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An Emergency Appeal to Our Pastors

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An Emergency Appeal to Our Pastors.

Emergencies are pregnant with tremendous possibilities. Unwelcome and disagreeable as they may be, they compel us to face the grim realities, demand earnest introspection, reveal our ugly deficiencies, uncover our monumental mistakes, expose our shameful neglect of golden opportunities, compel us to make necessary adjustments, and rise as a mighty challenge unto more consecrated efforts, more effective leadership, more genuine cooperation.

What is true of emergencies in general holds true with special emphasis of emergencies in our congregational and synodical life.

It will not be necessary to convince the reader that an emergency exists. More than a hundred ministerial candidates standing idle at the market-place and the ghastly specter of an alarming and ever-mounting synodical debt are forcible, compelling, convincing reminders.

We shall contribute nothing toward the improvement of this situation if we merely attribute everything to the present period of depression. That would not even be true. A careful perusal of facts will furnish convincing evidence that even during the unparalleled heights of prosperity we were not progressing, but retrograding. There was a noticeable decline in the number of calls and at the same time an increasing number of candidates. Our missionary efforts were not keeping pace with our educational efforts. Often due to a lack of proper interest in the affairs of the Kingdom missionary opportunities were not embraced, and, as a result, no new fields were opened, and we were gradually reaching the "saturation point."—Again, figures show that our contributions were definitely declining. At first we had merely a "budget." Then necessity demanded a division of the budget into "Group A" and "Group B." But even this arrangement did not remedy the matter fully, for soon the require-

ments of "Group A" were not met properly. To-day we face the sorry plight of a tremendous indebtedness in "Group A." The fact that it has passed the million-dollar mark should startle us and arouse us to earnest thought.

What is the matter? Why is it that we were not getting funds enough to carry on the Lord's work properly even during the period of unprecedented prosperity? Why were our people "living in ceiled houses" and permitting the Lord's house "to lie waste"? Hag. 1. Without a doubt our people were blessed abundantly with temporal possessions. The Liberty Loan and Red Cross drives during the World War revealed that. It was brought out again most forcibly during the recent financial crash. Our Lutheran people lost millions of dollars. These facts show that God was not getting His proportionate share. Shall we lay the blame entirely at the doors of our people? We know that many were withholding contributions from God. Many were "robbing God," Mal. 3. But what about us pastors and teachers of the Word? Did we ourselves give proportionately? Did we at all times show glowing warmth and burning interest in the affairs of our District and the kingdom at large? Did we furnish genuine evidence of whole-hearted interest in our sermons, our addresses, our meetings, our conversations, whenever opportunity arose? Did we speak to the individual, to "them that are rich in this world . . . that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate"? 1 Tim. 6. Did we perhaps even encourage our congregations not to do too much for synodical purposes by such indiscreet remarks as: "*Das Hemd ist uns naeher als die Jacke*"? Did we think too much of our local needs, our own salaries, etc., and permit this to throttle our efforts in behalf of our District and Synod? Or did a proud desire for outward pomp and glory prompt us not to dissuade our congregation from borrowing staggering sums and thus shouldering an almost crushing indebtedness for the purpose of erecting a stately church, a school, a parish hall, a parsonage? And did we then claim that our home obligations prevented participation in synodical affairs? In fact, did we try to be the *lieb Kind* by always speaking of the inability of our congregation to do more for the Kingdom?

The present crisis ought to arouse us. We need to subject ourselves to an unsparing self-examination. We need to repent. We need to confess our faults, our neglect of opportunities, our sins in our pastoral office. We need to plead for forgiveness.

And then? Then by God's grace let improvement follow. The present emergency rises as a mighty challenge first of all for us pastors. God has called us to be "the ministers," "the stewards," "the overseers," "the shepherds," of the flock, the spiritual leaders of

His people. It certainly is our duty to train our people, to lead them, to set them a good example, also to give proportionately for the upbuilding of the Kingdom. As we instruct them and admonish them to walk as children of God, to bring all manner of spiritual sacrifices, so we are to instruct them also in the grace of using their temporal possessions as true Christian stewards. Also (or shall we say especially?) during such emergencies as we are now facing we pastors must lead our people to do the God-pleasing thing. All of us realize and recognize this to be our God-appointed duty. But the task presents all manner of serious difficulties. It requires courage to speak to people about financial contributions during a period of depression. It requires a special measure of patience to meet all the objections, the unwillingness, the fears and doubts which beset our people, and in all these things to retain our composure and yet to carry on the Lord's work aggressively and successfully.

At the recent convention in Milwaukee, after thorough and prayerful deliberation, resolutions were adopted instructing the Board of Directors to inaugurate the proper steps toward the balancing of our synodical budget. Our laymen also offered suggestions concerning the method to be employed in the raising of funds to meet our synodical obligations. The Board of Directors and the Emergency Collection Committee sought to combine the two proposals and are presenting a plan which will be discussed thoroughly in every circuit and, we hope, in every congregation throughout Synod.

If these plans, inaugurated by Synod itself, are not to miscarry, if we hope to meet with success in raising sufficient funds to meet our current expenses and to cancel the increasing indebtedness, it will be necessary that our pastors throughout Synod put forth earnest, consecrated, aggressive efforts. Unless there is whole-hearted cooperation on the part of all our pastors, we cannot hope to gain whole-hearted cooperation on the part of our congregations.

Some earnest, straightforward preaching on Christian stewardship will be necessary. Our people must be shown, and reproved for, their sins of omission during the days of prosperity. We need to lead them to heartfelt repentance. Again, and that is the all-important feature, we should point out to them the marvelous grace of God, which prompts the Father's heart to forgive us, the unparalleled love of the Savior, which prompted Him to redeem us at such a staggering cost, the astounding long-suffering of the Holy Spirit, which prompts Him not to cast us aside, but to come again and again to set us right. We need to impress upon our people to what extremities God goes in order to save us. It is His kingdom in which we are permitted to labor. It is Jesus who is calling for our cooperation. It is He who "hath need of them," of our temporal means,

for the work of His Church. It is He who is offering opportunities to us now to manifest the sincerity of our love for Him. We should answer the challenge which comes to us in the present circumstances in the words of St. John: "We love Him because He first loved us."

But is this the opportune time to speak to our people on financial contributions? Look into the Old Testament, and you will find that the sharpest and most severe admonitions concerning giving to the Lord came at such times when "depression" made terrible inroads upon Israel, Hag. 1; Mal. 3. In fact, God connects the depression with their refusal to give properly. Turn to the pages of the New Testament. Jesus has immortalized the memory of the poor widow who "of her *want* did cast in all that she had, even all her living." St. Paul cannot refrain from emphasizing the "grace of God bestowed on the churches in Macedonia." What was that outstanding grace? He says: "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their *deep poverty* abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves."

What a mighty encouragement for every one of us! It is not a matter of chance that our Church is facing such a crisis. The Lord is putting us to a test. He is trying the sincerity and the depth of our love for Him. He still has supplied us with sufficient funds to carry on His work, if only we are sufficiently willing to bring real sacrifices. He is still presenting opportunities. Doors are open. The very fact that we have the Gospel in its pristine purity while others have forsaken it is opening more doors for us. He has given us many workers ready to enter the vineyard. He still supplies us abundantly with the powerful Gospel, by which hearts will be rendered willing to carry on His work. He still remembers the glorious promises which He made to His people both in the Old and in the New Testament, and He will fulfil them if they will but show the proper willingness to consecrate their silver and their gold unto the Lord.

Brethren, necessity summons us to more aggressive action. The emergency drafts us into more intensive service. The critical situation challenges us to more consecrated leadership. Our adorable Redeemer commissions us to go forward. Will we respond? Under the banner of the Cross let us start a great offensive. With our eyes fixed upon Golgotha and directing the attention of our people to Him who died there, let us assume the responsibilities of the task before us willingly, courageously, aggressively. May God graciously bless our efforts!

Houston, Tex.

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