



WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING?

Results of a WELS Survey on Congregational Recruitment

I. Introduction

In January of 1995, the recruitment officers of the synod's ministerial education schools began a joint effort to survey a cross-section of congregations in the WELS, seeking information from them about their local recruitment efforts and needs.

A total of 118 congregations in the synod's twelve districts and Canada were initially contacted with a request for their participation in the survey. Seventy-eight congregations responded to that initial contact. Sixty of those congregations consented to participate in the survey. Those sixty congregations were the following:

ARIZONA/CALIFORNIA DST.

Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, CA
Emanuel, Tempe, AZ
Mt. Calvary, Flagstaff, AZ
Redeemer, Tucson, AZ
St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, CA
St. Stephens, Fallbrook, CA
Trinity, El Paso, TX

DAKOTA/MONTANA DST.

Ascension, Mitchell, SD
Christ Our Redeemer, Gillette, WY
Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, SD
Redeemer, Mandan, ND
St. Martin's, Watertown, SD
Zion, Mobridge, SD

MICHIGAN DST

Bethany, Saginaw, MI
Good Shepherd, Midland, MI
Salem, Owosso, MI
St. John, Bay City, MI

MINNESOTA DST.

Bloomington, Bloomington, MN
Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, IA
Emanuel, St. Paul, MN
Martin Luther, St. Louis, MO

MINNESOTA DST (cont.)

Resurrection, Rochester, MN
St. John's, Lake City, MN
St. John's, Redwood Falls, MN
St. Paul's, Cannon Falls, MN
St. Paul's, North Mankato, MN

NEBRASKA DST.

Bethel, Waco, NE
Messiah, Wichita, KS
Shepherd of the Hills, Greeley, CO
Shepherd of Valley, Westminster, CO
Zion, Denver, CO

NORTHERN WISCONSIN DST.

Bethany, Manitowoc, WI
St. Mark's, Green Bay, WI
Trinity, Neenah, WI

PACIFIC NORTHWEST DST.

Grace, Portland, OR
St. Matthew's, Spokane, WA

SOUTH CENTRAL DST.

Christ the Lord, Houston, TX
Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, OK
Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, OK
Lord of Life, Friendswood, TX

SOUTH ATLANTIC DST.

King of Kings, Maitland, FL
Peace, Bradenton, FL
Zion, Gainesville, FL

SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN DST.

Calvary, Thiensville, WI
Christ the King, Palatine, IL
David's Star, Jackson, WI
Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, IL
Grace, Milwaukee, WI
Our Savior, Grafton, WI
Jerusalem, Morton Grove, IL
Salem, Milwaukee, WI
Trinity, Waukesha, WI

WESTERN WISCONSIN DST.

Bethany, Fort Atkinson, WI
Eastside, Madison, WI
St. John's, Baraboo, WI
St. John's, Jefferson, WI
St. Mark's, Eau Claire, WI
St. Paul's, Lake Mills, WI
St. Stephens, Beaver Dam, WI

CANADA

Hope, Markham, Ontario
St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario

Ultimately, twenty-eight congregations completed the entire survey process. To them and to all those -- both called workers and lay members -- who willingly contributed time and effort to this process, we express our sincere gratitude.

We also extend our thanks and our wishes for God's rich blessings to all those congregations throughout our fellowship who have been laboring and will continue to labor at the task of encouraging young people in their midst to consider seriously the blessed work of the full time Gospel ministry.



II. What Are Other Congregations Doing Now?

Four activities were, far and away, the most frequently mentioned by survey congregations as their *formal* or *organized* efforts at recruiting young people for the public ministry. These were:

1. *Inviting recruitment officers from the WELS schools of ministerial education to preach or make presentations in the congregation;*
2. *Hosting a concert by the choir from one of the WELS schools of ministerial education in the congregation;*
3. *Taking young people or others of the congregation to visit the campus of one or more WELS school of ministerial education; and*
4. *Observing an annual Recruitment Sunday where the public ministry and the need for workers are emphasized.*

These, of course, are all good and familiar ways of making congregation members more aware of the WELS ministerial training schools they support, and of interesting young people and their families in those schools. Simply because they are familiar, however, their “novelty” and appeal may begin to wear thin. To keep them fresh, congregations are reinforcing their impact with other creative ideas. Here is a selection of recruitment ideas from the congregations that responded to our survey:

What Congregations Are Doing:

- ✓ Inviting sons of the congregation now in pastoral study at MLC or WLS to participate in worship services as preachers, lectors, etc. (and having them relate some personal school experiences to the congregation after the service)
- ✓ Conducting a special “Farewell & Godspeed” Sunday service for sons or daughters of the congregation who are about to go out to serve their first call in the public ministry
- ✓ Participating in WLS’s vicar program or hosting student teachers from MLC in a Lutheran elementary school
- ✓ Hosting an MLS, LPS, or area Lutheran high school student for a *Taste of Ministry* experience in the congregation
- ✓ Playing host to an area Lutheran high school *Future Pastors’* or *Teachers’ Club* activity in the congregation (and showing support for those students’ goals)
- ✓ Showing the videos from ministerial education schools at church family potlucks, followed by fun “trivia” quizzes based on information from the videos
- ✓ Giving monetary gifts to young men from the congregation to cover their costs of attending “Focus on Ministry” workshops at MLC

What Congregational Groups & Lay Individuals Are Doing:

- ✓ Sending “CARE” packages of food and fun “stuff” to young people of the congregation who are attending WELS ministerial education schools
- ✓ Regularly showing and viewing *WELS Connection* tapes
- ✓ Devoting one organizational meeting annually to learning what is going on and what is new at the synod’s schools of ministerial education
- ✓ Taking young people from the congregation to ball games, concerts, plays, etc. on the campuses of WELS ministerial training schools
- ✓ Maintaining a positive attitude toward the public ministry and showing support and appreciation for the called public ministers in the congregation

What Called Public Ministers Are Doing:

- ✓ Making the public ministry (and preparation for that work) a topic in Bible Class, Adult Information Class, and/or elementary school religion classes

- ✓ Including practical information about the public ministry and preparing for that work in the course of study for confirmation class
- ✓ Including articles in the church and school newsletters that focus on the public ministry and on recruitment to the ministry
- ✓ Submitting the names/addresses of prospective students to ministerial education schools for their mailing lists
- ✓ Creating bulletin boards in school or in church that feature the synod's ministerial education schools or the work of the public ministry
- ✓ Sharing personal experiences and joys of the public ministry with young people, in a class setting or one-on-one
- ✓ Personally encouraging young people who have gifts for ministry to pursue that goal AND following up by giving encouragement to the *parents* of those young people
- ✓ Striving to be good and honest *models* of the ministry -- not suggesting that the work of the ministry is always rosy, but showing that it is important and rewarding work



III. Who Coordinates These Efforts?

The great majority of the congregations responding to the survey indicated that no one in their congregation had formal responsibility for coordinating recruitment efforts.

Some indicated that *general oversight* of such activities was the task of their Board of Elders or of their Board of Education. One congregation had a Youth Discipleship Committee that was tasked with these efforts; another had a called staff minister for Youth & Family Life who was in charge. Interestingly, two congregations saw recruitment as the work of their Evangelism Committees. In many cases, however, responders admitted that the practical assignment of responsibility for congregational recruitment was fuzzy at best, and they feared that this lack of focus was hindering their recruitment efforts.

One normal congregational board that was *not* mentioned in the survey responses but that might properly be charged with oversight of a congregation's recruitment efforts is the *Board of Stewardship*. Certainly, a congregation's stewardship of the young lives God places into its spiritual care is an important part of the corporate stewardship of the congregation.

However, some congregations elect not to have a Board of Stewardship because they feel Christian stewardship should be everyone's concern. The same might be said of recruitment to the public ministry.

If your congregation wishes to *organize* its recruitment efforts, perhaps a congregational *Recruitment Committee* or *Recruitment Coordinator* would serve you well. (Cf. *Guidelines for Congregational Recruitment Coordinators/Committees*) However, as the survey responses indicate, it is less important *who* does the work than *that* it gets done, so that a congregation may make the best use of its precious resource of young lives.



IV. Who Are Other Congregations Recruiting?

We asked our survey congregations to tell us who they felt were the most important *targets* for their recruitment efforts. Here is their “Top Ten List”:

1. Upper elementary students (ages 11-14)
2. High school students (ages 15-18)
3. Parents of elementary age students
4. Early elementary students (ages 5-10)
5. Parents of high school students
6. College students (ages 19-22)
7. Called workers in the congregation
8. Congregational leaders
9. Young adults (ages 23-30)
10. Congregation members in general

One important observation that can be made from this list is that congregations recognize the importance of addressing *parents* with their recruitment messages, especially when students are on the elementary or high school level. Gaining parental support is invaluable in moving a capable young person toward preparation for ministry.



We also asked our survey congregations how they identified young people as good prospects for encouragement toward the public ministry. Here are the five most frequently mentioned responses:

- (1) Watch for gifts that are well-suited to the public ministry. Specific gifts mentioned include:
 - ✓ *Love for the Savior*
 - ✓ *Spiritually growing*
 - ✓ *Academic ability*
 - ✓ *Understands sin and grace*
 - ✓ *Possesses “people skills”*
 - ✓ *Supportive family*
 - ✓ *Socially “well-balanced”*
 - ✓ *Positive attitude*
 - ✓ *Hard worker*
 - ✓ *Considerate of others*
- (2) Watch for students who show interest in the public ministry. Be quick to follow up on comments by students or parents that indicate such interest.
- (3) Encourage called workers to be “on the lookout” for prospective students and to share their observations with colleagues and appropriate fellow members so that recruitment can be a “team” effort.
- (4) Make an effort to keep in contact with young people in less formal settings (youth group, congregational activities, events at local area Lutheran high school, etc.) so that more accurate observations of gifts, temperament, etc. can be made.
- (5) Remember that young people will mature with time. Don’t discount someone as worthy of encouragement toward the ministry simply on the basis of immature behavior.

It may also be noted that several congregations cautioned against “targeting” young people for recruitment at too young an age, suggesting that recruitment messages be more general in nature until young people become able to express a more serious interest in the public ministry. Local circumstances and good Christian judgment will guide the application of these very fitting words of caution.



V. How Are Other Congregations Recruiting?

In order to get a feel for the general recruitment approach employed by our survey congregations, we asked them the following question:

In your congregation's recruitment efforts, do you most often recruit individuals to:

- the public ministry in general; or*
- a form of the public ministry (e.g. to be a pastor, to be a teacher); or*
- to a particular school where the person may prepare for the public ministry*

By a margin of nearly two to one, congregations indicated that they tend to recruit toward a specific form of the public ministry. Their reasons for doing so included:

- ✓ *It is easier to direct specific individual talents toward a more specific goal*
- ✓ *It makes it easier for a young person to think of the ministry in concrete terms*
- ✓ *So that efforts won't be clouded by a recruiter's "loyalties" to a particular school*
- ✓ *Because people, especially young people, think in terms of future "careers"*
- ✓ *It gives opportunity to demonstrate that each is a form of the same Gospel ministry*

These are good reasons. Of course, the congregations who took other approaches also had good reasons for their choices.

Those who choose to recruit toward the public ministry in general explained they do so:

- ✓ *Because a young person's opportunities for service in the ministry shouldn't be limited by the recruiter's message*
- ✓ *Because a need remains for all types of workers -- pastors, teachers, missionaries, etc.*
- ✓ *Because a young person's specific gifts for a type of ministry may not yet be clear or well developed*
- ✓ *Because doing so keeps the focus on serving the Lord rather than on choosing a "job"*

Those who choose to recruit toward a particular ministerial training school gave these reasons:

- ✓ *It is easier for a young person to identify with a school than with a profession*
- ✓ *It is easier for most congregational recruiters to give information about specific schools*
- ✓ *The schools are the most immediate concern; the work lies farther in the future*
- ✓ *Young people are "students" now; they think in terms of what schools will offer to them and demand from them*

Because all these reasons are good and valid, the conclusion seems to be that the best recruitment message is one that includes information and encouragement in each of these three areas, giving specific information about the training schools, directing appropriate gifts and talents toward appropriate forms of the ministry, but always focusing on the ultimate goal -- service to the Savior.



VI. How Do Other Congregations Deal with Obstacles to Their Recruitment Efforts?

When asked to identify both real and perceived obstacles to their recruitment efforts (other than the ever-

present obstacles of man's sin and the devil's opposition), two answers were well out in the lead among responses. They were:

- (1) The *distance* to the synod's various schools of ministerial education; and
- (2) The *cost* of education at those training schools.

After those two responses, the "obstacles" that filled out the "Top Ten" in congregations' answers to this question were:

- (3) Parents' negative perceptions of service in the ministry (e.g. low pay, long hours, etc.)
- (4) Similar negative perceptions on the part of the young people to be recruited
- (5) Lack of accurate information about our synod's schools (esp. in outlying districts)
- (6) Society's real or perceived lack of respect for those who serve in the ministry
- (7) The belief that one lacks the "spiritual gifts" or the "calling" to enter the public ministry, or that one is "not worthy" to aspire to such an office
- (8) Failure to recognize the blessings of such service
- (9) The lack of positive peer support (for young people)
- (10) Parents' hesitance to allow/encourage their children to leave home for high school and/or college. (- tied with -) The lack of a clear understanding of the work of the public ministry among the laity.

You may or may not agree that these things can be obstacles to efforts to encourage young people toward the public ministry. However, the fact that others see them as such may help to make all of us more sensitive to the "road blocks" young people in our homes or congregations may face.

It also may offer direction to our efforts to remove whatever obstacles we can from the path toward the public ministry.



VII. So... What Can YOUR Congregation Do?

We asked all of our responding congregations to offer suggestions, based on their experience, on what sorts of things a local congregation can do to encourage the sons and daughters of their church to consider service in the public Gospel ministry. We also asked them to list things they felt that congregations should be sure to *avoid* doing.

Here are their lists of *Recruitment Do's & Don't's* -- twenty-five of each (in order of their frequency of mention), directly from your fellow WELS Lutherans in congregations across the synod:

In congregational recruitment, DEFINITELY DO...

- (1) ...make sure information about WELS ministerial education schools gets to *all* members
- (2) ...have church workers display positive, joyful attitudes about their ministries
- (3) ...continue to preach Law and Gospel; minister through the Means of Grace
- (4) ...interact with and encourage young people personally, one-on-one, about the ministry
- (5) ...hold the congregation's present called workers in high esteem, and show this in visible ways
- (6) ...have pastors pray for workers in worship services; have teachers pray for them in classes
- (7) ...take prospective students and their parents to visit the campuses of the WELS schools

- (8) ...talk to parents specifically about directing their son or daughter toward the public ministry
- (9) ...invite recruiters/speakers from the WELS schools to address both students and parent groups
- (10) ...called workers -- be *faithful* in all you do
- (11) ...speak positively about the synod and its school system
- (12) ...start encouraging young people toward the ministry while they are young (even pre-school)
- (13) ...show sincere interest in and support for students now preparing for the public ministry
- (14) ...keep the issue of recruitment and the public ministry before the congregation in positive ways, via newsletter, bulletin, Bible Class, BIC, *WELS Connection* tapes, etc. as well as doing this for the children via a school or Sunday School religion curriculum, etc.
- (15) ...have called workers speak to young people about what led them into the public ministry
- (16) ...have members who now attend WELS schools of ministry speak to the congregation and its children in Sunday School, YPS, PTA, Church Council, etc.
- (17) ...give young people chances to participate in ministry-related activities (e.g. in worship services, on canvassing efforts, on pastoral calls, etc.)
- (18) ...show that there is not only joy but also *fun* in serving in the ministry
- (19) ...encourage parents to "*seek first the kingdom of God*"
- (20) ...provide financial assistance on the congregational level to students attending synod schools
- (21) ...reach out also to individual members who may have the means and the will to provide special support for needy students in ministerial training
- (22) ...send "Care packages" to students at WELS schools (maybe even to students not from your congregation), as well as birthday cards, Christmas greetings, etc., thus establishing a personal link between students away at synod schools and the local congregation
- (23) ...have lay families who know about and appreciate WELS schools speak with families considering enrolling students in those schools
- (24) ...hold a "ministry career day" in the school or a "Ministry Festival" (instead of a "Mission Festival") in the church, with representatives of various offices of the public ministry speaking about their work (e.g. pastor, teacher, missionary, institutional worker, staff minister, etc.)
- (25) ...be sure to be supportive of young people who choose other career goals, lest the congregation recoil if too much "pressure" is perceived toward public ministry.



In congregational recruitment, DEFINITELY DON'T...

- (1) ...complain about or belittle the church or its pastors/teachers
- (2) ...be a called worker who constantly emphasizes how "busy" you are, how hard you must work or how little you are paid, so that negative impressions of the public ministry are given
- (3) ...try to motivate students toward the public ministry with the Law (e.g. with guilt, duty, etc.)
- (4) ...think that recruitment means only talking to young people. Parents can be even more important, especially if a child is quite young.
- (5) ...complain about the synod, its schools, its administration, etc., or dwell on real or perceived "problems" in the synod (especially in front of young people)
- (6) ...let money (or anything materialistic) be an obstacle that keeps a capable young person from preparing for the public ministry
- (7) ...make demands on/expectations from called workers unrealistic (or allow them to appear as if they are)
- (8) ...state (or imply) that the public ministry is the *only* way to serve God

- (9) ...push so hard that it scares people off
- (10) ...assume that “everybody knows this stuff already”
- (11) ...exclude public school students from recruitment efforts
- (12) ...underestimate a young person and so eliminate him/her from your attention
- (13) ...fail to show appreciation for the many blessings God gives through the public ministry
- (14) ...openly discourage a student from the public ministry based solely on academics or attitude; don’t forget we all were young and immature once.
- (15) ...promote on WELS school by down-grading another
- (16) ...waste opportunities
- (17) ...leave everything to “chance”
- (18) ...put off making a contact “until they are older”
- (19) ...expect a degree of commitment to the public ministry that a young person is not yet ready to give (perhaps due to spiritual or emotional immaturity)
- (20) ...spread rumors about the synod, its schools, or its public ministers
- (21) ...let students think that if they go away to a WELS school of ministry they will lose their friends or family back home
- (22) ...let “somebody else do it.” Recruitment is everybody’s concern
- (23) ...give up
- (24) ...become discouraged by an apparent lack of results for recruitment efforts. (“Remember that the boy who does not go into the ministry today may become the father of the boy who does go into the ministry tomorrow.”)
- (25) ...fail to trust that God will guide and bless your recruitment efforts in the way he knows is best



These suggestions are only that -- food for thought and seeds for ideas that may sprout in your own mind and in your own congregation.

What we hope this section will illustrate is that the task of recruitment to the public ministry is one about which many of your fellow Christians are concerned and in which many of their congregations are active.

It is also clear that ample opportunity exists to share thoughts and ideas about recruiting. As you have occasion to be in contact with other WELS Christians and congregations in your area, perhaps at joint services or conferences or mission fairs, why not take a moment to explore what they are doing to recruit future workers and to share what your congregation is doing.

If you come upon some good ideas that don’t appear in this *Handbook*, we’d also be grateful if you would pass them on to one of the recruitment offices at our WELS schools so that we can share them in future recruitment updates.