Dialogue

The volume of correspondence following the Summer 2002 issue of CHARIS has prompted creation of this “Dialogue” column. For the most part, letters are reprinted in their entirety. The editor has reserved the right to delete personal greetings, references to individuals or institutions when such references are not essential to the context or content of the letter, and other extraneous material. The editor reserves the right to print excerpts of letters and to respond to those which in the editor’s mind warrant a reaction. In this manner the “dialogue” is extended, and of course, gives the editor the privilege of having the last word.

Those wishing to continue the dialogue are encouraged to write to the editor. Letters of under 300 words are preferred.

Anschauungen

In reaction to the editorial opinions expressed in “Anschauungen” the following letters were received.

I’m writing in support of your article. Our Wauwatosa forefathers were soundly criticized (especially by LCMS pastors) for not immediately turning to the Lutheran Confessions for their answers. Instead they carefully studied the Scriptures in their original languages and then ended up in agreement with the Lutheran Confessions. If we insist on answering every question by “what did our Wauwatosa forefathers say?” we are making the same mistake the LCMS made. But worse, then the basis for our beliefs has shifted by that much from Scripture.

On the other hand when we let each new generation openly question our doctrines and practices, and when with a clean slate we carefully look for the answers in Scriptures alone, I am confident that we will end up with a new generation in agreement with the Lutheran Confessions as well as all the other doctrines and practices that our Wauwatosa forefathers helped clarify.

Rev. Dale Raether
Palm Bay, Florida

I have heard a lot of flack from the most recent issue of the CHARIS journal. I don’t have a “beef” with any of the authors. Mine lies with the editors, and for this reason my e-mail has found you. In my opinion, you seem to in a de facto way espouse an atmosphere that insists a WELS pastor be “professional” in more than just the area of handling the treasures of God’s Word. A pastor is not to be an expositor of pet topics, but all he does is to be a developed presentation of the Law and Gospel/ Justification and Sanctification. I appreciate your work and the place CHARIS has in service to the Christian Church. Yet, I understand its purpose to be a scholarly journal mainly intended to edify the alumni and faculty of WLC and the Christian Church in a wider sense. Please don’t try to turn it into our synod’s “Castle Door” in that it is meant to be a supplement/ replacement to the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. I believe you would agree both of
these publications are meant to edify fellow Christians, yet, each has a “target” audience. Let’s respect that!

Rev. Edward Frey
Abita Springs, Louisiana

No one will argue with the thesis that there is a danger inherent in our confessionalism that debate might be stifled in the interest of preserving orthodoxy. It’s inherent in virtually all established systems, and we are not exempt from it. Witness the squelching debate on politically correct issues, conservative or liberal, on secular campuses. It may be true that confessional Lutheranism is particularly prone to this danger.

However, it strikes me that you draw a caricature of Synod when you write that people in Synod have to talk behind closed doors about fellowship issues, men/women roles, liturgy and worship practices, and the doctrine of Church and ministry for fear of being burned at the stake.

I don’t know who you talk to in Synod, but these are things- all of the above- that we discuss regularly and freely at the circuit and conference levels, and I am not aware that any of us feel particularly threatened.

Someone who reads what you wrote without having any firsthand knowledge of Synod would go away with a very distorted idea of what it means to be a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran, which I am with no shame, as if we walked around constantly looking over our shoulder to see who’s taking notes on what we’re saying.

Pastoral leadership is an important component of congregational development. Berg was paraphrasing Church Growth expert Lyle Schaller in your quoted comment. Schaller said that fifty years ago the three most important factors in a church’s development, in order, were location, location, and location. But today, Schaller says, those three factors, in order, are pastor, pastor, pastor. Pastoral leadership is important, but there are other important factors. I still like what my Dad always said better, that it takes three things on the human side to make a congregation grow, the right pastor, the right mix of people, and the right location, and lacking any of those three, you can run into problems. If from synod’s side you get a lot of emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s role in changing hearts, this is not just a defense mechanism by pastors to excuse laziness and bad habits on their part that are hindering growth, but a very real concern in the climate of these times that we not view the church in purely mechanistic, business terms, and buy into the idea that if pastors would simply follow leadership principles, such as those set out by Eberle, they would be guaranteed “success.”

My personal Anschauung is inclusive and supportive of the institutions of higher education God has given us in Synod. I appreciate good leadership that tries not to draw a false dichotomy between synod schools (Prep/MLC/Sem) and the non-synod supported schools (area high schools/WLC), but see them as complimentary, not antagonistic. It may be that area Lutheran high schools still do not produce pastor candidates sufficient to meet Synod’s needs. So then let’s work to make them better, not castigate them for it. I have no patience with people who try to isolate WLC as WELS’ “Valparaiso.” I embrace WLC as filling a previous void and serving a high purpose for us. But then
it seems to me that the WLC side of the equation is that WLC needs to be even-minded and fair in its representation of the synod it serves.

Rev. Stephen Valleskey
Houston, Texas

In case you are not already familiar with it, I thought this quote from J.P. Koehler might be of interest to you. I feel it dovetails nicely with your recent editorial.

“The person who is certain in faith confesses humbly his own inadequacy with respect to understanding and grasping all truths and therefore, while holding firmly to his own confession, remains open to discussion with other believing Christians.” To a systematic mind this conception may seem paradoxical. In a certain way I suppose it is, but so is all human life, including our Christian life in its most intimate respects.”

“To my knowledge it is in Luther alone that this inner disposition really is present, so that he draws on this fresh fountain of life as he lives, speaks, and interacts and this is what is so big about him.” Taken from Koehler, Kirchengeschichte Vorwort VII.

Prof. em. Harold Johne
Racine, Wisconsin

I picked up my CHARIS when I was on campus last Wednesday. Thanks for another excellent issue!

I especially appreciated your discovery of Koehler's Gesetzlich Wesen. Isn't that a piece of work? He really anticipated so many of the legalistic tendencies that trouble our church today.

Rev. Ronald Muetzel
Bay City, Michigan

I've been wanting to write for some time now regarding some questions I have about some statements you made in the "Anchauungen" article of the recent edition of CHARIS. The section about which I had some questions was on the "Ecumenical Christian." Some of the questions you raised, raised questions for me about the understanding of the doctrine of the Church.

First of all, on page 6 you talk about "finding ways to celebrate our common membership in the one true invisible church than it is with looking for reasons not to interact with other Christians because we don't belong to the same visible church." My question is this, "What do you mean by 'interact'?

If by interact you mean things outside the framework of fellowship, then the statement is understandable. And my second question is "What do you mean by 'celebrate'?" Again, are you talking within the context of "church fellowship?" And notice I spelled "church" with a small "c" which indicates that I'm talking about fellowship in the visible Christian church.
Dialogue

Another concern I have is that in our Catechism as well as in our WELS doctrinal statements we believe and confess on the basis of God's Word that "Christian education" is an expression of church fellowship. Do you agree with our doctrinal statements?

Another question I have is this, "What do you mean by "fellow Christians" in the statement "...we tolerate an environment which is hostile to at least some fellow Christians?" Are you talking about our "fellow WELS Christians?" Or are you referring to non-WELS students who belong to a heterdox church as "fellow Christians?" If you are, on what basis do you acknowledge them as "fellow Christians?" On the basis of "fides qua" or "fides quae"? What do you mean by "fellow"? That word is related to the word fellowship." Are we calling now heterdox Christians "fellow Christians" rather than "persistent errorists?"

Another question I have is about your concern about the "whereabouts" of the Castle Church door? Are you not familiar with pastor and teacher conferences or with circuit meetings in our synod? Are you not aware of district and synod conventions? Are these not the places where we have mutually agreed as fellow Christians in the WELS to discuss matters of doctrine and debate application of those doctrines? As the posting of theses for debate was the accepted practice of Luther's day for discussing doctrinal issues, is it not the accepted practice among WELS believers to do this at the circuit meetings, conferences, and conventions? Wouldn't you agree that anyone who chooses to go outside the agreed-upon forums is acting in an unloving and unbrotherly way?.

Rev. Bruce McKenney
Lake Mills, Wisconsin

The editor responds:

Pastor McKenney raises many important questions and in many ways illustrates the growing tension in the WELS over applications of the doctrine of church fellowship.

With respect to interaction with other Christians and finding reasons to celebrate our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, I was trying to draw a contrast between the evangelical spirit in which J. P. Koehler wrote, and the increasingly legalistic prescriptions which I hear expressed in many parts of the WELS. Obviously I do not condone pulpit or altar fellowship when doctrinal differences exist. Koehler wouldn't either. But when I participate in my community, when I socialize with my neighbors, when I go to Rotary meetings, or whenever I find myself in relation to others, and I meet individuals who confess their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, I first of all rejoice that - at least according to their confession - I will share eternity in heaven with them. According to the WELS' Doctrinal Statements, the starting point for the doctrine of church fellowship is the Una Sancta. "People may in God's sight be united in the fellowship in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta fellowship) and yet not have warrant to practice Church Fellowship here on earth." (Doctrinal Statements, 1970. p. 49) Koehler said it this way: "If I at any time meet up with someone that believes on the Lord Jesus, then the very fact of his faith and that, through his faith, he has become a child of God, a member of the body of Christ, becomes the main thing and warms the very heart."

In my estimation - and after all, an editorial is only one person's opinion - many members of our Synod are becoming increasingly paralyzed over who we shouldn't talk to, as opposed to understanding that the real enemies of the Church are Satan and the evil influences of this world on our own flesh. We are becoming almost rabbinic in our zeal to codify our behaviors and instead of using every occasion to speak the truth in love, we become "Gospel Nazis" - just like the Seinfeld Soup Nazi character - when we say, "Not WELS? No Gospel."
What does it mean to me to "celebrate" this common membership in the Una Sancta? In the context of WLC, I celebrate often with our non-WELS students the fact that we share a belief in Jesus as our savior from sin, death, and the devil. I do this when they come to my office to talk about their studies. I do this in the campus center when opportunity arises for casual conversation. I do this when they talk to me about their own spiritual growth here. We share "God talk." I may pray with them. We talk about what the Christian faith means to us. That's celebration. That doesn't mean that I go to their church with them or that I welcome them to communion in our church or chapel. There are things that separate us in the activity of fellowship. But - and this is the point Koehler was trying to make - that isn't the starting point in my conversation with them.

The assertion that Christian education is an expression of church fellowship requires some clarification. I'm assuming Pastor McKenney meant that among faculty and teaching staff, all should be in confessionally fellowship. Our faculty are all called into the public ministry of the WELS. Obviously, they have to be members of our WELS fellowship to hold a divine call. Or, if he meant that WLC shouldn't share programs or professors with other Christian, but not WELS, colleges, I would also agree. But if he is saying that we should never have non-WELS guest speakers or performers on campus I would disagree. Or if Pastor McKenney is saying that having non-WELS students in our college is a violation of the doctrine of church fellowship, then I would strongly disagree. We welcome Christian men and women of any religious background to enroll. We are clear about our mission and our theological positions. If they come to learn and we have the opportunity to teach the truth of God's Word, then we feel we have a mission to those students. [NOTE: An excellent treatment of this subject is found in a paper by Dr. Mark Braun which is reprinted in this issue.]

Regarding Pastor McKenney's question about "calling now heterodox Christians 'fellow Christians' rather than 'persistent errorists'?" the answer is yes. When fellow Christians have not demonstrated that they are persistent errorists, we MUST regard them as "fellow Christians" and even "Christian brothers and sisters." Even if they are "persistent errorists," they remain erring Christians. Mark Braun tells me that WELS history says we always used to call them fellow Christians until recently. With respect to the student population at WLC, I have asserted that there are many non-WELS students here, but there are no persistent errorists. I believe this is in conformity with the 1970 Doctrinal Statement. Being willingly educated in this WELS college may make them "weak Christians" but not "persistent errorists" unless they "persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it." (Doctrinal Statements, 1970, p. 54) We have had only a few rare instances in which we have had to ask a student to leave because they "persistently" propounded false doctrine and were no longer open to instruction.

Finally, my "church door" piece was prompted by an increasing number of comments I've received from pastors around our Synod who feel that we've lost the ability to speak openly with one another about doctrinal matters. Luther didn't have such opportunities within the church either - he had to use a system of debate in the university. I've attended pastor and teacher conferences as well as district and Synod conventions throughout my 30 years of public ministry. I tend to agree with those who are old enough to remember spirited doctrinal discussions and who now tell me there is a culture of conformity. I just got back from a small conference of pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and lay people who gathered to explore innovative and creative ways to reach the lost in their communities. Many of them spoke to me about my article as well and confirmed many of my observations. As far as debating the applications of doctrine in the accepted synodical forums, my own experiences as a delegate to district and synod conventions have led me to conclude that many are fearful of expressing doubts or diverse viewpoints, convinced that they will be "outed" and eventually lose their jobs. One elderly pastor told me that in the early years of his ministry pastors used to cherish heated debates in their circuit meetings knowing that at the end of the day they could belly up to the bar and enjoy a beer together. Now they're afraid to open their mouths for fear of being sneered at and publicly ostracized. How sad.
I hope and pray that the camaraderie most pastors enjoy with their brothers in the ministry is different than what I frequently hear. Regardless, the fact remains that many well educated and very concerned lay people are largely cut out of the discussion. What opportunities do they have? And where can women engage in such discussion? Conferences and conventions are parliamentary exercises, not symposia devoted to doctrine.

Dr. John E. Bauer

Our small study club (three pastors) in the outpost region of Northern Minnesota has spent some time reading and studying the summer 2002 issue of CHARIS. Since CHARIS (and WLC) seems intent on addressing and reforming a Synod that clearly frustrates you in your search for excellence, we feel we must respond.

By no means is this response exhaustive. It deals with those areas where you and Mr. Eberle have challenged and criticized the public ministerium and doctrinal positions of the WELS. We will respond briefly to your Anschauungen and also attach our limited response to Mr. Eberle. Since you are the editor, you, and the others listed on page 1, are responsible for everything that finds its way into final editions of your journal.

FIRST: to your opening salvo concerning “change.” First of all, your joke is an old joke, and not one that is destined to win many of us to your side. There are Lutheran churches that have changed much more than the WELS. They are not orthodox churches. You speak of orthodoxy and tradition as if they are something bad. The Scripture speaks in positive terms of both tradition and, most especially, of orthodoxy. The sound doctrine that we pastors are enjoined to hand down (tradition) is nothing but orthodoxy by another name. Without orthodoxy we have nothing to give the world. Even Jesus is eventually lost when we stray from orthodox teaching, as history clearly demonstrates. Frankly, even the phrase dead orthodoxy is an oxymoron. The living treasure of Jesus is carried in orthodox teaching.

Beyond that, we wonder what synod you have been living in. In recent years we have absorbed a new catechism, a new Bible version, a new hymnal, a new Sunday school curriculum. This has entailed a great deal of change. Too much change for some. Not enough, clearly, for you. All three of us make use of the variety that the new hymnal offers. It has enriched our worship. We recognize and appreciate modern Bible translations, through all translations are flawed. And we are thankful for the high quality of the new Christ-Light materials, not to mention the People’s Bible series.

Is the real premise behind your complaint that the stodgy old WELS could grow if it just adopted the yippy-skippy methodology and worship of the Church Growth Movement? Perhaps your remarks about change and your uncritical (or, even worse, critical) printing of the Eberle article in the same issue are not accidental. If this is the premise behind your words, we reject it. Not all of the changes in worship and congregational life that have taken place in some corners of the WELS will stand the test of time. Many will be seen, in retrospect, as huge mistakes. The “traditional” will begin to shine a bit more with the light of time. For all those clamoring for change there are many others who desire the anchor of familiarity, of comforting doctrines in comforting and familiar forms. Pastor Joel Gerlach shared some interesting insights on this matter in Forward in Christ, 1998, issue 1. The article was entitled “The Orthodox attraction.”
SECONDLY: concerning the Castle Church door: Are you really willing to compare the WELS of the 21st century, where solid preaching of Law and Gospel is more the rule than the exception, to the church of Luther's day? There is a reason that Luther posted his challenges to the doctrine of his church. The doctrine was wrong! What is the great falsehood that has been embodied in our confessions (either ancient or recent)? Is it that we have studied the Scriptures and struggled to a Biblical position on the role of man and woman and fellowship? There are not open questions. They have not been decided by human opinion. We may struggle a bit with application of these principles, but our real struggle is with those outside of the orthodox Lutheran church who have stretched the submission as an anachronism in our day. Our synod has statements that are based on the sound study of Scripture. They don't agree with the spirit of our times, and all three of us have suffered slander because we dare to oppose this spirit. An anonymous theologian does not change the fact that those who have strayed form these principles were dealt with patiently and at great length. They decided that our Scriptural position on these issues was too confining. And yes, they were not allowed to continue in our ministerium. Because we are a confessional church that is willing to take a stand and suffer the consequences.

In short, we reject the premise that our Scriptural positions on the role of man and woman, the Church and Ministry, and fellowship principles are open questions. When Luther posted his 95 theses he was in search mode, to a certain degree. We are living in a church body that has been diligent in applying Scripture to the issues about which you speak. Is this the real issue - that you, and others at WLC, disagree with our doctrinal position? Do you intend to agitate for change? Is it possible that (after you nail your theses to the door) you will be satisfied, while others (including the three who sign this letter) will have to find a new synod? Frankly, the LCMS allows the freedom to apply the principles in these areas differently. There is a great deal of diversity in that body, but, we can tell you, from speaking to those who live there, it is not a happy diversity. Ragged individualism has its price. Perhaps the "lockstep" of some solid traditions isn't so bad, after all.

Pastor Mark H. Falck
Pastor Arthur Frenz
Pastor Lon Kuether

The editor responds:

It is always good to know that people are thinking and talking about something that I've written. That it took these pastors a whole year to respond suggests that they've been chewing on my words for a long time. Nevertheless, I greatly appreciate their evaluation of my column.

Salvo? The pastors make it sound like I am at war with our synod by suggesting that openness to change doesn't come easily for Lutherans. I suppose I could have said that change doesn't come easily for people in general. I'm sorry they didn't see the self-deprecating humor in my light bulb joke. However, I was not suggesting that change for its own sake was necessary for the survival of the church. What I suggested was that careful attention to changing demographics, cultural differences, and cultural influences is necessary so congregations can be attuned to the population they are serving. That may mean giving consideration to how worship is structured, which music is selected, which visual forms of media might be employed to communicate to a media saturated society. That in no way means compromising our orthodoxy.
I also regret that these pastors have inferred that I am opposed to the rich traditions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Nothing could be farther from the truth. What I worry about is traditionalism in which the means and methods of ministry we have used for many years become entrenched as the only correct way of doing things. The danger, as J.P. Koehler pointed out 90 years ago, is that our traditions become our orthodoxy. This is the spirit of legalism he describes in *Gesetzlich*.

There is much to rejoice about in the WELS, especially as it has employed multiple means to proclaim the changeless good news of Jesus Christ. Our synod has indeed been in the forefront of innovation in its publications and in its use of media. Unfortunately, I think these pastors are missing the point of my editorial on change. I was not speaking about the synod per se, as much as I was reflecting on my interactions with those who participate in the “Church and Change” conferences and who work hard to preserve the orthodoxy of the church while developing means and methods that are relevant to the populations they are serving. I’m willing to grant that this may not be of concern to these three pastors. They serve small, rural parishes. Maybe things haven’t changed much in 30 years, but I suspect that even in rural America, people don’t think and act entirely the way they did in the past. Even the most remote farm houses are wired to the internet.

Regarding their assumption that I am in doctrinal disagreement with the WELS and that by advocating a venue – a “Church Door” – at which to discuss such matters; this too is not accurate. I have every confidence that pastors and seminary professors give careful attention to make sure that the doctrines of the church are those supported by Scripture. They have many avenues to discuss these things and to achieve consensus at pastoral conferences, in Seminary courses, and at conventions. What these gentlemen forget is that the audience for CHARIS is “the educated Christian.” It is just because there is often a struggle in applying Scripture that educated laymen, teachers, pastors, theologians, and academics need some place in which to discuss these matters. Because there remains considerable confusion among many educated Christians about doctrine and practice, opportunities to achieve shared understanding can only help, not harm the church. The point I’ve tried to make is that – at least in the WELS – there is no place where educated and spiritually mature laypeople, pastors, teachers, and professors can get together to share, listen, discuss, and pray together over these matters.

To this end, I would invite these pastors to submit proposals for papers dealing with leadership in the church and to share their concerns at the first annual “Church Door Symposium.” Information concerning the symposium is found on page 64.

Dr. John E. Bauer

Pastoral Leadership

The following letters were received in reaction to Mr. Bruce Eberle’s article on pastoral leadership

Thank you for your inspiring article on Pastoral Leadership in the Summer issue of CHARIS. As an entrepreneur and son of a WELS pastor, I can relate to your observations from multiple points of view.

It is ironic that your article is essentially a blueprint for the success of the four megachurches that we have in our town of 55,000. Yet, when our church council was brainstorming ways to grow our small congregation, a fellow councilman (and former WELS pastor) insisted the only way to grow
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was to abolish close communion and change our position on the roles of women in the church. Sadly, no one at the time had the spiritual or logical capacity to refute his rhetoric.

As we continue to evaluate our church’s plan for growth and evangelism, I’m sure we will find your article and others in the CHARIS to be valuable resources.

Rob Kitzerow

Thank you. We needed that. By “we” I mean those of us who have spent long years as pastors or as laypersons living within the Synodical “culture” you lament and wish to modify.

Critical to an understanding of our Synodical culture is the exaggerated emphasis that has been placed on the original languages as the key to understanding and implementing God’s will for the world. Those of us who have spent endless hours learning how to manipulate this key as though it were the Spirit’s only strategy for mission and ministry have felt too little appreciation for other kinds of scholarship and activities, including the kinds you exhibited and called for in your article.

I remember my own shock in my first graduate school class at Michigan State University. I found out my classmates were well educated, reasonable, and insightful beyond me though they did not know a lick of Greek or Hebrew. Oh did that hurt! I had so loved the languages and had come to regard them too highly as the secrets of responsible communication and interaction with peers. My pride was punctured, my arrogance swiftly atomized.

The Lutheran emphasis on the Means of Grace is overdone when it fails to appreciate how God works through other spiritual gifts like those mentioned in Romans 12. We do well to exercise and cultivate these gifts, too, in the service of our Lord and his church.

Prof. em. Darvin Raddatz
New Ulm, Minnesota

I just finished reading your article in “CHARIS” from WLC, and I wanted to thank you for taking the time to write it.

Since you invited reaction and comments to the article, I wanted to offer a few of my thoughts.

I agree with most of the points that you developed in the article, and I think that is due to the fact that these are the things that my classmates and I were taught at the Seminary and have been striving for since coming out of the Seminary. Although I do know a few men who could probably use some motivation to work on their leadership skills, a great majority of the WELS pastors I know also are striving for the very things that you have mentioned in the article. That is a credit to the faculty at the Seminary and the reason to thank our gracious God.

The points that you developed are good for all of us pastors to review. They also would be very helpful for the lay leaders of our congregations to apply to themselves and their roles in their congregations. In the congregations that I have served and have known, the men who have been leading the congregations by and large have not agreed with many of the points of your article. So
when a new (and young) pastor comes in and is wanting to lead the way that you describe, he immediately runs into roadblocks.

The thing that has frustrated me most in the congregations that I have served (They’ve been over 100 years old) is when the men who have been in leadership positions in our congregations for years do not want to set goals for the future for their congregations and say that the plans that the pastor is suggesting will never work. So they never support any future plans. Even when the pastor and a few others have some success with what has been planned, there always seems to be vocal members who have controlled “church policy” for many years and who still publicly state their opposition to anything new. I suppose that in some congregations the pastor does the same kind of thing. Perhaps this is just my experience, but I’m sure you at least have an idea of what I’m describing.

Getting back to the basics of the Word and the mission that Christ has set before us is the key to the spiritual renewal (inwardly and outwardly) of our congregations. We pastors need to keep pointing to these things and to keep praying for the words and talents to equip the men of our congregations to be leaders in their homes and in their congregations.

Rev. Karl Schultz
Hadar, Nebraska

I think we are all aware of the scripture that says, “... each of us will give an account of himself to God” (RO 14:12) and “they keep watch over you as men who must give an account” (HE 13:17). We who have been entrusted with the mysteries of God bear greater responsibility before our Lord because he gives them, not to be hidden, but to be put to the best use possible during our time in this world. We seem to be comfortable with the teaching of accountability before God... probably because we know that Jesus has obtained forgiveness for all our ministerial faults. Nevertheless, there is accountability... and what that fully means remains to be revealed.

Most of our people are accountable not just to God, but also to man. People in the work force face regular evaluations. Those of us who work out of the WELS home office also are regularly evaluated... by the DMB’s we serve as well as by the missionaries who are asked to do so. This summer I saw our synodical leaders held accountable at the MI district convention. Held accountable to men by men.

Pastors are accountable to their people, and sometimes the people serve their pastors with helpful, gospel-centered evaluations and suggestions. But more often they don’t know how to do that and are afraid to do that. I recently spoke with some laymen who would desperately love to speak to their pastor in a loving and respectful way, but they are definitely afraid that they will not be well received. 50 years ago, most pastors would have said, perhaps bellowing, “how dare anyone question my ministry?” Today, we know we all need to be lovingly encouraged and supported... and even held accountable.

But we lack at least two things:

1. A standard according to which to give an account
2. The courage to take the lead and offer to be accountable
The first is because we have not been trained and we have not learned to be accountable to anyone except God, our conscience (and in some wonderfully bold case, to our wives... by our wives). But we are afraid of what our people might say, because we think they will judge us according to the way Billy Graham preached 30 years ago (not the way he does today), or by the ministry done by all those pastors in those megachurches that we love to criticize, but secretly wish we could emulate.

That’s because we haven’t thought through our ministry work all that well. We just do what we've always done... hopefully improving some, but not thinking too much about what needs to be changed, dropped, begun. There’s uncomfortable work in that. We know we should/could be doing something better to reach more souls because we have never been all that good at it. But we don’t know what we should be doing... and neither do our people. It's kind of like the polls they take of high school kids who are asked, “could you do a better job of being president/ running GM than the incumbent”. And they all think they can. But they have no idea about how complex and difficult those jobs are. Same with the ministry. Our people look at attendance and listen to our messages and don’t feel what they think they should feel and are pretty sure something needs changing. But they don’t know what (and they don’t know that they are part of the problem, too)... so they think that maybe if we change the pastor, it will be better. Of course, some pastors are able to lead well and some aren’t. Some can get things going, some can’t. We’ve had to learn how to do that outside of what we’ve been taught... because the needed knowledge and even experience isn’t found at our schools.

We haven’t identified well and collectively what the standards for a faithful pastor are. Somebody told us it is simply preaching and teaching law and gospel. That’s not biblical (it’s biblical to say “be faithful”... but we need to understand the full context of that Pauline statement). I think Bruce Eberle's article probably is a very good place to start. It would be great to sit down at the beginning of the year with our people and talk about what is reasonable and what isn’t... what would be above and beyond and what would be unsatisfactory... in each of those areas. Then, every 2-3 months, we would discuss together how things are going. Not finger pointing and blaming, but lovingly and respectful to each other.

Both we and our people need training and equipping in this whole area. It's vital if our church body is even going to survive (because the question is no longer “how will we grow and reach more souls?”)

That takes courage... enough to even speak up at pastoral conferences and say, “I’m going to try this with my leaders and suggest we all do this.”

The real courage comes from the gospel—a motive that says, “I will trust these people whom I love and serve to love... that they will love and serve me and their Lord by helping us to strive to move forward in the kingdom... “by all possible means to save some”.

Finally, it will not be a “business model” because the “bottom line” is going to be of a totally different nature. Sometimes our people say, “the church should be run like a business”, but those folks are not close to the heart of things. They're looking at externals such as bills, glamour, buildings, etc. The people of God care about the quality of sermons and equipping Bible classes, souls being saved and reclaimed and nurtured, spiritually maturing members, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, Christlikeness and a host of other things.
I do agree that many pastors would be well served by continuing in their education. I do think that a pastor, as a shepherd, is in a position of leadership. But I do not think that the solution to our declining membership is to import the principles of business into the church. And I do think you lay too much of the blame for our lack of growth at the feet of pastors.

Why is our membership declining? Look at the history of Christianity. What you call “rationalizing failure” I call success of Satan. Time after time after time men have thrown away the Gospel. Look at the world in the days from Adam and Eve to Noah, or from Noah to Abraham, or from King David to Christ, or from the Apostles to Luther. The cycle keeps turning; the vast majority of people keep throwing away the Gospel. Was Jeremiah a bad leader? Was Isaiah a bad communicator? Was Amos lacking in social skills? Was Jesus was a bad leader because He failed to start mega-churches in Israel?

Orthodox churches have not grown in size. In reading surveys, you need to clearly define the terms. Orthodoxy around the world has crashed and burned. Even in our country, the big, growing churches are the ones that have consistently traded God’s Word for political correctness, and compromised doctrine to fit in with the world. Churches have been moving away from God’s Word, not towards orthodoxy.

Why do our churches not grow? It’s not the pastor, it’s the apathy among the average person in the pew. Compare for a minute our world missions... they ARE growing, rapidly! What do they have that we do not? Super pastor/leaders? No. They have active members who are growing in faith and sharing the Gospel. They have people that love the Gospel and make it their top priority in life to do God’s work. They have people who can’t wait to study to be pastors and make it their life’s work. More and more, we Christians in America are fat, happy, and APATHETIC. The average pew sitter does not care enough to take action in his faith. That is a cruel assessment, but I often include myself.

Too many people look to the pastor to do everything. Somehow this twisted mindset that the pastor is responsible for starting every program and taking every initiative and doing every shred of the work is killing us. Pastors are working 100 hours or more a week already and not getting everything done. Many congregations treat them like dirt already by working them to death and not paying them enough to care for their family. Too many members complain about the pastor when things aren’t happening fast enough – yet they use this excuse as their crutch and continue to rationalize their laziness and lack of direction. Lay members do not need the pastor to hold their hand, they can take initiative. Let them see that they are the church and they are God’s workmanship and they are created to do God’s work. One man working vs. 300 people working? Now we have a recipe for growth.

Why are pastors pessimistic oftentimes? One word: disappointment. Over and over and over they try to instill in people the fact that being a Christian is a lifestyle not a one hour a week habit. Over and over they try new things and people will not listen. A pastor could stand on his head and juggle chainsaws in church, but on any given Sunday 50% of his people will not care enough to be there.
Over and over a pastor tries to get his people to take more responsibility and do more for the church, and over and over and over he meets unwillingness. He can get out of the way, but what happens when instead of stepping up to pitch in, people sit back in their laziness and apathy and snipe at the pastor for not doing things for them? This is reality all over the WELS.

The pastor cannot lead unless he has members who will go with him in equal partnership. This is not a business where employees expect to follow a leader and collect a paycheck. In a church the pastor will get hung out to dry quickly if he had big plans for the congregation but no one will go with him. Do our members want to dream big or are they content to leave things the way they always have been in their comfortable world?

As far as adding members and keeping them, talk to the member in the pew. Friendship evangelism and friendly members is what works. The pastor will move on some day; if everyone is dependant upon his personality they will walk out the door with him.

I think you see what I’m trying to say. Our biggest problem in America is not always poor leadership on the part of the pastors. Our biggest problem is apathy... the same problem that every established church has. Our mission fields are growing because we have people there who WANT to hear the Gospel and will take ACTION to live their lives in God’s service. Here you have to convince someone that they need the Gospel (which is like pulling teeth) and then you have to battle the stagnant attitude among the congregational members. Too many of our members have their priorities all messed up. They think of everything else first before their God and their church. They take their faith and their religion for granted and they smother the fire of the Holy Spirit. If everyone put as much time and energy into the work of the church as they do at their jobs in the secular world, maybe we would be getting somewhere. If everyone put as much time and effort into raising their families in the Lord, maybe the pastor wouldn’t have such a difficult job training the youth. If everyone encouraged people to think about the ministry we wouldn’t have a shortage of pastors. If everyone gave their first fruits to the Lord we wouldn’t be facing 25% WELS-wide budget cuts. I think it’s a shame that we in America sit here in luxury while missionaries will be going home next July because of our apathy. They will be going home and people who actually want to hear the Gospel will not get it.

Have you thought about being a pastor? I would encourage you. I don’t come from a pastor’s family... and as someone who has spent a long time in the pews I think you could add a valuable perspective to the ministry. You are well-equipped to train lay leadership. You have the confidence and optimism needed. You have a love for lost souls or you wouldn’t have written this article. Where has the Lord equipped you to serve?

Mr. Raymond James

Mr. Eberle responds:

I happen to believe that good, successful businesses follow Christian principles not vice versa. God’s Kingdom is amazingly consistent. The idea that somehow relationships and leadership in the secular world are and should be different than they are in the church has no basis in fact. Laymen shouldn’t leave their faith at home when they go to work any more than Pastors should not incorporate Biblically inconsistent leadership practices. I would submit to you that the greatest leader of all time was Jesus and he should be a role model in both the spiritual and secular world. He was a servant-leader, he didn’t compromise in regard to excellence, he didn’t make excuses, he spoke clearly and
powerfully, and the movement he started, i.e., Christianity is the most successful in history. Jesus started the mega church to end all mega churches, the Holy Christian Church.

I believe we have many, many excellent men who are pastors, but far too many pastors have the leadership training to lead effectively. Do you really believe that other churches are growing because of false doctrine? The fact is that the growing churches in America are doctrinally conservative, are headed by a pastor with good leadership skills, and have the ability to preach clearly and to communicate one-on-one with their members. These churches demand much from their members and their members know the Bible better than most WELS members. Don’t get me wrong, I do not agree with the many false beliefs of these churches, i.e., eternal security, baptism and communion practices, the rapture, etc. But the seeker doesn’t join or refuse a church based on these beliefs.

If all churches were declining in membership your arguments to the contrary might carry some weight. That’s simply untrue. Many churches are growing (including some churches within the WELS), and these churches have many things in common – conservative doctrinally, good preaching, good leadership, and a commitment to God’s standard of excellence as it is so clearly stated in Colossians 3:23.

The leader can’t blame the followers for his failure. I simply can’t come up with a Biblical rationalization or excuse for why other churches are growing while we are declining. If we are willing to accept such decline then we can’t blame the Holy Spirit, we can only blame ourselves. If you really think that the big, growing churches “have consistently traded God’s Word for political correctness and compromised doctrine to fit with the world” I urge you to attend one of our fast growing WELS churches or one of the fast growing independent churches in your area. I know that is the standard line, but I think you will find that it is untrue. I have attended several churches in this area that are rapidly growing and they are very conservative doctrinally.

I’m sorry, but the leader pastor can’t blame his members for a lack of growth. If he wants to see growth then he must energize his members through powerful preaching and be a cheerleader who makes them want to share the good news.

There are churches filled with active, energetic men and women waiting to be led. I know, because I’ve been a member of such a church. A church that made 40,000 telephone calls, knocked on tens of thousands of doors, etc. that generated many, many visitors. These visitors were warmly received by the congregation, but never returned because the pastor couldn’t give a coherent sermon and had a lifeless personality. Speaking well and having compassion are leadership skills that must exist if a church is to grow.

I don’t want a pastor who works harder or longer, I want one that leads. Energize. Cheerlead. Get out of the way. That’s what Jesus did and it’s what pastors must do. If a pastor is working too many hours then something is definitely wrong. Often the problem is micromanaging. A pessimistic pastor cannot lead. I know that being a pastor must be an extremely challenging and often disappointing job, but aren’t all jobs? It’s also the most exciting and worthwhile job a man can have. He works directly for the King of Kings. He often has the opportunity to be present at the birth of a new Christian. I have been there and it’s comparable to being present at the birth of a child.

Yes, I wrote my article because I am concerned for my church body. The 21st century may well usher in spiritual renewal for our nation and the world. We have been so, so blessed with the Gospel in its truth and purity, but how long will the Lord linger with us if we fail to share that Gospel effectively as He did and as the early Christians did?

The fields are indeed white and the harvest is waiting. I don’t want to change any doctrine, I just want to equip our pastors with the leadership skills they need to become effective instruments of the Holy Spirit.

Bruce Eberle
Dialogue

First of all, I want to say I appreciate your concern for the leadership qualities and skills of pastors within the Wisconsin Synod. I finished reading your paper that was printed in the recent CHARiS magazine from Wisconsin Lutheran College.

However, I am concerned the ideas you present are an overstatement of what our Savior commands us to do. Jesus simply commands us to “preach the Gospel.” Your paper seems to be an over analysis of Jesus’ command.

Permit me to cite a few examples. In the section entitled, “Set Goals. Devise a Plan. Measure results.”, you offer an example of setting a goal of increasing church attendance by two people every Sunday and to measure it with a colorful chart. This is a plausible example, but what happens if a pastor is faithfully preaching God’s Word in it’s truth and purity, preaches the Word passionately and with conviction and church attendance stays the same? Is that considered to be a failure? By no means. The pastor will be commended by God for remaining faithful to him and preaching his Word faithfully.

The bottom line is not so much the numbers as it is faithfulness. The numbers will come. God will see to that. What matters is a pastor’s faithfulness in feeding the flock God has entrusted to him, seeking the lost to bring them into God’s fold. That isn’t to say numbers do not matter. They do. As a pastor it hurts to see one of the congregations I serve lose 20% of its membership within six months due to drought and economic downturn because ranchers are forced to sell the family farm and move away. Does that mean I am an unfaithful pastor? Not at all. At the same time it is a joy to bring one person through Bible Information Class and have them join the church. I see that as a blessing from God. Not because of me, but how God has used me as his tool to bring someone to faith.

At the beginning of your paper you outlined fourteen points you discuss as the body of your paper. Granted, these points are applicable to the parish ministry, but the first one, “Give all glory to God,” is the point that is key. All of the other points flow out of giving all glory to God. In giving all glory to God, pastors are simply called to preach the Gospel.

Rev. Timothy Gray

Mr. Eberle responds:

I certainly do not claim to have all the answers, but I am very concerned that the WELS is not effectively reaching out to the lost. I see no justification for such decline.

Let me just make a few comments on some of the points you made in your e-mail. Does God indeed just command us to “preach the Gospel.” I think the answer is yes and no. Yes, that’s the command, but God gives us further direction on how we are to proceed with this in Colossians 3:23: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” In this verse God has clearly expressed his standard of excellence. This standard applies to preaching the Gospel as much as it does to playing the trombone. No compromise in quality.

While not every church has the same potential for growth based on the market it endeavors to reach, numbers are, as you say, not only important, but Biblically important. I can’t judge the performance of every pastor, only his church
can and should do that. Accountability applies to everyone in life, including pastors. The beauty of accountability is that we find out what we are doing wrong, what we are doing right, and can improve our performance.

Not only is accountability Biblical, it is the defined practice of the WELS. A church calls a pastor and therefore is empowered to withdraw that call. On page 45 of “The Shepherd Under Christ” is a section entitled “Incompetence.” I am not suggesting that pastors should have their call withdrawn en masse. However, I am suggesting that accountability is Biblical, practical, and the position of the WELS. You believe I overstated my case. After further reading the Bible in regard to the importance of numbers, I feel the case may well have been understated.

Faithfulness entails growing, learning, studying. Becoming an effective leader is part of faithfulness. God adds the increase but he expects us to use all his God-given abilities to further this Kingdom. He judges our faithfulness and he uses congregations as his instruments to judge the effectiveness of the pastors they call to serve them. Results do count. If we bury our talents under a rock waiting for the Master to return we haven’t served him well.

A gain, the performance of a pastor is a subjective thing. Only the lay leaders of a congregation can and are obligated to make this judgment. Is he performing up to his maximum ability? Do the results indicate such performance under the given conditions?

This is not about working hard, this is about working effectively. And we give glory to God when we use our God-given talents and abilities to their maximum effectiveness. Ultimately only the lay leadership of a congregation can judge if this is happening. Numerical results are but one tool for making this evaluation.

In every case we must beware that we don’t rationalize failure as inevitable. There is simply no legitimate explanation as to why our church body is declining in membership while others are growing. To lay it off to “watering down the gospel” is simply an excuse. The days are getting shorter. Many are marching down the road to Hell. We can’t reach all of them, but we surely can reach more than we are today.

Bruce Eberle

I read your article entitled “Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective.” I wanted to let you know that I appreciated it very much. I liked your common sense approach, and your comparisons to the business world. All too often, pastors like me forget that there are certain common sense things we need to do, that are Biblical, in order to be good leaders. I’ve made a commitment to myself to grow as a leader, and your paper has certainly helped me grow.

Rev. Don Schultz
Michigan City, Indiana

Without question your article in the Summer 2002 issue of Charis - “Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective” - gave pause for thought to many pastors in our Wisconsin Synod. Thank you for your many insights and suggestions that can be beneficial for our personal growth in our ministries.

At our recent circuit study meeting we reviewed your thought-provoking article in light of the Scriptures and discussed how your article applies to us as pastors and to our individual ministries. In this review three statements from your article concerned us enough that we felt it would be best to
address them in a letter to you. We appreciate your openness, loving concern for the ministry, and warm invitation for your readers to respond to your article.

1) On page 10 you state: “The parable of the talents focuses exclusively on numbers.” However, we feel that is a misuse of the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) In reality the faithfulness of the servants is the main point Jesus is making here. In fact, their numbers differed, from five to two, to none. Only the “unfaithful” was condemned. The first two were praised not for their numbers but rather heard their master say: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things;.. This is entirely consistent with Paul’s words to the Corinthians: Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2) Jesus merely chose one way to show the evidence of faithfulness - numbers.

2) On page 15 you have quoted Proverbs 29:18a from the King James Version of Scripture. After lengthy study of the use of the Hebrew word translated “vision” in the KJV (“revelation” in the NIV and “prophecy” in the RSV), we find that what the Lord is saying through Solomon is that where the proclamation of God’s Word is absent, people will run wild, unrestrained. While we can appreciate the value of establishing a vision, this verse of Scripture would not support your point in the article.

Finally, on page 17, you quote Acts 14:1 to underscore the importance of the preacher speaking effectively. While proper preparation and delivery are indeed important in proclaiming God’s Word, we never want to give the impression that conversion is dependent upon organization and delivery of a sermon. The impression is given in the context of your article that Paul and Barnabas spoke in such a way (their delivery, their style, the structure of their sermons) that it was responsible for converting great numbers of people. God’s Word never states that their sermons were responsible for these numbers, rather than God’s grace and power. This time the NIV translation gives a wrong impression by translating the Greek words - “so effectively.” The concept of “effectively” is not in the Greek itself. Rather it would be more accurate to say “they spoke so that...” This does not put the burden of conversion on the effectiveness of their methods, but where it belongs, on the content of what Paul and Barnabas spoke – the Gospel. (Romans 10:17)

In the interest of working together for the truth, we hope that our comments have been helpful to you as many points in your article were a blessing to us. However, in concern for that truth of our Lord’s Word, since your article has gone into many homes and read by many people, we would encourage you to publicly clarify or correct your use of the above passages that no one would be misled in his or her understanding of God’s truths.

In closing, we again thank you for many provocative thoughts that stirred us into reviewing and evaluating our ministries to God’s precious lambs. May our gracious Lord continue to use you in wonderful ways to reach out to lost souls with the gospel of Jesus Christ and to strengthen those of his flock by the faithful use of his Word and Sacraments.

The Northeast Circuit of the Ohio Conference of the Michigan District,

Rev. Samuel J. Hacker III
Rev. Paul D. Rutschow
Rev. Paul A. Schmiege

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Mr. Eberle Responds:

Let me endeavor to respond to the three points you made in the letter attached to your e-mail of October 22, 2001.

You are correct. I stated that “The parable of the talents focuses exclusively on numbers.” And you responded “that is a misuse of the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).” You went on to say, “In reality the faithfulness of the servants is the main point Jesus is making here.”

Perhaps I would have better stated my case if I had used the term “emphasized” rather than “exclusively.” Clearly no two churches have the same opportunity for outreach in terms of numbers. In other words, if one church grows by 10 members per year and another by 100, it doesn’t mean that the pastor with the slower growth has been less faithful.

On the other hand, faithfulness means more than just preaching the word in its truth and purity on Sunday morning. Faithfulness encompasses the use of all the talents and abilities that God has given to the man who is the called leader of the flock.

The pastor was hired (called) by the congregation to serve them and to lead them in sharing the Word with all those with whom they come in contact. It is the responsibility of the lay leadership of that congregation to support, encourage, and evaluate the performance of that pastor.

Such evaluation is not only Biblical, but also the practice of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. If you go to page 45 of The Shepherd Under Christ you will find a section entitled “Incompetence.” The first sentence says, “Should it become clearly evident to the congregation that a pastor lacks the necessary gifts for the ministry or the particular gifts without which working in its midst cannot be done, consideration for the man should not outweigh the welfare of the church.”

At minimum, results must be a part of the evaluation of the competence of the pastor. For example, if a church is located in a rapidly growing area and nearby churches are growing but the WELS church is not, something is amiss. To dismiss such empirical evidence with an argument that the growing churches are liberal, apostate churches is rationalization, pure and simple. It also shows an ignorance of the nature of seekers and the initial message offered by growing churches.

Perhaps it is the fault of the laymen and women in the congregation? But that begs the question of leadership. A leader must lead. How can the leader blame those he is supposed to be leading?

I agree that we should be careful about taking any verse out of context. But I don’t believe you can narrowly define faithfulness in Matthew 25:14-30. If faithfulness has nothing to do with results where is the servant that invested the money and received no return?

It is simply impossible to ignore the fact that the master expected a return. While results may vary, I believe it is clear that Jesus does expect a return. He expects results. That is an inescapable, Biblical fact. In the Book of Acts, numbers of conversions are mentioned repeatedly. That is surely not by accident. In addition to the numbers, the term “many” is used throughout Acts referring the conversion of the lost.

Yes, I agree that you are right, I should not have used the term “exclusively,” but no I do not agree with you that the Lord doesn’t expect results. I simply do not believe that point of view can be supported Biblically.
I find it a curious thing that some pastors will state that one can’t apply the leadership principles of business to the ministry. They have it backwards. Truth is universal and the Bible is truth. In the book, “In Search of Excellence” Peters and Waterman “discover” the leadership practices of successful businesses. And what is it they “discover?”

Although they don’t identify it as such, they “discover” leadership characteristics exhibited by the greatest leader of all time, Jesus. In human terms, Jesus started the most successful movement in the history of the world! The practices of leadership he exhibited – vision, caring, integrity, excellence, a bias for action, delegation, loyalty, humility, sacrifice – are the very characteristics of leadership “discovered” in successful businesses by the business gurus of the early 1980s.

I won’t quarrel with you over the intent of Proverbs 29:18a. I’ll leave that to others. I hold no claim to being knowledgeable in Hebrew. However, there is no question that vision is a crucial part of leadership. One of the greatest visionary statements in the history of the world was the challenge Jesus gave to his disciples (and to you and me) in Acts 1:8b when he said, “... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This was not going to be a small movement limited to the Jewish nation. Jesus was telling us that we would spread the Gospel throughout the entire earth! I can think of no vision statement greater than that given to us by Jesus. When a congregation takes ownership of this magnificent vision can we not expect great things to happen?

I would never suggest that the quality of the sermon is the determining factor in converting the lost. Nevertheless, a poorly delivered, unorganized sermon that is hard to follow will neither inspire its listeners, nor reach the lost. If we truly believe that all we have to do is preach the Gospel, no matter how poorly we do it, we might as well preach in a foreign language. The Gospel would still be there, but to the listener it would be just as unintelligible.

God establishes his own standard of excellence in Colossians 3:23 - “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” Anything less in the preparation and delivery of a sermon is not worthy of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I have often mused that if it were announced that President Bush was going to attend worship services at our church next Sunday, would everything be the same? Or, would the choir put a little more work in on it’s number? Would the organist add a little time to his or her preparation? Would the ushers be a bit more attentive? Would the pastor put an extra hour in on his sermon preparation? President Bush is probably not going to be in attendance next Sunday, but the Lord God almighty will be. Shouldn’t that be sufficient inspiration to everyone who participates in the worship service?

I have yet to locate a fast growing church that has a pastor who can’t preach well. Such churches just don’t exist. I do not believe there are any excuses for poor sermon delivery. I’d love to see a pastor deliver a sermon and immediately pass out a questionnaire asking the listeners what the one major point of the sermon was. If they don’t get that one major point, the pastor has wasted his time.

In fact, the purpose of the sermon is a matter that I have difficulty getting a clear understanding of, although I have asked that question of several WELS pastors. It’s not an accident that lay people refer to ministers and pastors as “preachers.” Preaching is viewed by the laity as the most important, single role of the pastor. I believe it is the most important role. It’s one I hope to write about in the future.

Bruce W. Eberle
Dialogue

Your CHARIS article is outstanding and very much on target! I would have been deprived of an important proposal for effective ministry if you had not sent this. Thanks for sharing your thoughtful presentation, which I trust will receive approving reception in WELS.

I did not know of your $2,000,000 education and the crisis you faced in the 1980’s. This experience as the foundation of your article is entwined in an outstanding way to give you permission to share your leadership concepts in a winning way, and to be heard. Indeed, they were used effectively as part of the lesson for pastors to learn concerning their leadership and effective planning for the church.

Your fourteen points are good selections for leadership principles, and your development of these proposals were very helpful. You will not be surprised to hear me say that I would have been pleased to have more quotations from GOD’S WORD and fewer from the special edition of the NIV.

Waldo J. Werning
Brookfield, Wisconsin

Your article in the WLC publication, CHARIS, was outstanding. That is exactly the kind of encouragement and leadership pastors and laypeople in the WELS need. Personally, I have focused on your list of “14” and begun to review my leadership style in that light. Obviously, that type of training is not available at the Seminary. I might add a thought on the “number.” Of course we need to review the numbers. Your argument is sold. How many emphasize the “numbers” we people of God can “control” such as: How many new people have we mailed to, provided TV or radio adds for, or canvassed, or phone called, or penetrated with our message? How many follow up contacts have we attempted or actually made? How many of our members are personally praying for and growing relationships with someone who is unchurched? Those are all numbers we can control to a very large extent. I pray you continue to write articles and share your insights. They are extremely helpful to local pastors like myself. May God bless you and the ministries you are involved in.

Rev. Steve Witte
Green Bay, Wisconsin

We write to you as the author and editor of the article, “Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective,” which appeared in the Summer, 2002, issue of CHARIS. We have twice discussed this article and are writing this response to you. We are the pastors of the Kettle Moraine Circuit of the Winnebago Conference of the Northern Wisconsin District, the area around Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Together we serve about 10,000 members of the WELS, a number equal in size to a half dozen of the districts of our Synod. Many students from our congregations attend Wisconsin Lutheran College.

Although we are experienced pastors, as we read this article there was not much about our work that we recognized in your presentation. We did not recognize our ministry. The article sees us as managers with broad visions, but we see our ministry as being Seelsorgers, caretakers of individual souls, bringing Law and Gospel to people on the personal level that meets their needs. Even when
we are doing group work (classes, services), we see our focus as that individual care for each one of God's people. Rather than seeing virtue in being pastors with visionary management, we have rather seen such pastors become negligent in their care of their people at the personal level. And that is not the kind of ministry that we are seeking for ourselves or for God's people.

We also did not recognize our congregations in this article. We are not managers who can hire or fire to find the people we want, nor can we surround ourselves with people who are compatible with our visions. We often find ourselves in congregations which do not have the strength or desire to move in the directions that we may think seem advantageous for God's kingdom. When you write that "nine times out of ten, or perhaps ninety-nine times out of a hundred, members will follow the pastor's lead," you show a very naive understanding of how congregations really do work. Pastors have to deal with congregations as they are, just as congregations have to deal with pastors as they are.

Nor did we recognize the great problem you see as the reason for the decline of the WELS. In your article you point to deficient leadership by pastors as the reason for this decline. We submit that our problem is something else. Our people are being affected by the attitudes and values of the world around them. Our people have become as materialistic as the rest of America, more and more occupied with success and with things rather than with families and with godliness. Very few of our members are willing to have larger families, even while they make sure they have more toys and larger homes to hold them. One third of the children born into our congregations are born out of wedlock and many others become the victims of their parents' divorce. Children move far away from their parents and grandparents and from their congregations and its ministry as they pursue their life ambitions. Materialism and worldliness, immoral living and a declining birth rate, the effects of our sinful world, these are the challenges we face, and not our skills at management.

It is, of course, all Christian churches in the Western world that are enduring these challenges. No churches are doing well against them. Evangelistic churches like the Assemblies of God and the Southern Baptists bring them in the front door and lose them out the back door. The Assemblies of God acknowledge that their enthusiastic new members are actively involved only an average of three years in their new congregations. The Southern Baptists acknowledge that half of their listed membership does not attend church even once a year. The megachurches that make the news build their vast memberships by robbing members from the smaller or from the more liberal churches around them. In these difficult times for the Christian church, our WELS is doing surprisingly well, as we thoroughly train children and adults in the Lord through our personal ministry with the Word and then keep serving them through their lifetimes.

And this brings us to the greatest problem we see in your article. Your solution to the woes of the church is pastors learning to become visionary managers. God's Word tells us that the solution is something else, that the church does not grow and prosper through organization and management but through the Means of Grace that proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this Good News that makes Christians and so makes the church. The marks of the church are not management and meetings, they are not powerful personalities and dynamic leadership, nor are they growing numbers and worldly recognition. The marks of the church are the Gospel preached and proclaimed to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people. And that ministry is flourishing very well indeed in our Synod, and will flourish as long as pastors remember what their work is.
We have taken some time to respond to this article. We have done so because this article was published and enthusiastically endorsed by a school with ties to our Synod and was then widely disseminated among our membership. We are concerned that views like those expressed in this article and in the editorials favorable to its message are being seen as a standard by which our work and ministry is measured. We well realize that your defense is going to be that you only wanted to stimulate discussion, but as servants of God it is above all your responsibility to edify the church by that discussion and to honor Christ and His truth in all that you say and do.

One of our men commented, that if his young son read this depiction of the ministry, he wouldn't be interested in preparing for the ministry. We all concurred in his comment, and added the thought that none of us felt we measured up to the criteria this article presented. We then went back to discussing the Scriptures, feeling that they were of greatest worth in guiding and encouraging our ministry and our congregations.

May God guide you to a better understanding of what you were writing about.

The Pastors of the Kettle Moraine Circuit
The Northern Wisconsin District
c/o Rev. Fred Toppe
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Mr. Eberle responds:

It is my hope that no one ever describes me as a manager. In my view, managers are those individuals who manage the status quo. They make wonderful bureaucrats, but lousy leaders.

Some folks might say that I am trying to apply so-called business concepts to the church. I think they have it altogether backwards. I endeavor to apply the leadership principles of Jesus to my business and to the church. Let me offer a few examples.

1. **Vision.** There has never been a greater visionary statement than this one given by Jesus in Acts 1:8b — "...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This was not a local, neighborhood cause they were being commissioned for, but rather a worldwide outreach to every nation and tribe!

2. **Servant Leadership.** No where is this better exemplified by Jesus than in John 13 — "So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." Our Lord and our God not only took on the form of human flesh, but before his disciples he took on the lowest role of washing feet.

3. **Caring Leadership.** Jesus' examples of healing the sick and feeding the hungry provide ample examples of how he not only cared for the souls of people, but also for their human needs.

4. **Delegation.** When he left this earth, Jesus made it dear that he was leaving his disciples behind (and us behind) to be in charge of sharing the Word with the lost and hurting of the world. What a big and exciting job he gave us. But, of course, he also gave us the Holy Spirit to change hearts as we share the Word.
5. **Clear Communication.** Through his easy to understand parables Jesus shows us how to communicate the Gospel simply and clearly. He spoke in the language of the common man, not those sitting in high places.

6. **Focus.** Jesus was focused on doing one thing, taking our sins upon himself so that he might fulfill the Scriptures and be the Savior of the world.

I could go on and provide many more examples of Jesus leadership that are applicable to ministers and laymen alike. We sometimes miss the fact that truth is universal. There is only one truth and that comes from God’s Word.

You are absolutely right that these are difficult times. The devil is walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but are these times really any worse than those encountered by Luther? From what I have read, in the days of Luther, it was not only society that was corrupt, but also the church itself. If we intend to lead a Christian revolution that spreads around the globe shouldn’t we see the lost and the hurting as opportunities, not problems?

Undoubtedly you have the most difficult, yet at the same time the most rewarding job in the world. People are often known by whom they work for. You work directly for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Bosses can give bonuses to workers, you offer life eternal.

I was privileged to be present at the birth of my son 22 years ago today. What an incredible experience! There is simply no way to adequately describe being present when life is given to an infant by God. I have also been present when the Holy Spirit changes a heart and that person confesses his sins and trusts in Jesus as his Savior. Truly, that experience is like being present at the birth of a child. There is simply nothing more exciting.

Last week, while flying to the West Coast, I had an opportunity to read the results of a year long survey of 576 churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. This one denomination was selected because it is the largest Protestant denomination in the US and in order to compare apples with apples, not apples with oranges. The churches qualified for the survey because they had a conversion ratio of 1:20 or better, i.e., they were realizing a conversion of one person for every twenty members. Some had a conversion ratio of 1:6. Please note that these were not transfers from other Baptist churches or folks who decided to change from Catholic or Lutheran or Presbyterian to Baptist. These were conversions of folks who had never previously belonged to a church.

Interestingly, these churches are from all sections of the nation (urban, suburban, rural) and they varied in size from less than 100 to several thousand. But in each case their conversion ratio was at least 1:20. And, each of these churches had seriously addressed the “back door” issue. Although there are most certainly exceptions, these churches aren’t pulling them in the front door and seeing them file out the back door.

Of course, not every church is alike. Not every church has the same potential, but if we convince ourselves that it can’t be done, then it is certain that it can’t be done. In fact, there are numerous examples of churches in the WELS that are reaching out effectively to the lost and hurting. Some are old and well established, while others are less than fifteen years old. Some are located in affluent suburbs, others are in urban areas, and still others are in medium size towns.

I fully agree with you that the church grows through proclaiming God’s Word. I advocate no bureaucracy. No organization charts. No job descriptions. No meetings. Rather, I suggest a passion for the Word that results in a bias for action, the kind of passion of the early church. Unfortunately laymen cannot provide such leadership, it can only come from the pastor, as I learned from personal experience. But let’s not delude ourselves, we are a dying Synod at worst and ineffectual in sharing the Gospel at best. It doesn’t have to be this way. We have been blessed with the Gospel in its absolute truth and purity. Now, let’s follow Jesus leadership example and share the word with those around us.
Leadership is not something only for businessmen who can hire and fire. Many, many of the most effective leaders in our society are involved in non-profit, voluntary organizations. They care, they listen, they inspire, they lead by example, and they stay focused. Leaders of voluntary organizations like a church are no different or less effective than leaders in business, government, or elsewhere. The leader can’t blame the followers for not following. That turns the definition of leadership on its head.

Let me be perfectly clear, my goal is not to stimulate discussion. My goal is to initiate a Christ centered revolution. As long as the church is an institution and not a cause we are doomed to fail.

Frankly, I must admit my puzzlement at your description of the young man who would not want to be a leader in the church as I described it in my article. What could be more exciting than working for the Lord God almighty, saving souls on the road to hell? How can we not have passion, commitment and enthusiasm for such a cause.

I wrote my article out of genuine concern for our Synod and for the lost. We have been blessed immeasurably with the pure and perfect Word. We have the power of the Lord on our side. We have truth and wisdom as only the Bible can provide. Yet, we are a declining church body possessed of a mentality that things have never been worse and nothing can be done about it.

I don’t presume to be a Biblical scholar or a great leader. But I confess to being a very concerned layman who only prays for the best for his church body. It is not and was not my intent to offend you or any members of your circuit in any way. Nor do I sit in judgment of you or your congregations. I do, however, believe strongly that we are called to reach out to the lost and that we can, as a church body and as pastors and laymen do so much more effectively than we are doing today.

Bruce W. Eberle

I just finished the article you wrote that appeared in last summer’s Charis magazine out of WLC. My brother and one brother-in-law (both very successful in business) have shared similar thoughts with me over the years. Pastoral leadership is very much a key issue in the growth and life of a congregation. I have done many of the things you suggested in my nine years of ministry and will continue to do so. The LORD blessed Mt Olive in Tulsa and is blessing Abiding Word.

One side of the story that I have always shared with my brother and brother-in-law I would like to share with you. Lay leaders often say and do the same things that you pointed out in pastors. I have faced a great deal of rationalization for failure, lack of vision, lack of goals, and lack of accountability from many of the lay leaders I had "turned loose" as you say. Men who ran successful businesses and handled millions of dollars every day failed to keep any of the promises they made to their church and me. Even after years of pleading I couldn’t get some lay leaders to plan beyond a month at a time.

The point I want to make is this. Have you ever fired employees for lack of performance or mismanagement? I CAN’T DO THAT AS A PASTOR! Did you reward your employees financially when they did well. I CAN’T DO THAT AS A PASTOR! Did you promote or demote employees when they didn’t plan and didn’t reach their goals? I CAN’T DO THAT AS A PASTOR! What kind of working capital did you have for equipment in your business experience? It takes money to make money! The Home Mission Board doesn’t give the average mission pastor a lot to work with.
In Tulsa I exhibited enthusiasm and optimism. I insisted on accountability and was changed for the better because of it. I held out a vision for the people. I was a cheerleader, a risk taker. And by God’s grace the church grew in many ways. We added a wonderful facility and expanded our ministry. I have seen lay people take charge and accomplish great things. But before you judge pastors as the problem with the WELS walk in my shoes for a while. There are many laymen who don’t have your dedication and enthusiasm. There is a great deal of apathy and lethargy among those who you claim we pastors are ignoring, not empowering, and not leading.

Rev. Michael J. Otterstatter
Tulsa, Oklahoma

I realize that this email in response to your article “Pastoral Leadership: A Layman’s Perspective” in Charis is quite late in coming. I doubt I have anything new to add that hasn’t already been said. Yet actually writing my thoughts down is helpful for me, and if anything here proves beneficial for you, thanks be to God.

First of all, your article reminded me how I need to guard against the sin of complacency in my ministry. I share your desire to see our synod grow, and yet I must confess that I often fail to put that desire into practice. It becomes easy to do what is comfortable and not to challenge myself or stretch my faith. It is good for me to examine my heart, to confess my sin, and to rely on my Lord not only for forgiveness but also for the resolve to grow. I appreciated your willingness to humbly share your own experiences with us readers. Leadership ability is certainly one area of ministry I can grow in and your article gave me some insights on what leadership is all about. I also appreciated your encouragement that as a pastor I need to continue to sharpen and hone my skills so that I can better serve my Lord.

On the other hand, even as I judge my own heart, I must guard against the sin of judging the heart of a brother in the ministry. If I am busy in the call the Lord has given to me, I cannot and should not know all the details in someone else’s parish. I do not know what particular challenges (both personal and professional) that the Lord has placed before him. I do not know the extent of his abilities or how he is using them. From a distance it can be hard to tell the difference between a humble faith that accepts what God has given and complacency. I dare not assume that, if his church is not growing, he must be doing something wrong.

This brings me to what troubles me about the article and the use of the business model for the pastoral ministry. Although there are several places that I find exception with, I think most of my concern boils down to the question of how to evaluate the success or effectiveness of a pastor’s ministry. Please forgive me if I am reading something into the article that you did not intend. Yet having read it, this seem to be the underlying premise: Just as success or effectiveness in business is measured by the result of numerical growth, so also in gospel ministry numerical growth determines success or effectiveness. I do not agree. Please allow me to explain my concern.

In business, success and effectiveness is measured by growth in number of clients, in profit, etc. The article appears to say that success or effectiveness in ministry is measured by growth in membership. The numbers listed for conversions in Acts, the parable of the talents, Acts 14:1, and other evidence is cited to support that assumption. However, I contend that it is unbiblical to say
that gospel ministry is to be evaluated based on growth in membership. In fact, using growth in membership can be misleading and deceptive as an indicator of what God intends.

Now let's step back to a point that we both agree on. God promises that his word brings results. He says, "My word that goes out from my mouth . . . will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11 NIV). His word is "living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12 NIV). So also as you concluded from the parable of the talents, God wants us to put what he gives us to use so that he produces results through us.

The key question now is: What are the results? The business model and the article imply that the result that measures success is numerical growth. However, God does not say that. In fact, some of the results that God says his word will bring when faithfully used, would be called anything but a "success" by the business world.

Can God bless his word with growth, even phenomenal growth? Yes, he can! Acts says 3000 were baptized on Pentecost (Acts 2:41). That number was added to daily (Acts 2:47), and the number of men grew to 5000 (Acts 4:4). I don't think specific numbers are given anywhere else. And although we are told that after the judgment against Ananias and Sapphira no one else dared to openly join them, more did continue to believe (Acts 5:13, 14), but precise numbers are no longer given.

However, we must keep in mind that this growth is an example of the results God can give. No where does God promise to give that kind of growth again. No where does he promise faster growth to faithful churches. He doesn't even promise faster growth to Christianity in general compared to false religions. To believe something that God hasn't promised is not faith but superstition. In fact, God has said that at times the result his Word will produce is the opposite of numerical growth, namely hardening and persecution. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's return to the question: What are the results that God's Word can bring in our ministry? Here is an attempt to list some of the examples God tells us:

1) Numerical growth as in Acts 2
2) Spiritual growth. Jesus' parable that the kingdom of heaven is like yeast describes the internal, spiritual growth of his kingdom (Matthew 13:33). Paul often prayers for the spiritual growth of the people he has brought the Gospel to (Philippians 1:9-11). This kind of growth is hard to measure accurately.
3) Temporary growth -- people believe but then fall away. In the parable of the sower, those that fell on rocky soil or among thorns believed for awhile and then fell away (Matthew 13). Consider also the example of Judas Iscariot.
4) Preparatory work. A faithful, effective pastor may sow many seeds but not see the harvest of souls. But another would not have reaped that harvest if the seeds hadn't been sown (John 4:37, 38; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9). (No doubt the harvest the disciples reaped on Pentecost and afterwards was one way Jesus' words were fulfilled: "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:38 NIV). The disciples reaped the harvest which the prophets from Moses until John the Baptist had been sowing for centuries.) (What would the business world say about you doing the work and someone else reaping the results? It's not a desired result or a success -- but in God's work it is.)
5) Hardening of hearts. When God commissioned Isaiah, he told him what results his word would bring: "Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes"
(Isaiah 6:10). This is also one reason Jesus spoke in parables (Matthew 13:13-15). (The business model would label this result as an utter failure, the exact opposite of the supposed goal. But God clearly says this is the result he intends if people persistently refuse to believe his Word. [I'm not denying that he sincerely wants all to be saved. Both these truths are revealed in Scripture (Romans 9:18), and although we may not be able to reconcile them in a way that feels good to us, both are to be believed, because God says so.)

6) Persecution. (Matthew 10:17-36) (What business would be considered a success if its leaders are put to death and its clients jailed?)

Now when God's Word brings a result that leads to the salvation of a soul, we know that all the glory goes to God for it is by grace alone that any one is saved (Ephesians 2:8, 9). When God's Word does not lead to salvation the failure is not due to God or his Word but to the sinful heart that refuses to believe (Matthew 23:37). In addition, if my sinful life or deceiving words cause others to fall away (Luke 17:1-3) or if I fail to speak and warn (Ezekiel 33:7-9), I bear responsibility as well.

This explanation of the relationship between cause and result in gospel ministry does not follow the rules of logic. The only reason we believe it is because the Bible reveals it. The business model does not and can not comprehend or incorporate what the Bible says about the cause-result relation in the working of God's Word. Therefore, whatever conclusion the business model draws about cause, or credit, or fault will not necessarily be valid.

Now if we go back to the list of results that God says his word will produce when faithfully used, we see another reason why the business model fails. To pick just one of the results listed above as a benchmark of success in ministry is to distort God's word by ignoring part of it. Since some of these results can not be measured and some are contrary to each other, we can not use results as a basis to evaluate the success or effectiveness of a pastor.

What then determines success or effectiveness in ministry? If we turn back to the parable of the talents, we see that the focus is not on what kind of results or how great the results are. Rather the emphasis is on faithfulness. The master says, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things . . . " (Matthew 25:23 NIV). Paul reminds us that those servants entrusted with the secret things of God must prove faithful (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2).

Faithfulness is much harder to evaluate than results. Faithfulness can not be measured with numbers. However, as a pastor I must fight against the temptation to use this as an excuse for complacency. Even though others may not be able to see all my sins of unfaithfulness, God does. I daily need to go to him for forgiveness and for strength to remain faithful.

I believe the key to faithfulness is not leadership skills or the business model. I believe that the key to faithfulness is to faithfully meditate on God's word, faithfully go to my Father in prayer, faithfully struggle against daily temptations so that I live for my Lord.

Will I set goals and consider results? Yes, that is a part of faithfulness. Yet the goals need to be for what I am capable of doing (e.g. making so many calls per month) and not for what is in God's hands (e.g. having so many conversions per month). Likewise in considering results, I can ask myself questions, such as, "Did my sermon or visiting or counseling result in communicating a clear message of God's Law and Gospel so that the hearer could understand?" "How could I communicate the Word more clearly, more directly, more often, and/or to more people?" Yet the
final result the message has on the hearer is not in my hands, and it could be any one of those results mentioned above. I must realize that the result God gives may not be the one I was looking for.

Moreover, whenever God’s word is used, I know it brings results, even if those results can not be measured or seen. Faith trusts God’s promise that his word is effective (Isaiah 55:11, Hebrews 4:12, John 6:63). Faith is certain of that even when we can’t see results, for faith is being sure of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). In fact, faith that depends on results is no longer faith but logical deduction. Faith keeps its focus on God’s promise, not on the results.

Will I want to improve my leaderships and evangelism skills? Yes, that, too, is part of faithfulness. But the work of a pastor is much more multi-dimensional than simply leadership. As a faithful pastor there are many other skills I need to work on as well, such as skills in teaching, counseling, preaching, Biblical languages, and inter-personal skills. I need to continue my education in exegesis, dogmatics, church history, pastoral theology, all of which underlie many of these skills. In addition, I also want to faithfully carry out my responsibilities as husband and father.

As I or a brother in the ministry seek to balance all these, no doubt there are areas that outsiders will see and may wonder why I or my brother is not doing more. Under such circumstances I need to honestly evaluate myself to root out my laziness, complacency, and sin. But part of the explanation may be the other pastoral, family, and personal responsibilities that take my time and dare not be neglected. Although Christian love will encourage and warn as necessary, Christian love also trusts one another to make faithful decisions. May God guide me and all his servants to be faithful.

I pray that I have not offended you in what I have written. I do see a great danger in applying the business model to ministry and tying success to numerical growth. On the other hand, leadership skills are an important asset to a pastor and I need the warning and encouragement not to become complacent but to continue to strain forward toward the prize trusting in Him who works in me to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Rev. Gregg Bitter
Hancock, Minnesota

Mr. Eberle responds:

Yours is a long and insightful response to my article. It may have been long in coming, but it was worth the wait!

The fact that I mentioned results seems to be the one thing that a number of pastors are focusing upon. There was much more to the article than that. Even in that case, I saw numbers as one way for the pastor and his lay leadership to evaluate their effectiveness.

I live in a world of reality. I was formerly a member of WELS congregation a short distance from another small church that was established about the same time. The WELS congregation has about the same number of members 17 years later that it did a few months after it started. The other church now has more than 3,500 members.

The first reaction I usually get to this example (unfortunately not an isolated one) is that the other church must not teach salvation through grace alone. They must not demand instruction in the Word before joining. They are not WELS and therefore apostate. All of that could be true in a given case, but the WELS pastor says that without even knowing what they teach and preach.
The fact is that most growing churches with a high conversion rate (non-believer to believer) are what could be defined as conservative theologically. Now I would not agree with them on things like decision theology, eternal security, baptism, etc., but they do teach and preach salvation by grace alone. While some would argue that their false doctrine is the reason they grow, it’s simply silly to make such an assertion. Can anyone with a straight face really argue that a non-believer understands the differences in theology between different churches? That is patently absurd.

What then is the difference? According to a survey of more than 550 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention (they qualified for the survey because they had a conversion ratio of at least 20:1, i.e. for every 20 members they gained at least one person per year who had previously been a non-believer). Incidentally, of this group and other churches in another survey, most had effectively closed the "back door." So, what was it that distinguished these churches from the more than 40,000 sister churches in the SBC?

Preaching was number one. And good preaching (i.e. good communication) is clearly an vital part of good leadership. Assimilation into the congregation, specifically Sunday School, was number two.

While I might agree with you that if you don’t reach a goal you haven’t failed, it does not necessarily follow that you have maximized your talents and skills. If we don’t take a hard look at performance we will continue to accept mediocrity in the ministry, and that dishonors God. After all, his standard of excellence is clearly stated in Colossians 3:23.

I would assert that if churches all around you are growing and yours is not, then something is wrong. To come to any other conclusion is to rationalize failure.

My business model of leadership is the leadership example of Jesus. He cared. He was compassionate. He was a servant leader. He communicated clearly using anecdotes called parables. He was courageous. He was humble. He inspired. He was focused. He listened.

Don’t get me wrong, we have many, many wonderful pastors in the WELS. But we also have many who run from accountability. This is a failure not only of the pastor, but more so of the lay leadership who fail to hold the pastor accountable for performance.

Yes, faithfulness is one measure of leadership, but only one. In the parable of the talents those who were commended for their faithfulness also produced results. That’s not an accident. God does expect results. He expects our best.

I believe that today we have a wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel. People are hurting and confused and we have the truth. We have the answers. But we can’t reach out to them if they cannot understand what we are saying or if we don’t show compassion to them. Or if we don’t really reach out to them. I have heard pastors say that all they need to do is share the Word and then they proceed to get up in the pulpit and talk in circles so you have no idea of what they are saying. I would argue that such poor delivery drives away prospects and does nothing to inspire the members to share the good news.

You took time to write a great e-mail and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. My intention was not and is not to attack, but to provide some examples of the mistakes I made and how I learned from them. No, not everything from the business world is applicable to the role of the pastor-leader, but much is. God’s world is amazingly consistent.

If we go somewhere with a congregation and we do everything right and no one heeds our message, then let’s shake the dust off our feet, close the doors and move on. But please, let’s not rush to rationalize failure. We need good leadership training at our Seminary. I have a wonderful WELS pastor who is doing everything he can to reach out to the lost. Now, I want to do my best to support his efforts.
I highly recommend a small paperback book by Thom Rainer that is a report on a year long study of churches that have experienced a growth rate of at least 20:1. It's called *Effective Evangelistic Churches*. He also has a follow up book (sorry, but I don't have the name handy) that reports on a survey of churches that have effectively closed the "back door." He debunk's many so-called "church growth" concepts while reporting on empirical results that have application.

Bruce W. Eberle

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**A Final Note from the Editor**

We deeply appreciate the thoughtful correspondence which was sent in response to last year's issue. We especially thank the pastors of the Ohio Conference of the Michigan District of the WELS for their brotherly concern for the correct understanding of Scripture. Mr. Eberle and I both accept their patient instruction and regret any unintentionally inaccurate expression or interpretation of the Scriptures. Their concern reflects precisely the type of interaction we hope to support. Regardless of our editorial policy, it is certainly not our intention to promote an incorrect understanding of Scripture. We thank these men for their study of Prov. 29:18, Matt.25, and Acts 14. We stand corrected.