



CONGREGATION-BASED RECRUITMENT: *What's This All About?*

Recruitment... specifically, recruitment to the *public Gospel ministry*. It isn't a new idea. God's people have been doing that sort of recruiting for a long, long time. Think of Philip bringing Nathanael to serve Jesus as one of his disciples (*John 1*). Or, long before that, think of Elijah readying Elisha to become his successor as God's prophet (*1 Kings 19*). What Philip and Elijah did is the same sort of *recruitment* this handbook talks about.

That sort of recruitment is nothing new in our synod circles either. **Pastors, teachers, and congregation members in the WELS regularly do much to seek and send young men and women who will prepare to become called workers in our synod.** They encourage and support those prospective servants of the Savior with their prayers, their offerings, and their personal efforts. The process that results, with God's blessing, in each new pastor, teacher, missionary, or staff minister is something that begins in homes and congregations like yours, with people like you. That is what we are talking about when we speak of *congregation-based recruitment*.

The scores of young men and women who graduate from Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary each spring are clear evidence that you, your congregation, and others like you across our synod have been busy at this work of recruiting. **Please know that you are *not* receiving this handbook because someone thinks you haven't been doing your job.**

On the contrary, **it is clear that the Lord has blessed our synod with countless people who care about the public ministry and who are committed to encouraging and supporting young people toward that goal.** Since you are reading this handbook, it is likely that *you* are one of those people. *You* are a recruiter. So...

- ✓ Would you like to know what God's Word has to say about this vital work?
- ✓ Would you like to hear from the people your church has called to carry on this work full-time?
- ✓ Would you like to find out what other people like you in congregations like yours are doing in their recruitment efforts?
- ✓ Would you like some ideas that may help you to refresh or refine what you and your congregation are doing?

If your answer to these questions is *yes*, then this handbook has something to offer you.

Some of what you read here may not be new to you. Feel free to ignore it. Other things may not fit your congregation's situation today. You can skip over those things, too. Along the way, however, you may find something useful. Even if it is just the seed of an idea, it can grow through your efforts and God's blessing and bear precious fruit for God's kingdom.

Use what you find here in any way that is useful to you and your congregation (and if you come up with new ideas that may be useful to others, please pass them back to us so we can pass them on). God bless you, your congregation, and your efforts at *recruitment to the public Gospel ministry*.



HOW TO USE THIS *HANDBOOK*

First, be reassured -- there is *no* wrong way to use this Handbook. If you are *using* it at all, you are using it as intended.

However, if you are interested in a few suggestions about how to get the most out of this resource for you and your congregation, then read on.



It would be ideal to use this Handbook in a way that would get as many of the ideas it contains into the hands and into the heads of as many of the members of your congregation as possible. **Recruitment works best as a collective effort**, so the more people involved, the better.

Experience and the input of dozens of WELS congregations suggests that most congregations have not thought too much or worked too formally with the issue of recruitment for the public ministry. That means the ideas presented here may be fresh and new to many of your fellow members. Almost any organization in your church, then, might be interested in addressing the topic: *What Can WE Do to Recruit More Workers for Christ's Church?*

The recruitment bible study in *Part II* (p.8) would be a fine place to start. It may be used by individuals but is also very suitable for use with your church council or with any other group within the congregation -- the ladies' aid, men's club, young people's group, parent/teachers' association, couples' club, singles' group... you get the idea. (Please note that the bible study pages are followed by a *Leader's Guide*.) **The bible study will give anything else you do in recruitment a solid foundation on God's Word.**

From that point, taking a look at *Where Do We Go from Here* (p.4), as well as the *Recruitment Do's & Don'ts* at the end of Part IV (p.36f) might help to turn your discussions in a very concrete and practical direction. Think of these lists of what other congregations have done as *menus* from which your congregation is free to pick and choose what sounds interesting or workable for you.

Eventually, you may find that it is beneficial to make recruitment toward the public ministry in your congregation a formal, on-going responsibility of some person or group. That way interest will be less likely to fade as the freshness of the idea wears off. Larger congregations may even wish to establish a congregational recruitment committee, but the work could be coordinated much more simply in smaller congregations. One or two interested members could serve to spearhead the effort, working under the auspices of the Board of Elders or the Board of Education. Another possibility might be to place recruitment into the scope of your congregation's Board of Stewardship; our attention to the young lives the Lord brings into our congregation is certainly an important part of our stewardship of God's blessings.

As you get things started, we encourage you to make contact with the recruitment offices of our synod's ministerial education schools. We are eager to provide support and guidance for your efforts. We are here to serve you!

You have read this far... that means you have already begun. **Please don't stop here.** What you and your congregation can do on the "grass roots" level to identify prospects, offer encouragement, organize support, forward information, and pray for blessings will certainly bear rich fruit for Christ's kingdom!



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Seven Suggestions for Congregational Recruitment Activities

If you have taken the time to work through the bible study *Recruiting to the Public Ministry*, you are well under way. Even if you do nothing else with this handbook, you are already more aware of the work of recruitment and its importance. It is likely that, from this point on, recruitment to the public ministry will be more in your thoughts and in your prayers. That is good for your church and for its work.

If you and your fellow members find that you are interested in moving on to things that you might do in your own congregation to direct people toward the public ministry, this section should be of use to you.

Every congregation is different. The way the Lord has blessed your congregation with personalities, talents, resources, and opportunities is unique. No other congregation is just like yours. Because that is so, what is useful for recruiting at one congregation may not be so useful at another.

The following seven suggestions, however, are pretty universal. In one way or another, each should apply in your situation. Of course, you and your fellow Christians will have to decide just how each one best applies. We hope these seven suggestions will help to get you started.



- (1) Proclaim the Gospel** -- Of course, this is already happening in your congregation. From the pulpit, in the classroom, at the family altar, God's people are proclaiming his precious message of sin and grace. Even though we know it is happening, however, this is still where things must start. Let this point *never* be left unsaid. Let the Gospel *never* be assumed or taken for granted. God's Good News must *always* be the heart of our recruitment to the public ministry, just as it is the heart of the ministry to which we are recruiting.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..."

Colossians 3:16a

- (2) Keep the Congregation in Touch** -- If the members of your congregation are kept informed about the work of our synod and its efforts to train future public ministers, it will come as less of a "bolt out of the blue" when you seek to encourage people to consider the ministry themselves. Here are some ideas to help you keep your church in touch:

- ✓ **Two new videos are now available** to help explain the work of the public ministry and give information about the WELS schools that train people for that work. *The WELS Ministerial Schools: An Investment in Our Church's Future* and *The Gospel Ministry: A Blessing to Our Church* are available through the synod's Board for Ministerial Education office or from any of the four synod schools of ministerial education.
- ✓ **The four synod schools jointly produce an informational report** three times each year. These reports are distributed at fall, winter, and summer pastor and teacher conferences. They are also available on request from any of the four synod schools. Sharing informa-

tion from these reports or placing them on a bulletin board or table for members to read can help keep them informed.

- ✓ **Each of the four WELS ministerial education schools publishes an annual catalog.** Keeping a current copy of each in your church library or tract rack increases the visibility of our synod's schools and gives members ready access to information about them. The catalogs are available free of charge from each of the schools on request.
- ✓ **In your parish hall or classroom, why not do one bulletin board each year promoting the public ministry or the four synod schools that train for the ministry.** If your congregation has students attending any of those schools, display a picture(s) of the student(s) on the bulletin board with a friendly reminder to members to keep the student(s) in their thoughts and prayers.

(3) Involve Your Congregation Directly in Worker-Training -- You and your fellow members are already vital to our synod's worker-training effort because your offerings help to support the schools that train our future workers. However, there are other ways in which individual congregations can become actively involved in the process. Doing so may help to show your congregation in very concrete and personal ways that the responsibility for training future pastors and teachers belongs to all of us.

- ✓ **In church, in class, at organization meetings, and elsewhere as opportunities permit; pray for workers and for our schools that train them.** Use the prayers provided elsewhere in this booklet or others of your own composition.
- ✓ **If possible, be a host school or congregation for the *Taste of Ministry* programs at our prep schools (or your area Lutheran high school), or for an *Early Field Experience* for a Martin Luther College student.** The schools can give you specific information about each program.
- ✓ **If your congregation is blessed with having young members attending one of our synod schools, keep them before the congregation's eyes** by inviting them to participate in worship services (as organist, liturgist, preacher, etc.) or to speak to your class or church group.
- ✓ **If your congregation's resources permit it, offer support for a student** (not your member) at one of our synod schools by providing financial assistance, or "care" packages of food and personal items, or even Christmas and birthday cards and letters of encouragement.

(4) Identify Prospects -- It is possible that there are good prospects for the public ministry in your congregation who aren't thinking about that work only because no one has ever encouraged them to do so. It is also possible that people in your congregation who are willing and able to offer such encouragement aren't doing so because they aren't sure to whom they should be talking. That is why it can be useful to take some positive steps to identify and encourage prospects in your congregations.

- ✓ **Take some time at appropriate gatherings** (ministry staff/faculty meetings, Sunday School teacher meetings, Board of Elders or Education meetings, etc.), to let each person

identify prospects for the ministry. Discuss plans for following up with encouragement and guidance for these prospects.

- ✓ **Remember to be age-appropriate in identifying candidates.** Younger students need more general encouragement along with some education in what the public ministry is all about. Older students (i.e. adolescents) may need more specific encouragement about their individual talents. They also will value concrete, hands-on experience with aspects of the public ministry if they can be made available. Be positive. Children (especially teens) tend to “read” as negative anything that is not clearly positive.
- ✓ **Find (or create) opportunities to discuss the public ministry with parents and families.** It is far easier, humanly speaking, to recruit a prospect for the ministry who has parents and a family that support that goal.
- ✓ **Always keep in mind that you are identifying *prospects* for the ministry,** not ready-made pastors and teachers. Immaturity, inexperience, and under-developed talents are all factors that will change as a young person grows up. These characteristics should not automatically eliminate young people from consideration as prospects for the ministry.
- ✓ **When you identify prospects in your congregation, pass on their names and addresses to the appropriate ministerial education schools.** The recruitment offices at those schools are set up to provide reinforcement for your recruitment efforts.

(5) Establish and Maintain Personal Contacts -- After the essential work that only God can do through his Word, the next best kind of recruitment is that which is done one-on-one from one Christian to another. Making personal contact with prospects and their families takes extra time and effort, but it is well worth while. Here are a few thoughts to consider:

- ✓ **Know that your encouragement does matter.** Don't fail to offer a personal word of encouragement to a prospect because you fear the prospect doesn't know you well enough, or that you are too old or too young or too close to the prospect or not close enough. Often, the unexpected word of encouragement is the best remembered. Speak up; a positive word is never wasted.
- ✓ **Make sure prospects hear encouragement both from called workers and from lay people.** It is OK for “encouragers” to discuss these things among themselves so that prospects aren't inadvertently missed or overlooked.
- ✓ **Try some creative “networking.”** For example, invite the parents of prospects to an informal get-together with parents who currently have children in the ministry or studying at one our schools for the ministry. The resulting conversations may be both informative and reassuring.
- ✓ **Don't lose contact once prospects go off to school.** If possible, make an effort to visit the campus(es) while they are students. Take them out for lunch or supper. Give them the chance to share their experiences with you. Also, everyone loves to get mail (either e-mail or post) so when visits to your congregation's ministry students aren't possible, keep those cards and letters and e-mail messages coming in!

(6) Appreciate Your Called Workers -- It's true... actions speak louder than words. Prospects for the public ministry will learn how much you value that ministry from the way you treat the called workers who serve you. Make your appreciation and support for your pastors, teachers, and staff ministers plain to see, and the message you will communicate to prospects is *"The public ministry is important. It is valuable. God's people care about the ministry and the people who serve in it."*

- ✓ **One of the most direct ways to show your appreciation for your called workers is the manner in which you support them, not just financially but also through your personal words of thanks and encouragement.**
- ✓ **Establish and support a continuing education fund for your called workers** -- particularly, one that encourages them to continue their *theological* education.
- ✓ **Two congregations we heard from have the policy of conducting a called worker appreciation Sunday each year. It's a fine idea.**

(7) Work diligently and wait patiently for God's results -- What comfort, to know that the results of our work in service to the Savior do not depend on us or our "effectiveness." God will use all we do -- also in the area of recruitment to the public ministry -- in the way that best serves him.

"Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."
1 Corinthians 15:58b

A Few Extra Ideas for Use with Lutheran Elementary Schools or Sunday Schools:

- ✓ **Have your students make cards or write letters and send them to students or faculty members at the synod's ministerial education schools. They can ask questions and share personal or school news. It is likely (though not guaranteed) that you would get an answer back. However, just the process of writing would help to make your students more aware of our synod's schools and what they do.**
- ✓ **If your school has a computer with Internet access, have students explore the Web sites from each synod school. They can report to the class on what they find. The class may wish to create a list of questions about the schools or the ministry to e-mail to each school. Responses *are* guaranteed.**
- ✓ **Consider designating part of your school's mission offerings to one or more of our ministerial education schools or to the synod's *Student Assistance Fund* that supports ministry students.**
- ✓ **Invite a spokesperson from one of our synod schools to come and speak to your students about the public ministry and our schools that train for it. If possible, try to arrange for the school speaker to address your parent/teacher organization on the same day. School speakers can travel anywhere in the U.S. Or... Invite your pastor/principal into the classroom for a "meet the pastor/ principal" question and answer time. This lets your students begin to view their pastor or principal in terms of what they *do* instead of what they *are*. Or... If your congregation has members attending a synod school, an alternative would be to ask one of them to speak to your classes.**
- ✓ **Make use of the recruitment devotions for elementary students and/or the recruitment prayers included elsewhere in this *Handbook*. Never doubt that God's Word works!**