

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP: A LAYMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

By Bruce W. Eberle

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You may wonder what qualifications I have to address the issue of pastoral leadership. Although I have been a WELS member for more than 30 years, I haven't attended a seminary. In spite of the fact that I have served as elder and chairman of my congregation on the local level, I wouldn't qualify as a Bible scholar. And even though I have served on several synodical commissions and boards, and have served on the Board of Regents of Wisconsin Lutheran College, I'm not a called worker. Why then would I be so bold as to attempt to analyze the challenges of parish leadership and to articulate ideas for strengthening its effectiveness?

Well, you might say that I have received a \$2,000,000 education in organizational leadership. I started my own business in 1974. During the first years my business grew far beyond my expectations. By 1976 my firm handled the national direct mail fund raising of Ronald Reagan. It was a record-setting success and it put my company on the fast track to incredible growth. In 1980 and 1982 we received Echo awards from the national Direct Marketing Association for outstanding direct mail campaigns and in 1983 my company received national acclaim when we were named an *Inc.* 500 company by *Inc.* magazine. Yet all was not well.

All this success went straight to my head. I began to believe there was nothing I could not do. In addition to the fund raising agency, and the list company created in 1974, I added a computer service bureau, a mailing house, a telemarketing company, and a publishing company. By 1981 I had more than 150 employees and our sales were in the millions of dollars. My company had become one of the largest of its kind.

In fact, 1981 was a record setting year for my company. Our clients mailed more than 41,000,000 pieces of mail and the future looked bright. Our offices took up several floors of a large building and our West Virginia production plant had more than doubled in size. I had a pretty high image of myself and my abilities. However, I had not yet gotten my \$2,000,000 education.

The week before Thanksgiving 1981 three of my top employees quit to start their own company, and before the end of that year, I had lost my largest account. Although our client mail volume plummeted to 26,000,000 pieces in 1982, I still didn't get the message. But by 1988, our client's mail volume had bottomed out at 9,000,000 pieces and the handwriting was on the wall for everyone to see. My company was insolvent. During this period I lost the lettershop, the printing company, and the computer service bureau. I couldn't meet my financial obligations. I owed my current landlord \$100,000 in back rent, my previous landlord \$100,000 in back rent, \$1.7 million to the bank, and \$90,000 to the IRS. I couldn't make my company payroll, we had three mortgages on our home and I hadn't been paid in months. I had accumulated a \$2,000,000 education in arrogance, but I still didn't get it.

Two things happened that helped me to weather this self-created storm. First, a friend stopped by my office and suggested I read Deuteronomy 8. As I turned to that chapter I learned that it was about the observations and advice the Lord gave to the children of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land—¹⁷*"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.'*¹⁸*But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*¹" A light bulb finally went on. I hadn't done anything to create the success I had achieved. God had done everything. He had blessed me with the energy, the talent, the drive, the intelligence—everything that went into creating that success. It was his success, not mine. He was everything and I was nothing.

The other thing that happened along the way was that I came across two books by Tom Peters, *In Search of*

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Excellence and a follow-up, *A Passion for Excellence*. Up until the time I read these two books my company was a top down, autocratically run organization. Peters changed my thinking about running a business forever. His empirical study of for-profit companies and non-profit organizations that were successful made me reconsider the entire structure of our company and the way I worked with customers and employees alike.

Today, the Eberle Communications Group is one of the most successful and most prosperous fund raising organizations of its kind. It didn't happen overnight and plenty of mistakes were made along the way, but we finally turned the company around and we continue working hard to make it the best it can possibly be. Based on what I have learned through the mistakes I have made, I'd like to offer some observations on the status of our church body and the issue of leadership as it affects the pastor in the local parish. I believe the following hard lessons I learned are just as applicable to the parish ministry as they are to running my business.

1. **Give all glory to God.**
2. **Don't deny reality.**
3. **Don't rationalize failure.**
4. **The buck stops here.**
5. **Get out of the way.**
6. **Care about your team.**
7. **Be a cheerleader.**
8. **Be a risk taker.**
9. **Set goals. Devise a plan. Measure results.**
10. **Have a great vision. Dream big dreams.**
11. **Communicate Clearly.**
12. **Add members. Keep them.**
13. **Insist on accountability.**
14. **Leadership. It's a journey, not a destination.**

I hope that by sharing my experiences and observations, pastors can be more confident and effective in leading their parishes and winning lost souls for eternity. After all, what can be more important than carrying out the Great Commission?

Give All Glory to God

It seems rather obvious doesn't it? Each time we sing the Doxology we proclaim, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," yet as we go about our day we like to hear praise for all our accomplishments. And pretty soon we find that it's not too difficult to reach around and pat ourselves on the back. But pride does indeed come before a fall and such pride is a sure recipe for disaster in heading up any organization. I really did believe I was Horatio Alger, and that there was no limit to what I could accomplish. I didn't need anyone else. I was invincible, or so I thought.

But the Lord, in his mercy and goodness, brought me up short. He not only reminded me of his sovereignty, but also preserved me, my family, and my business in spite of my foolish behavior. I firmly believe that acknowledging the fact that we are weak sinners and that all blessings come from the Lord is not only the first step to business success, but also the first and most important step to success in the parish ministry. As long as we remember that it is the Holy Spirit that adds the increase, we will not stray from acknowledging that it is God who deserves all the glory for any success that pastors experience. Pastors should be encouraged by Paul's message in Philippians 4: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."²

Don't Deny Reality

Although my company expanded rapidly during the first few years in business, profitability was always very marginal. And then, when our client base began to shrink, we started losing money. We lost a little bit in 1982, and we were hemorrhaging with red ink by 1988. For the first few years, as debt was increasing and sales declined, I kept believing that the company was basically sound and that a turnaround was just around the corner. It was not until it was beyond deniability that I finally accept the fact that we were basically a bankrupt corporation. Until I accepted reality there was no chance of saving the company. Only then was I willing to file for bankruptcy on the computer company and only then was I willing to make the cutbacks that needed to be made in order to give us a chance to survive.

A company doesn't have to file for bankruptcy in order to be bankrupt. If the outflow exceeds the inflow, you are going out of business. The same is true of a congregation. If the outflow of members is greater than the inflow, it is going out of business. In fact, if it is not growing; it is dying.

If we are honest with ourselves and face reality, we must acknowledge that the WELS is a slowly dying church body. Our outflow is greater than our inflow. Each year for the past decade our membership rolls have declined by about a thousand members. We can make excuses and we can offer rationalizations, but facts are facts. While numerous individual congregations are thriving, our synod as a whole is in crisis. The first step toward reversing this trend is to recognize that all is not well.

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Don't Rationalize Failure

For the first fifteen years I was in business, my associates and employees repeatedly urged me to find more clients. I always had a pat answer that went something like this: "The direct mail fund raising market is a finite market and we have maximized our market share. There is very little opportunity for us to add new clients. Growth is simply impossible." It was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When our client base was plummeting while our competitors continued to do fine, I could always come up with reasons they were successful. It was easy to fall into the trap of denigrating their business practices and offering a holier-than-thou explanation for their success while we were dying. In the end, I realized that these and other excuses were just that, excuses. Rationalizations never lead to success in business or at the parish level. It wasn't until I put such rationalizations behind me and developed a successful marketing strategy that my company has been able to grow steadily and profitably.

Many pastors and their congregations are quite frustrated with their inability to reach out to the lost. And perhaps the usual, convenient "explanations" for lack of success have already been heard. But truthfully, it doesn't have to be that way. I submit that any WELS congregation can grow as fast, or faster, than the fastest growing congregation in its community. "Wait a minute," you say, "Those fast growing churches don't offer the pure word of God like we do. That's the reason they grow so fast."

Does anyone really believe that the reason other churches grow fast and ours don't is because we are a more theologically conservative church body? Consider for a moment who these unchurched individuals are, the ones who are joining these fast growing churches. Are they people who read their Bibles every day? Of course not. Do they understand the differences between the various Christian denominations? No. Do they understand or care about our practice of close communion? No.

These folks are hurting. They don't have Jesus in their lives. They don't understand God's plan of salvation and they certainly don't understand or appreciate the difference between one Christian denomination and another. The truth is that most are not making their decision to attend a church on the basis of doctrine. They are looking for someone to help solve their problems. They are probably looking into a church for all the wrong reasons. But Jesus is the answer, and who should be better equipped than a WELS pastor to bring them the only news that brings peace to the soul?

I have heard many rationalizations for why the WELS is losing members. Such rationalizations often include the following:

1. **Historic Slow Growth.** Historically the Christian Church has only grown at an annual rate of 1% or less. Therefore, according to this observation, a church and its members should be reconciled to a membership growth of 1% per year. Yes, in some cases the Christian Church has grown slowly, yet at many, many other times throughout history, especially in the beginning, the Church enjoyed exceptional growth. For example in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2: *"⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day³."* There always have been and always will be churches that grow at a much, much faster pace. Why not the WELS? Why not yours?
2. **Only Apostate Churches Grow Fast.** According to this theory, only churches that are unfaithful to scripture grow fast. Actually the opposite has proven to be true. While mainline churches have been in decline for more than 40 years, those churches identified as fundamentalist or orthodox have grown, often at an amazing pace. For these churches, orthodoxy seems to be an asset that assists growth, rather than hinders it. Surely you and I don't believe that the pure Gospel, as taught within the WELS, is an impediment to growth?
3. **Lutherans Can't Build a Mega-Church.** This rationalization is similar to number two, but is it true? It is easy to dismiss such churches on the basis of doctrine, but perhaps a more honest appraisal was offered by a WELS pastor who said, "Most [WELS pastors] are loathe to even consider that mega-churches in our area grow because they are well-led, high-performance, high-expectation, high-quality organizations. The fact that these churches are theologically more conservative than us and more demanding of their members is conveniently ignored." Since that is the case, it begs the question—Why aren't there any WELS mega-churches?
4. **These are the Last Times.** Of course these are the last times, but no one knows when the Lord will return. Can hearts actually be harder than they were when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg? Matthew 24:10-13 reads *"¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,¹¹ and many false*

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*prophets will appear and deceive many people.*¹² *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,...*⁴ This passage from scripture is not meant to excuse a lack of effective evangelism, but it should, if anything, spur us forward to work even harder. Christians today are certainly more than a remnant. Today there is just as much reason to believe that we are in a period of spiritual renewal as there is to believe that we are in spiritual decline. Church attendance across the board in the United States is up, as is giving. According to the latest edition of *Giving USA*, “Giving to religion increased from \$72.69 billion to \$76.06 billion between 1997 and 1998.” This is a 3% increase in inflation adjusted terms. Moreover, giving to religion is nearly triple that to education and nearly five times that to foundations. Finally, increased interest in religion has been tracked by national surveys and such interest has even been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. A more applicable verse might be John 4: 35b: *“I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”*⁵

5. **Lutheran Churches Can’t Grow.** The fact is that there are many Lutheran Churches, including some in the WELS, that are growing quite rapidly. Why do such churches continue to grow at such a rapid rate? Is such growth accidental? Is it possible that these pastors have worked hard to hone and sharpen their leadership and communication skills? A study was recently conducted within the WELS comparing fast growing WELS churches with non-growing WELS churches. After comparing all the different circumstances the conclusion was, “The only real variable is the quality of leadership.” What do you honestly think would happen if the pastors of the five fastest growing WELS congregations moved somewhere else in the United States? Within five years would they again be leading the five fastest growing churches in the WELS? I think you know the answer. Does this deny the work of the Holy Spirit? Of course not! After all, we know that, *“No one can say that ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*⁶ As it says in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12, verse 4, all gifts, to pastors and laymen alike, are given by the Holy Spirit. It is God who gives out the talents and abilities we have and he also

provides the opportunities for honing and sharpening those talents and abilities. Tools of all kinds are a gift from God, but they don’t work very well if they aren’t sharpened. The knife won’t work for the butcher and the scissors won’t work very well for the seamstress if they aren’t sharpened. In fact, not everyone has the same skills and talents and certainly not at the same levels. Nevertheless, the instrument that is sharpened and honed regularly will work better than the one that is left to rust.

6. **It’s Not My Responsibility.** Perhaps you have heard comments such as—“What can I do? My only responsibility is to share the Gospel. It is the Holy Spirit that adds the increase.” Yes! Of course the Holy Spirit adds the increase, but numerous verses in scripture can be quoted showing that the Lord expects results. As noted earlier, numbers of conversions are repeatedly cited in Acts, and the parable of the talents deals with results. None of this is inconsistent with giving the Holy Spirit complete and total credit for the conversion of the lost. It strikes me that this rationalization is not crediting the Holy Spirit for conversions, but borders on blaming him for a lack thereof.
7. **Don’t Look at Numbers.** Why not look at numbers? All sorts of numbers of conversions are mentioned in the Book of Acts. Even in the WELS we measure results. The parable of the talents focuses exclusively on numbers. After all, if we do not care about the numbers, why do we publish *The Statistical Report*? The only reason to ignore numbers is if we are embarrassed by them. Those aren’t just statistics in our communities; they are men and women who are hurting. They are headed for hell if we don’t bring the message of forgiveness and reconciliation to them. As one WELS pastor put it, “The main reason we want to count numbers is because we are not counting fence posts, but rather real, living people with eternal souls...and every soul counted is a soul gained for eternity. That, and the fact that chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8 of Acts (the early history of the Christian Church) count numbers ‘big time.’”

Frankly, I have been puzzled by the pessimistic attitude expressed by many pastors regarding evangelism outreach. An attitude of failure is self-fulfilling. A salesman will never be successful selling his products or services if he doesn’t expect success. If he anticipates failure, he will fail. That doesn’t sound to me like the attitude Paul was trying to convey in the first chapter of his second letter to Timothy when he stated, *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love,*

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*of self discipline*⁷.” That’s a statement of boldness and confidence if I have ever heard one!

As Christians we are part of the most successful enterprise in the history of the world! Jesus began with just twelve disciples (including one who betrayed him) and after just three years of public ministry he launched the most successful movement the world has ever seen. The good news he preached has been carried to every continent and millions have been saved for eternity. The story of Christianity is an incredible story. Anti-Christian movements such as communism have come and gone like vapors in the night, while Christianity keeps growing and growing. What a joy and thrill it is to be a small part of such a great and good cause that has been successful far, far beyond the wildest expectations of the original disciples.

What a visionary leader Jesus was. He boldly told his disciples after his resurrection, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1). This wasn’t going to be some small, insignificant effort to serve just a few loyal souls. No, this was going to be an evangelism effort that reached *“the ends of the earth.”* And Jesus wasn’t hesitant to talk about power, the same power that’s available to us today, to change hearts and save souls. What an empowering charge he gave his disciples and to us. We have the greatest and most important news to share. It’s the same good news that has been accepted by millions around the globe since the time of Jesus. We not only have God’s Word, but Jesus’ personal promise that the power of the Holy Spirit will be with us as we go forward to share this good news. There is simply nothing to be pessimistic about.

The bottom line is that if we are to be effective in sharing the gospel in our communities we can’t rationalize failure. Once we start making excuses we have erased the opportunity for success. A person who believes he is a victim of circumstance is guaranteed to lose. We shouldn’t throw in the towel. Instead, we need to be confident in the words of Paul as recorded in Philippians 4: *“¹³I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*

Instead of worrying about coming up with believable explanations for why congregations are not growing, pastors should consider how they might hone their skills and abilities to become more effective as leaders

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and communicators. It is often said that we are instruments of the Holy Spirit in spreading the Good News. Of course, there are all sorts of instruments. Some are used to calibrate equipment. Some are used to till the soil. Still other instruments are used by a doctor to save a life. Continuing in that vein, some tools are dull. Some are rusty. Some are sharp. Some are well oiled. Others are honed to an effective degree. Pastors, like everyone else in God’s Church, need to keep their leadership and communications tools sharpened and well-oiled.

The Buck Stops Here

Harry Truman was right, but I had a very hard time learning that lesson. When things didn’t go right and my business continued to slide downhill, I found lots of other folks to blame. It was the bankers who didn’t want to extend more credit. It was my accountant whose numbers just couldn’t be right. It was difficult clients who wouldn’t follow my advice. Everyone was to blame except for me. Of course, in reality, it was all my fault. I hired the people. I made the ultimate decisions that affected our success or failure. I’m not suggesting that every pastor and his congregation can overcome every difficulty, but 99 times out of 100, pastors have no one to blame but themselves. I have to be responsible for my own decisions and actions and the same goes for the pastor as the spiritual head of his congregation. As the Bible makes clear in the parable of the talents, God expects results. He doesn’t expect us to hide our talents in the ground, but rather to use each and every talent he has given us to our maximum ability. Yes, the Holy Spirit deserves all the credit, but that doesn’t excuse less than a 100% effort on our part. Pastors must accept responsibility for the effective leadership of their congregations.

Get Out of the Way

This was a tough lesson for me to swallow. Of course, I gave lip service to the idea that the best way to succeed is to hire good people and get out of their way. But it was a lot harder on the ego actually doing that. As long as I wanted to take credit for any success my company achieved, I was not empowering my employees to act on their own. Ronald Reagan used to say, *“There’s no telling what we can accomplish if we don’t care who gets the credit.”* A hands-on leader who wants to get credit for every success and thinks he has to make every decision is on the road to failure.

It is a fact that if the leader chooses weak individuals to serve under him who will never disagree with him or challenge any of his ideas, he will have a weak, ineffective organization. To paraphrase David Ogilvy, founder of Ogilvy & Mather (one of the world’s largest

advertising agencies), if you want a company of pygmies, surround yourself with small-thinking people, but if you want a company of giants, surround yourself with big thinkers.

This is not easy to do. It's hard on the ego. It's tough to surround one's self with people who are smarter than we are, but that's exactly what every successful businessman tries to do. It is tough to take criticism and to have our ideas and concepts challenged. It's even harder to admit we are wrong. But that's exactly what a leader must do. He cannot be defensive when his thoughts or ideas are challenged. When he is defensive he sends a strong signal that he's not looking for new ideas or people with new ideas. And, from that point forward, he'll get very few.

Until my employees knew with confidence that they were free to make decisions and to act on them, I couldn't capture their genius. Until they understood that they had my blessing to try new ideas and fail, we didn't have the innovation our company needed to succeed. Until I flattened the organization so that decisions were made and acted upon at the lowest level we had no chance to deliver excellence to our customers.

Pastors may not be the CEOs of their congregations, but they certainly are their spiritual leaders. And while members may not be the equivalent of stockholders of a corporation, they certainly have ownership of the mission of their congregation's outreach to the lost. They have to step out confidently on their own. But that's only the beginning. As noted earlier, an important intellectual step each leader must take is to recognize that he does not have all the good ideas and concepts. Fifty or a hundred years ago the pastor was the most educated person in his community and certainly in his congregation. But today this is a very complex world and a very educated society. Clearly pastors have more knowledge of theology and doctrine than any of their members, but many lay members may be much more knowledgeable in the area of management and leadership. Most congregations are filled with laymen and laywomen of great talent. The businessmen in our congregations understand all too well that top-down, autocratic organizations are dysfunctional. Such organizations simply don't work. They can't compete.

At the end of World War II American businesses ruled the world. Why? Because the rest of the industrial world was in shambles. But by the 1980's the Asian tiger, Japan, was beginning to beat the Americans at their own game. Japanese quality was far superior to that offered by American corporations, most notably in

the automobile industry, but also in other areas such as electronics. How did this happen?

Shortly after World War II a noted business consultant, the late Arthur Demming, tried to point out to American industrialists that top-down, autocratic organizations were not effective in producing high quality products and services. But the Americans ignored Arthur Demming, so he took his analysis to Japan and the Japanese bought into it.

They empowered their workers to make decisions at the lowest possible level of the organization. They flattened their organizations to get the very best from those they were paying. They recognized that you cannot demand, insist upon, threaten, or extort the very best from a person—they only give their best if they choose to do so.

Finally, by the early 1980's American businessmen began to realize that the old ways were no longer working. They began to listen to organizational experts like Kenneth Blanchard and Peter Drucker who had analyzed what was working in the business world and what was not working. This new understanding revolutionized the American business community. The message was clear. In order to succeed with a for-profit or a non-profit, you must flatten the organization in order to empower workers and volunteers. Driving decision-making down to the lowest possible level has its problems, but the rewards in terms of ownership and enthusiasm, will far outweigh the difficulties created

But, as Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun. When the church was growing at an incredible rate, as related in Acts, it was as a flat organization that empowered new believers to share the good news with all those around them. There was no top-down, autocratic organization that stifled creativity and innovation. Individual problems were dealt with as individual problems.

If our pastors don't know how to turn loose, if they are afraid to flatten their congregation's organization, or if they are afraid to let people fail, then they need to do some reading, attend a seminar, and study what works and what doesn't. Today there are many good resources to assist in their professional development. Many books are available such as: *When God Builds a Church* by Bob Russell and *The Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren, *The Management Methods of Jesus* and *The Leadership Lessons of Jesus* by Bob Briner, and of course, *A Passion for Excellence* by Tom Peters. Unless and until our pastors turn loose and quit worrying about all the details, our congregations will continue to be stuck in neutral. A pastor's time is too valuable to worry about

the usher schedule, the color of the paint on the walls, the color of the carpet, or the brand of coffee served at Bible class. Pastoral leadership demands focused attention on the important task of equipping members and then getting out of the way.

Pastors who second-guess the decisions of their laymen and laywomen don't expect them to make decisions. They have been disempowered. Pastors who interrupt each lay report to put their spin on it are disempowering their laymen. Pastors who not only attend each meeting of each group in the congregation, but also insist on speaking up or even taking over every meeting, are disempowering their laymen. Pastors can't have it both ways. A pastor cannot empower laymen to go out and share the good news, while at the same time trying to micro-manage everything they do. It simply doesn't work.

Pastors who want to have strong, active congregations with maximum participation and support from lay members must step back and let those lay leaders – men and women – make decisions. In fact, I would argue that the most effective pastoral leader is the one who not only steps back and lets others make decisions, but also gets out of the way and lets laymen and laywomen lead. Turning loose is the first step in building a congregation that reaches out effectively to the lost.

Care For the Team

I mistakenly thought that everyone in my organization knew that I cared about them and their welfare. But how could they know I cared about them if I didn't tell them? Sure, I liked to hobnob with my executives, but the others received short shrift. I didn't realize that if you want to build a team that thinks of itself as a team you can't discriminate between male and female, young or old, the prosperous or not-so-prosperous. If you care about someone and you expect them to appreciate that fact, you must tell them. Hugs and pats on the back are just as important in the office (or in the church) as they are in the home. But it goes beyond that. If someone is in a troubled relationship, has financial problems, or suffers with a physical problem and you know about it, it is critical for you to empathize with that individual. If you can't do that, you are not a people person and your ability to lead is severely inhibited. Good people skills are as important to success as any other attribute a leader has.

Pastors have a need to empathize that is even greater than that of a boss. Pastors should ask themselves if they are willing to care for and be empathetic to the problems of their members. In other words, are they people persons who are sensitive and care for the needs

of others? Pastors must lead the way if they want their members to be similar caring Christians. Leaders can't discriminate between rich or poor, young or old, male or female. As it says in the 2nd chapter of James “*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.*”¹⁰ If members are to be compassionate toward each other, their pastor must show compassion to everyone—clearly and visibly.

Recently, at a Lutheran Church I attended, the pastor, who was very outgoing, called a little old lady to the front of the church prior to the start of the service. He proceeded to announce that this lady was celebrating her 90th birthday and asked everyone in church to sing happy birthday to her. What a warm, wonderful way that was of expressing love to this old lady. Sensitive, caring pastors need to avoid formality in their dealings with parishioners and must let their humanity be seen. What better example have we to follow than Christ himself? His compassion was so great that he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and fed the hungry. And he was not afraid to show his emotion when he wept at the grave of his good friend Lazarus. We should realize that God created our emotions and that they can play an important role in our lives and in our ability to empathize with others. Being able to show compassion to those in need is vital to building a congregation into an effective and affective team. It's exactly what we are commanded to do in the 3rd chapter of 1st Peter—“*Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.*”¹¹

Be a Cheerleader

Everyone has an inherent desire to be a “hands on” person. We want to do something of substance. That's why we shy away from just being a cheerleader. Perhaps we want the credit for everything and we think the only way to achieve that is by doing everything ourselves. That certainly was my approach and, as the company grew, I finally realized that I couldn't do everything. In fact, when I finally accepted my primary responsibility as cheerleader, not only did morale improve dramatically, but also creativity and innovation. Pastors, too, will be surprised at the impact cheerleading can have on their congregation.

I have found that simply by staying in close touch with everyone and praising their efforts and giving them encouragement, there is a dramatic shift that takes

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place. Employees begin to take ownership. They become willing to step out with new ideas and new concepts and they are very, very careful that the work is done right. I love it when my employees say to me, "This place just isn't the same when you aren't here." They look to me to be their cheerleader.

Is the glass half-full or half-empty? It's an old, old question, but an important one. No one follows someone who is always negative and looking for reasons something won't work. Leaders are inevitably positive and enthusiastic. As it says in Proverbs 15, ³⁰*A Cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.*¹² In the business world I have never met a pessimistic entrepreneur. They don't exist, just as pessimistic leaders don't exist. That would be a contradiction in terms. If pastors want to energize their members and give them the kind of leadership they seek and deserve, then they must be provided with continuous support and encouragement. Is it unreasonable to expect pastors to be positive and upbeat with a smile on their faces and a bounce in their step? And why not? They have the most exciting job in the world. They get to tell others the great, good news that their sins are forgiven and that, through Jesus' blood and righteousness, they can lay claim to eternal life in heaven. No one in the world should have more enthusiasm for their job than Christian pastors. Just as it says in the 4th chapter of Philippians: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"*¹³ Every Christian has a reason to be joyous, especially pastors. They know everything turns out perfectly!

Be a Risk Taker

Trying new ideas is always a risky business, and I have headed down the wrong path more than a few times. But if you aren't willing to experiment and take some risks, your business soon loses ground to the competition. Flattening out my company's organization was a huge risk. What was going to happen when we let employees at the lowest level make decisions that involved tens of thousands of dollars? The answer was that their ownership increased dramatically and they were even more creative and innovative in saving our clients and the company money. There is a dramatic story about a crucial decision made by the Ford Motor Company. One innovative manager put buttons at each station on the assembly line that would allow each worker to shut down the line. Skeptics were sure that the results

would be disastrous and that productivity would dramatically decrease. Of course, the exact opposite happened. Productivity increased thanks to improved quality, and that translated directly into less production line shutdowns. Ford empowered their workers and showed that they trusted them. They were rewarded with an increase in productivity and in quality of their products.

Reaching out to the lost demands that pastors be risk takers and entrepreneurs who experiment with forms and concepts to most effectively reach out to the lost in their communities. One doesn't have to compromise doctrine in order to experiment with new bridge-building techniques to reach the lost. Try to eliminate the roadblocks to opening doors to searchers. Be willing to let laymen try ideas for pre-evangelism, no matter how non-traditional they are. There are no cookie cutter approaches to evangelism. That's why pastors need as many ideas and concepts as their members can come up with.

Set Goals. Devise a Plan. Measure Results.

One of my worst failings as a businessman was in the area of marketing. It wasn't until we decided upon a marketing strategy and set specific goals that we finally made progress. Now, I know at the beginning of each year almost exactly how many new clients we will add. How do I know that? Well, I know that for every two prospective clients we talk to directly, one will agree to a no-risk test mailing. And, I now know that for every three test mailings, one will become a long-term client. Therefore, if I can identify good prospective clients and contact them, ultimately one in six will become a long-term client of my agency. Simple and obvious, but I didn't realize how I could make the process work for nearly 20 years!

Working with a congregation's lay leadership, pastors should set annual goals, and have confidence that they will succeed, for as it says in Proverbs 16, *"Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."*¹⁴ Once goals have been set, the pastor and his lay leaders should not only devise a plan for achieving those goals, but also pray diligently for its success. Setting goals without a plan to achieve them is worthless. I believe it is the role of the pastor to take the lead in establishing these annual goals and developing the plan to achieve them in full cooperation with the congregation's lay leadership. As the spiritual leader, the pastor's role is to both suggest and to solicit ideas for the outreach plan so that lay leaders and members take full

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ownership of the evangelism effort. Most pastors will find lay leaders within their congregations who are quite familiar with the importance and the techniques of goal-setting and measurement evaluation in the commercial world. Pastors should take advantage of these talents and skills to get their plan of action off the ground. As it says in Proverbs 20, “*18 Make plans by seeking advice;*”¹⁵ The more lay leaders participate in the process the more enthusiastic they will be about the congregation’s evangelism program.

As one effective WELS leader has been heard to say repeatedly, “That which gets measured, gets done,”— a simple but time-tested truth. Once a strategic plan for winning souls in the community has been developed, pastors and their lay leaders should test it for effectiveness. Experimentation with different techniques and tactics will enable congregations to forecast the results of their evangelism and retention efforts. One should be able to identify what steps must be executed in order to meet the goals. This will give great confidence to those individuals who are participating in the outreach effort. And confidence breeds success. That’s the funny thing about goals— people will stretch to meet them. It’s like winning a race, and this after all is the most important race of all.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that alterations to an outreach strategy have to be made more than once. There is no cookie cutter approach that works universally for all congregations in all situations. Just remember that, “*9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps*”¹⁶ (Proverbs 16). Whatever plan the pastor and his congregation undertake, if it is successful, it is the one that should be followed.

It’s very important to keep members and leaders updated throughout the year as to how the congregation is progressing toward meeting the goals which have been set. It’s also important that everyone is able to participate in the excitement. How many contacts has the congregation made? How many prospects have enrolled in an instruction class? How many adults will be confirmed by the end of the measuring period? One key thing to remember about any plan is to keep it simple and short – no more than two pages in length and preferably much shorter. For example, a very simple plan might be to increase attendance by two people each Sunday. If that is the goal a colorful chart might be kept in the entrance of the church comparing actual attendance this year to last

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year and to the goal. This will generate enthusiasm for the outreach effort and will help keep everyone focused on the goal. Whatever plan is devised, when the measuring period is finished, a debriefing should be conducted to determine what went right and what went wrong.

Have a Great Vision. Dream Big Dreams.

No one wants to join a team that doesn’t have big dreams. This may be the only area where I didn’t fail from the beginning. All along I wanted to be the biggest and the best in the field. I wanted to create the very best, most successful direct mail fund raising organization in America. I knew that if I accomplished that, the clients would beat a path to our doors.

There’s no incentive to join a team that doesn’t have an exciting, grand vision of the future, whether its growing to a certain size, developing a mega-church, creating an effective outreach into a target community or whatever the goal may be. Short term, annual goals are important, even critical, but they are no substitute for a long-term vision. There is a lot of truth in what hotel magnet Conrad Hilton said, “*To accomplish big things I am convinced you must first dream big dreams.*”¹⁷ In other words, if the pastor and his lay leaders can’t imagine having their congregation grow to 500, 1,000, or even 5,000 members, it won’t. Of course, the excitement is not the growth, or the numbers, but the joy of knowing that the Holy Spirit has converted the hearts of lost souls who are now headed for heaven rather than to hell.

Proverbs 29:18a (KJV) puts it this way, “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*” There’s simply nothing more important a leader can offer than an exciting vision for the future. When people “buy into” a dream, they are committed to making that dream come true. It is the dream that inspires them to work long hours and to take bold steps for the Lord. If pastors and their congregations are going to effectively reach out to the lost, they need to dream big dreams that will inspire others. It takes leadership, however, to set forth a simple plan to turn that dream into reality. “Simple” is the key word, but “simple” should not be confused with “easy.” That’s why pastors need to articulate a dream that catches the imagination of congregational leaders and members. There is no “magic bullet” that turns such dreams into reality. At the same time, if pastors and lay leaders work hard and long and do lots of things right, they can expect the Lord to bless their efforts far beyond their greatest expectations. He never fails us.

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There's nothing more exhilarating than being part of a team that has a big dream. Pastors can help create that exhilaration by offering a vision for the future that energizes members and lay leaders. It's both an opportunity and a responsibility that is key to providing the leadership every congregation needs. After all, our God is a great God and there is nothing he cannot accomplish. When we lift our vision we acknowledge his greatness.

Communicate Clearly and Passionately

If I don't keep my employees fully informed and make sure that they see my own passion for the work we are doing, they will be operating without the most important tool they need to be successful—enthusiasm! I believe fervently and passionately in my clients and their causes, and I want my employees to feel the same way. There is no amount of talent, expertise, energy, skill, or intelligence that can substitute for a passionate commitment.

I'm in the direct mail fund raising business, and our specific goal is to communicate with donors on behalf of our clients with a message that has a powerful impact. Not dissimilar to a sermon, there are four elements to a good fund raising letter—

Attention. The opening line must capture the attention of the prospective donor.

Problem. Quickly, clearly, accurately, and with emotion, the letter must describe the problem that the organization is addressing.

Solution. In a simple, straightforward way the letter must explain how the organization is solving the problem.

Close the Sale. You can't beat around the bush. You must tell the prospective donor exactly what you want them to do and why it is so important.

If the urgency and the passion do not leap off the pages of the letter, it is not going to be successful. The same thing is true of an effective sermon. As a layman in the pew, and as one who has listened to a lot of sermons in his life, I can only offer pastors some humble suggestions. I don't pretend to have any understanding or insight into homiletics, but I know a good sermon when I hear one. Good sermons seem to have these basic elements.

Capture the attention of the listeners. If the sermon doesn't grab the attention of the folks in the pew from the very beginning, all that follows, no matter how good, has been wasted.

Show them their sin. If the sermon doesn't forcefully remind them of their sin in a clear, simple manner, it may not only distract them from the problem we face as mortals, but also miss the opportunity to reach the searcher who is there for his first visit.

Point the way to salvation. Joy always exceeds sorrow when we are reminded of the mercy and love of a God who sent his own son to die for us. This is the exciting part!

Urge them to take specific action. If the sermon sends parishioners on their way without a specific charge to strengthen their faith through Bible reading, or to reach out to the lost, or to live a sanctified life, a very important part of the sermon has been missed. Parishioners will leave the worship service either emotionally charged, indifferent and unmoved, or simply relieved that it's over. Which will it be?

Just as the commercial says, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression." Of course, Peter said it much more powerfully when he wrote the 4th chapter of 1st Peter, "*11If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*"¹⁸ The fact is that the sermon on Sunday morning is the primary factor in determining whether a visitor will return. If the pastor is unprepared, if the delivery is flat and unemotional, if the content is disorganized, forget it. They won't be back. And members will get the message, too. They are not going to be enthusiastic about inviting guests if the sermon content and delivery are poor. Why make the effort if the guests never return?

Our WELS pastors have every reason to be passionate and enthusiastic about sharing the Gospel from the pulpit. What a wonderful opportunity to talk about sin and its devastating impact on every man and woman. And what can provide a greater thrill than reminding everyone that Jesus has washed away their sins! The joy of knowing that God the Father loves us so much he is willing to sacrifice His own Son to save us certainly overwhelms the true, deep, genuine sorrow in knowing that it was our sins that put Jesus on the cross. After all, as it says in Luke 15:10, "*10In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*"¹⁹ Certainly if the angels in heaven are rejoicing over a soul that is saved, a messenger of the Gospel should be in a joyful state as he goes about sharing the Good News. How can any minister of the

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Gospel not get excited about his weekly opportunity to speak from the pulpit and fire up the troops, while at the same time sharing the good news of salvation with lost souls?

I know that homiletics is taught at the Seminary. I know that the art and science of effective communication is taken very seriously there. But if pastors struggle with the delivery of their sermons years after graduating from the Seminary, they can take heart because there are things they can do about to improve the organization and delivery of their sermons. Truly, as it says in Proverbs 25, ²⁰“*A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*” That’s how important the delivery of the sermon really is. Pastors who solicit honest evaluation from their members, and recognize their limitations in this area, have already taken the most important step toward gaining the ability to deliver a well-organized, powerful sermon. Speech teachers, as well as organizations like Dale Carnegie® and Toastmasters®, have turned around the speaking abilities of tens of thousands of individuals. They have turned boring, dull speakers into forceful, effective speakers who are capable of delivering a powerful, passionate message. I’m of the belief that they can provide valuable help for pastors who are challenged in this area as well.

What should the minimum standard be for the quality of sermons? At the very minimum, parishioners have a right to expect a sermon on Sunday morning that is logical, well-organized, understandable and that is delivered with passionate conviction. Remember, if we want laypeople to be passionate about their faith, they need to see that their pastor is similarly passionate.

The standard for attention and comprehension should not be the most Biblically knowledgeable member of the congregation, but rather the first time visitor. Seekers don’t make their decision to come back based on deep theological issues. Rather, they make their decision on the most superficial first impression they have. If the church is attractive, if the members are friendly, and most important, if the pastor delivers a strong Biblical message from the pulpit that touches their heart, they *may* decide to return. Pastors and their members should settle for nothing less than excellence in preaching, for as it says in Colossians 3:23 *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...”*²¹ The last place we should compromise our standards of excellence is among the men who have been chosen to provide pastoral leadership for

our congregations. As the late Dr. Walter A. Maier responded when asked why he was so hard on his students, “...I *must* help maintain high standards for the highest profession on earth. Doctors or lawyers have much to learn in mastering their professions; the same should certainly be true of the ministry.”²²

Pastors and their lay leaders should regularly assess the effectiveness of sermons in conveying God’s Good News to the lost. The criterion for determining if sermons are hitting the mark is given quite simply in the 14th chapter of Acts, which describes the impact of Paul and Barnabas, ^{1a}“*There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.*”²³ That’s the bottom line. Are sermons reaching the lost and touching the hearts and minds of every member?

Add Members. Keep Them.

It’s a great feeling when that long sought after client finally signs on the dotted line. That means our marketing effort has been successful. But as important and critical as that step is, it is only the very first step. This was a hard lesson for me to learn. Just because we signed on a national presidential campaign when the company was less than two years old didn’t mean that we were going to keep that account. In fact, I learned quickly that our ability to keep that client or any client happy doesn’t depend entirely upon the quality of our work no matter how unfair we think that is.

In the early 1980’s I was fortunate to sign the Grace Commission (Ronald Reagan’s blue ribbon effort to eliminate waste in government) to a fund raising agreement. The test mailing was an incredible success, netting the organization more than \$90,000. Unfortunately, our reporting of printing expenses to the client was inaccurate and my handling of the situation with the client was worse. The result was that the client abruptly cancelled our agreement immediately upon conclusion of the test mailing. The fund appeal we created was a record-breaking success, but the client fired us. It was sort of like that old saw, “The operation was a success, but the patient died.”

Recently I read an article in one of our WELS publications questioning the need for pastors to have good “people skills” as well as fulfill his “primary job” to “interpret sacred texts for his flock.” To emphasize the author’s point, he posed the following hypothetical

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²² Excerpted from, *A Man Spoke*, A Word Listened, by Paul L. Maier, Copyright © 1963 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri

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question: “Suppose you were about to undergo major surgery. You had the choice of two doctors. One was friendly, personable, and grossly incompetent. The other’s bedside manner left a little to be desired, but there was no better in the operating room. Which would you choose?” Setting aside the fact that this is a loaded question, the answer is neither! I would accept neither the doctor who was incompetent nor the one who was incapable of giving me the emotional support that I would need to recover.

We should never settle for mediocrity in any area! In my business, excellence must encompass every aspect of our work with our clients. This includes our “bedside manner” and the bottom line results of our efforts. If we fail in either area the result will be the same: we will lose the client. Should it be any different in the Church? If a congregation has the Gospel in its truth and purity, but fails to deliver it in a clear, caring, Christ-like manner (corporately and individually), it is unrealistic to expect prospects to become members and to continue as active members.

Far too often we bring people in the front door, but they are soon headed out the back door. Why? The answer is that we must serve those we seek to save where they are. If we are not meeting their needs for Christian fellowship, for spiritual growth, for nurturing, for caring and concern, they will be gone before we know it. Hearing a well-developed, well-delivered, scriptural-based sermon on Sunday morning is a good first step, but it is only the first step.

When hurting souls walk through the front door they need real, genuine help and compassion. Consistent with scripture, they need opportunities for spiritual growth, Christian fellowship and relationship building that may come from a couples’ club or a ladies’ circle or a youth group. They need to feel welcome and needed in the community of believers. They must feel that the pastor really cares about them as individuals. The pastor must lead the way by example and by encouragement.

Participating in a Bible information or instruction class needs to be a stimulating, interesting, and energizing experience. The story of our living God is an exciting one. Good preparation is essential and a program that involves the participants is critical. A lecture will simply not suffice. Once seekers see the relevance of God in their life, they too will be excited about God’s word and sharing the good news with others.

Pastors and their lay leaders should regularly evaluate the atmosphere in their congregation. Is it an exciting, challenging place to be? Are the members not only friendly, but also caring and compassionate? Does the

pastor work hard at making every part of the congregation a vibrant, engaging experience? In the WELS we are blessed with the true Gospel, and that gives us a great edge. But just because we have shared the good news and the Holy Spirit has used us to convert a heart, our job is not over. If new converts do not find our fellowship to be alive and vibrant, they can and will look elsewhere. If outreach efforts are not matched by commensurate retention efforts, the flow out the back door may match the flow in the front door. The truth of what we preach must be equaled by the way we act and treat those who have joined our fellowship.

Insist on Accountability

This is a tough one. No one, including me, likes to be held accountable. However, authority and autonomy without accountability almost always spell disaster. Throughout the years I kept getting my company in trouble. I would make decisions, without consulting anyone else, that greatly affected the health of my company. I lost millions of dollars through my own stupidity, and it happened in the main because no one was holding me accountable. I was holding my own employees accountable, but who was holding the boss accountable? Then one day I read an article in a business publication about how a number of closely held corporations, like my own, were setting up boards of directors to hold their actions and proposed actions up to scrutiny and review.

The CEOs of public corporations such as those traded on the New York Stock Exchange® serve at the pleasure of their board of directors and must report to their stockholders. In contrast, privately held corporations are not required to have a board of directors. This can be a dangerous situation, as I have proven repeatedly.

Recognizing my own frailties, I decided to set up an official board of directors for my corporation for the sole purpose of holding me accountable. Surprisingly, I received quite a bit of resistance within my own company from employees who were afraid what such accountability might mean to them. Today, however, I can tell you that setting up a board of directors was just about the most important step I have taken since founding my company. My board got me out of a business that had already lost a million dollars and, in spite of my optimism, was surely destined to lose more millions. They have also kept me out of another venture, which it is clear, in hindsight, would have been a very bad match for my company. Being held accountable has been painful emotionally but rewarding financially. At the bottom line, it has been a wonderful blessing to have the counsel and advice of such

talented men and women. It can be a similar blessing to every pastor's ministry.

As the spiritual leader of the congregation, the pastor makes many critical decisions. Generally, it is rare when a church member will stand up and challenge a pastor's decision. Nine times out of ten, or perhaps ninety-nine times out of a hundred, members will follow the pastor's lead. They will look to their pastor, especially in matters of worship, education, preaching, and outreach. However, pastors, like the rest of us, are not infallible. That's one of the reasons I sought out accountability by setting up a board of directors for my corporation. My advice to pastors is to seek accountability. A congregation's church council, or board of elders, or a specially designated panel can hold the pastor accountable through semi-annual or annual reviews. Regardless of congregational structure or formal committee responsibilities, pastors should seek out strong lay leaders and insist that they hold them accountable.

If the idea of seeking accountability makes one uncomfortable, it shouldn't. Real leaders welcome accountability because they know they don't have all the good ideas and they also know they can't get the job done alone. It's very difficult to learn and grow if one is unwilling to become vulnerable to others. It is in this state of vulnerability that real transfer of wisdom occurs. It may be somewhat frightening, but strong, intelligent counselors will not only come up with good ideas, but can also steer one away from bad ideas that will only make the job more difficult. Lay leaders not only have their pastor's best interest at heart, they will respect the courage and humility that their pastor shows by making himself accountable to them. Moreover, after pastors have gone through the performance review process several times they will find that they will look forward to the opportunity to receive honest counsel from laymen. The bond between the pastor and his members will grow even stronger and the ownership of congregational leaders will increase dramatically.

In the performance review itself, pastors should encourage their lay leaders to speak their minds if they think they are going down the wrong road. Use objective criteria. The review should include a comparison of personal objectives (leadership, management skills, evangelism and retention efforts, preaching, cheerleading, counseling, relationship building, etc.) with results. The more specific the evaluation, the more individual growth will occur. A pastor who is strong and confident enough to undertake this process has the makings of a leader. It's human nature to respond defensively to criticism. The normal reaction is to defend our views and counter the

complaint. Perhaps it will help to look upon a criticism as an opportunity. That's the philosophy at IBM. They consider every complaint or criticism as an opportunity to cement their relationship with a client. Of course, not all complaints or criticisms are legitimate, but before reacting defensively, pastors who earnestly seek to improve will try to objectively examine a concern to see if there is any validity to it.

Pastors are the spiritual leaders of their congregations, and whether they like it or not are the ones who will be identified with the success or failure of their congregation's evangelism, spiritual growth, and member retention efforts. Of course, even if pastors and their members build a mega-church they have still accomplished nothing. It is God who has generously given pastors the intellect, drive, personality, and all their talents and abilities. As it says in the 2nd chapter of Philippians, "¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.²⁴" It is the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who will be there, using you as his instrument to save souls for eternity.

Each congregation has its own unique circumstances and ministry needs, so I would not presume to suggest that there is a one-size-fits-all type of performance review that will work in every congregation. However, I would suggest that every pastor in every congregation needs to find out how he is doing. Pastors and their lay leaders should not only establish criteria for evaluating success in achieving objective goals, but should also assess the pastor's and lay leaders' effectiveness from the perspective of a broad representation of members – young and old, male and female, black and white. And pastors should be comforted and encouraged by the words of Proverbs 15—"²²Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.²⁵"

Leadership. It's a Journey, Not a Destination.

The bad news is that no pastor will ever build the perfect congregation. Leadership really is a journey, not a destination. But once a pastor is no longer burdened by reasons for failure, it will be like opening a door to fresh air and fresh ideas. He and his congregation will be able to grow and build just as far and as fast as the Lord blesses their efforts. And don't His blessings always exceed our expectations? Doesn't He always over deliver? Aren't His grace and mercy far, far beyond what we can possibly imagine?

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Finally, pastoral leadership is the ultimate form of service. Just as Jesus saw his role as a servant when he said, (Matthew 20)—²⁶...*whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,*²⁷ *and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--*²⁸*just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*²⁶ And as Peter says to spiritual leaders in 1 Peter 5:3, *“Don’t be rulers over the people entrusted to you, but be examples for the flock to follow.”*²⁷ In other words, as they say in the U.S. Marines, “Lead by example.” Pastors cannot expect their laymen to do more than they do. If pastors expect them to knock on doors, they should be the first ones to the door. If pastors want members to make telephone calls, they should be the first ones to pick up the telephone. If pastors want members to invite guests, then the pastors’ guests should be the first in the door. If pastors want members to show compassion, they must be compassionate. If pastors want their members to be friendly to visitors, their friendliness must be evident to all. A leader never asks his followers to do more than he does. That is the ultimate test of leadership.

Today, more than ever, the WELS needs effective leadership in its parishes. That’s the first gift Paul is talking about as he enumerates gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, verses 7 and 8: *“The evidence of the Spirit’s presence is given to each person for the common good of everyone.. The Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with wisdom. The same Spirit gives one person the ability to speak with knowledge.”*²⁸ What a great definition of leadership—speaking with wisdom and knowledge for the common good of everyone!

We are charged with the most important task on the face of the earth, winning lost souls for heaven. We simply cannot be satisfied with leadership that is poor or even mediocre. Virtually every pastor can increase his effectiveness by reading, studying, listening, and taking courses that help him understand how to lead. Business leaders are always looking for ways to improve their leadership skills by attending seminars, reading books, and keeping up with new ideas through periodicals. It is a never-ending journey. Pastors who are totally committed to excellence will infuse their members with the same commitment to excellence. In my company it all starts and ends with me, and in every congregation it all starts and ends with the pastor. There are many, many talented pastors who can become effective leaders if they are simply open to learning how to lead.

The ongoing decline in membership of the WELS is testimony to the fact that effective leadership is needed now. Our challenge is to carry out the Great Commission as effectively as we can with the God given talents we have been provided. Although lay leadership can never substitute for pastoral leadership, laymen must step up and provide the support and encouragement talented pastors need to become effective leaders. I can tell you that there are thousands of lay people just like me who are pleading to be led. Lay leaders must also have the courage to take whatever steps are needed to see that their congregation has effective leadership. Unless and until this happens, the WELS will most certainly continue to decline in membership.

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