

Note: Mr. Steinbrenner is a layman who is presently a member of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. All of the Steinbrenners' five children have attended WELS schools of ministerial education. His four sons now serve as pastors and his daughter is an elementary school teacher, all in WELS congregations. Mr. Steinbrenner wrote the following brief essay in 1991 at the request of Northwestern College, and presented it at a youth counselors' workshop hosted by NWC. It is intended to offer a layman's perspective on the work of recruitment to the public ministry.

What Can We Do to Recruit Gospel Ministers?

My name is Bill Steinbrenner. I am the parent of five children. Two of them are attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, one is at Northwestern College, one is at Dr. Martin Luther College, and the youngest attends Winnebago Lutheran Academy, the high school from which they all have or will graduate. I would like to share with you my thoughts on recruiting from a parent's and a layman's point of view.

As parents, we have always pointed out to our children that all Christians have the loving responsibility to promote God's Kingdom.

As a layman it is clear to me that, at forty-five years of age, I have done pitifully little to extend the Lord's Kingdom. I would be embarrassed to tell you when I have last spoken to someone about our Lord. Surely we can use the excuse that we are supporting others to carry out that work, but that only helps establish the fact that the most efficient way to promote God's Kingdom is by being a full-time pastor or teacher.

We have always held this fact in front of our children and have demanded that they take courses in high school that would allow them to become full-time workers if they decided to do so. This selection of courses is not hard to sell because it would enable them to best pursue any vocation.

Let us consider how a person is called in the public ministry. Will there be a blinding flash of light and a voice from heaven? Probably not. It will more likely be this way: a fifth or sixth grade teacher will point out that spreading God's Word is our most important role in life; an eighth grade teacher or pastor will meet with the student and parents to encourage the consideration of full-time service to the Lord; the guidance department of our Lutheran high school will make sure to promote and schedule classes that fit preparation for such work; the high school faculties will treat the teaching and preaching ministries as the highest possible calling.

All of this will be done so as not to inhibit what the Lord is doing to call us all, through his Word, to his service. The vocational guidance of the student will lead him to consider Northwestern College* or Dr. Martin Luther College,* and so... on to the ministry.

Is it necessary to alter some of our attitudes or practices in order to promote recruitment? What things might inhibit and what things might support recruitment?

* Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College have since been combined to form Martin Luther College, our synod's college of ministry. It is located in New Ulm, Minnesota.

From my vantage point:

I. Group meetings should be considered with all parents and students at the grade school - planning for high school level, and at the high school - vocational choice level, to promote the public ministry.

A. Most parents have much to say about their children's education but are not included in recruitment programs.

B. Most laymen don't have the faintest idea where the synod's worker-training schools are, what their programs are, or what is required to enter them.

Note: Sporting contests or other such public events are probably the only touch an average parent or student will have with any of our synod schools. Many years ago, at a basketball tournament on the Northwestern campus in Watertown, we took a tour of the campus. Dean Lindemann gave us the tour and then asked my fourth and fifth grade boys if they had considered becoming pastors. Their answer was that they didn't know. His response was, "If you don't become a pastor, who is going to?" Those two boys are at the seminary now. No matter how trivial this may seem, isn't this all part of the way God calls people?

C. A group meeting does not allow a possible candidate to slip through your fingers.

1. Quite often individual students are encouraged by a teacher or pastor, while other possible candidates may be overlooked or forgotten.

2. Public high school students should be included as well. I attended a public high school, thought about becoming a pastor, feared public speaking, and forgot about it. Some counseling with my parents and with me might well have netted another prospect for the pastoral ministry.

II. Make sure that all teachers and all pastors realize that they are on the same team.

A. Teachers and guidance counselors should be as knowledgeable and as excited about recruiting for the preaching ministry as they are when approaching a teaching prospect who will grow up "just like me."

B. Every pastor should be clearly pro-Christian education. Anything less is a glaring inconsistency.

C. In many cases, the high school teachers whom the students admire most, and who could easily sway them, do not take the opportunity to promote the ministry.

D. Pastors quite often miss an opportunity by not keeping in touch with students once they have been safely confirmed and "deposited" in a Lutheran high school or prep school.

III. Area Lutheran high schools should not feel that someone else (like the prep schools) will provide all the candidates we need.

A. No one on earth has the power to tell a Christian school that the extension of the Lord's Kingdom is not their responsibility or is not of greater importance than advanced math.

B. It is often said that peer pressure keeps students out of the pastors' program at an area Lutheran high school. My children did not experience any peer pressure, but they did have to deal with a

general lack of enthusiasm about the public ministry on the part of students and faculty.

- C. District presidents, school boards, and administrators ought to go out of their way to provide the most outstanding teachers to the positions that teach pre-ministerial subjects.
- IV. Explain to new high school students and parents that if they decide to become a pastor and have not taken the proper courses in high school, they will be required to take an extra year of college. To high school students in their senior year, the same five-year program should be emphasized to still allow the student to consider the pastoral ministry.
- V. Make sure that parents and students understand that the pastors' courses in high school or even graduation from Northwestern College (*now, Martin Luther College -- ed.*) does not lock anyone into becoming a pastor. The schools only ask that you have not completely rejected the idea of becoming a pastor.

To summarize: All students ought to be directed through Christian education to be able to clearly see how they, as adults, can best serve the Lord and the extension of his Kingdom.

All students and parents, really all lay people, too, ought to fully understand the system and the schooling needed to become a full-time pastor or teacher. And we all ought to understand that there is no more important work in the world.

