members true to the Word of God as we are in reaching them or in raising money to cover the expenses? It will take a lot of work! The Old Adam will be present in the midst of our resolves to make us lazy or to think that that is now the responsibility of the new member. Let us recognize him for what he is and work more diligently to keep what God through the Word and Sacrament has gained.

Another important lesson is that the church needs to adapt itself more readily. The needs of people are all different. They are at different levels of maturity. There is a high mobility in the church which only adds to the problem. Some will stay longer than others. The length of time to work with them will vary. Thus we can keep with our principles but open to new methods of presenting them in accordance with the church's need.

Confirmation is a God-pleasing custom in the church. But just because a person is confirmed does not mean that he is spiritually mature. We must not equate it with baptism. Baptism is good for all time. But confirmation is just a step in maturing as a Christian. More growth is necessary. Growth is a slow process. It continues throughout one's life.

It might seem from this paper that methods are not important. That is not so. Methods are important. But we must remember that they are only a means to an end. You can have the best method and have it carried through in every detail, but if a warm relationship does not result or if people have not been helped, what good is it?

To Him, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ, who through the Holy Spirit has begotten us unto a lively hope by His glorious resurrection, we commit ourselves individually and collectively, now and forever. With new insight and zeal let us from this day forward express our love to Him who first loved us. Thus our people, pastors, congregations, and synod will be revitalized to have the power from on high which is needed to carry out the revealed will of God for His Church.

As we grow as the Lord has promised, we shall then keep those who are entrusted to our care and the Church will be the witness it ought to be in the world.

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