

Our Synod

Lesson One – Seen and Unseen



Introduction:

- Day after day, many cars and trucks pass by our little church here on Westgate and Sixth. If they happen to stop at the stop sign and look over at the church – they will see a word which may seem rather strange – “Synod.” Many in our congregations also may look at that word and wonder exactly what it means.
 - Is it a federation?
 - Is it a co-operation of churches?
 - It is like some kind of hierarchy – with ruling leaders like the Vatican in the Roman Catholic Church?
- There are many ideas of what exactly “Synod” is and what that means. What would you say to someone who asked you – “What is a ‘Synod?’”
- What are some specific questions which you have concerning this gathering we call – “Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod”?
- Some of the questions which we will seek to answer in this study are:
 - What is a Synod for?
 - What does a Synod do?
 - How is the Synod related to the one, holy, Christian and apostolic church?
 - What does it mean for a congregation to belong to the Synod?
 - What obligations does a congregation have to the Synod?
 - What duties does a Synod have to a congregation?
 - Who are the leaders of the Synod?

The Definition, Mission, and Purpose of the Synod

What is the synod? What is its primary mission? Why do we have a synod at all? These are questions that every member of WELS should be able to answer.

In its report to the synod convention in July, the Ad Hoc Commission included a section that explains and identifies the mission and purpose of the synod. The convention received the entire report with thanks and passed a resolution that this section be forwarded to all congregations for discussion and study.

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Before we can delve into seeing what a Synod is, we first need to define what we mean by the word – “Church” (capital C) and “church” (small c).

Unseen:

1 Peter 2:9 — 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

- ⇒ St. Peter is speaking to us today. What does he call us?
- ⇒ How can He call us such?
- ⇒ “called you out” – Explain this term.

Side Note:

ἐκκλησία – derived from two words.

- ἐκ – “from, out of, out from”
- καλέω – “to call, to call by name”

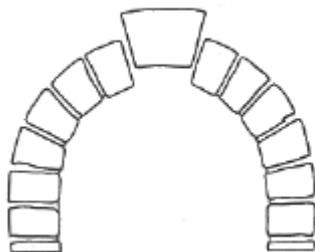
This little word is translated from the Greek as “church” – those who have been called out by name (1 Pet. 2:9)

Application:

In your own words – define “Church” according to 1 Peter 2:9.

Ephesians 2:19–22 — 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Christ the Cornerstone



- ⇒ St. Paul also speaks about those who have been called out by name to be God’s people. Note what he writes concerning them. What two things does he say we now are?
- ⇒ Explain.
- ⇒ What is a cornerstone? (see diagram)
- ⇒ How is Jesus the cornerstone of our relationship with God and our relationship with other Christians?
- ⇒ Look at the last part of verse 18 and the last part of verse 22. Who is responsible for creating the bond between God’s children?

Application:

- Complete the following statement:

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	<p>“The Church is _____”</p>
<p>1 Samuel 16:7 —The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Can we see whether a person has true faith in Christ or not? → So who alone knows the members of the Holy Christian Church – the Communion of Saints? <p>Application: Define, in your own words, the “Invisible” Church.</p>

Definition of the Holy Christian Church (the communion of saints):

Called “Holy” because _____

Called “Christian” because _____

Called “Church” because _____

<p>Matthew 18:20 — 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”</p> <p>Matthew 28:19–20— 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”</p> <p>Galatians 3:26 — 26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,</p> <p>Isaiah 55:11 — 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Where does this “invisible, Holy Christian Church” exist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explain what this means. → How long will it exist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do you know for sure? → What is the purpose of this Church? <p>Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → A/D — It is impossible for someone to be saved if they belong to a church that teaches false doctrine. (Look up Isaiah 55:11 for help.) → A/D – There are members of the Holy Christian Church in the Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Lutheran churches. → What comfort do we have in knowing that
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which I sent it.

→ In the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe in "the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." Are we talking about the Church or visible churches?

God's church—God's family of believers—exists whenever the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are correctly administered?

- In terms of how the gospel message will be proclaimed throughout the world even though our own synod may not be able to reach all places given our size and resources. (Is 55:11)

Various Quotes:

We believe and confess that the church is people who have saving faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gathers people together around the gospel in Word and sacrament. These are the marks of the church because the Holy Spirit works through the gospel. So wherever the gospel is in use, we expect to find believers, that is, Christ's church. The work of any assembly of believers is to proclaim the gospel. Thereby they encourage and strengthen believers and gather new disciples of the Lord. As confessional Lutherans, we agree and believe that the assembly of these believers becomes evident in visible organizations in various places. The New Testament asserts this principle (Cf. Acts and the letters of Paul). Certainly, both believers and unbelievers belong to such visible organizations.

(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)

“Thus the Christian Church is physically dispersed among the pope, Turks, Persians, and Tartars, but spiritually gathered in one gospel and faith, under one Head, that is Jesus Christ.” (**Great Confession, Martin Luther, 1528**) (*Pastor Sauer – Luther was pointing to the fact that wherever the gospel is proclaimed, there you will find the Church – even when proclaimed among those who seek to destroy it – cf. Isaiah 55:11*)

“The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other organizations, however, but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts. To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ. This church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews, consecrates, and governs by His Spirit.” (**Apology of the Augsburg Confession, VII & VIII, 5**)

“Thank God, a seven year old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their good Shepherd. So children pray: ‘I believe in one holy Christian Church.’ Its holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, albs, or other ceremonies of theirs, which they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures, but it consists of the Word of God and true faith.” (**Smalcald Articles, III, XII**)

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Seen:

Respond:

Joan just moved to the Valley. She found out that Abiding Savior is located in Weslaco, but...she lives in Mercedes. Up North there were Wisconsin Synod Churches located on just about every corner in her city. Now, there is only one in the whole Valley. But Joan is not concerned. She knows what she believes and reasons – “I’ll just go to the non-denominational church service in my park. It’s Christian after all and Abiding Savior is so far away to drive on Sunday mornings. As long as I hear the message about Jesus, I’ll be fine. After all, there is no distinction between Christians in Heaven, so why are we making the distinction now with all these denominations.”

<p>1 Corinthians 1:2 — 2 To the church of God in Corinth,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What is a “visible” church?
<p>Matthew 13:47–50 — 47 “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → How is a “visible” church different from the “invisible” Church? → When the net was let down, all kinds of fish were caught, good and bad, which had to be separated at the end of the day. How does Jesus apply this? → What important truth does that teach us about the difference between the Holy Christian Church and a Christian congregation (church)? <p>Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → A/D – As long as we belong to the WELS, we will be in heaven. → A/D – There are no hypocrites in the WELS. → Respond: Joan says to you, “It is foolish to believe that all members in the Synod are in

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agreement on all teachings of the Bible. So it really is foolish not to join with other Lutherans or Christians.”

Acts 2:42— 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Matthew 28:19 (NIV) — 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV) — 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. **25** Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

→ What does God wish for a “visible” congregation to do? (4 things)

→ What is the God-given mission of every visible church?

→ What factors may make it difficult for a local congregation to carry out all aspects of its mission by itself?

Application:

- What will be the criteria for determining whether to join a particular church or not? (cf. Acts 2)

- At a congregational open forum, one of the members gets up and says, “We don’t do enough for the needy in our church! Every year we send so much money off to synod to do missions. Why don’t we cut back a little and use some of that money to open a food pantry. After all, if we aren’t caring for the needy, we really aren’t acting like a church, are we?”

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- Does this person have a point? What might you say to them?

Next Week: Lesson Two – Separate, yet Together

Various Quotes:

Every local assembly of believers becomes a visible organization, a “church.” Those gathered together in a visible church have the responsibilities Christ gave to his church, such as, retaining the truth of God’s revealed Word, teaching its members of all ages, preparing future leaders, and extending Christ’s kingdom by proclaiming the gospel. These are the tasks of Christians individually and together jointly however they are organized into visible groups.

Other visible organizations can also correctly be called “church.” We have no disagreement among us that the synod is “church” in a theological and biblical sense. Wherever two or three (or 400,000) are gathered together in Christ’s name, he is there in their midst. They are his church, his people, and his disciples. And as such, collectively, they have been given all of the tasks that God has given to individual Christians and to Christian congregations as they proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also believe that the local congregation is responsible for the administration of its own affairs as it carries out the responsibilities given to it by the Lord—sharing the gospel; teaching members; worshiping; owning its own property; calling pastors, teachers, and others; paying its bills; and in every other way taking care of its day to day responsibilities. *(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)*

“And we do not speak of a fictitious church that can nowhere be found, but we say and know for sure that this church, in which saints live, is and remains truly on earth, namely, that some children of God are here and there in the whole world, in all kinds of kingdoms, islands, lands, cities, from the rising to the setting of the sun, who have rightly learned to know Christ and His Gospel, and we say that this church has these outward marks; the ministry of the Word, or the Gospel and the Sacraments.” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, VII,VIII,20)

Matthew 13:24–30, 37-43 — **24** Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. **25** But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. **26** When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. **27** “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ **28** “ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ **29** “ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. **30** Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ ”

37 ... , “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. **38** The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, **39** and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. **40** “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. **41** The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. **42** They will throw them into the fiery

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furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

“We are surely prepared to observe peace and love with all men, provided that they leave the doctrine of faith perfect and sound for us. If we cannot obtain this, it is useless for them to demand love from us. A curse on the love that is observed at the expense of the doctrine of faith, to which everything must yield - love, an apostle, an angel from heaven, etc.!...Doctrine is heaven; life is earth...Therefore, there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. ‘One dot’ of doctrine is worth more than ‘heaven and earth’ (Matthew 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. But we can be lenient toward errors of life. For we, too, err daily in our life and conduct; so do all the saints, as they earnestly confess in the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed. But by the grace of God our doctrine is pure; we have all the articles of faith solidly established in Sacred Scripture.” (**Galatians Commentary, Martin Luther, 1535**)

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Lesson Two – Separate, yet Together Individuals working Together



Psalm 133:1 (NIV) — 1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!



Define Synod -

What is the symbolism in the term “synod”?

In what ways does this show itself?

“The local congregation even chooses to align itself with other congregations that share the same beliefs. Believers recognize one another by their confession and join others of the same confession. The decision of visible local believers in various congregations to seek some association with other congregations creates the larger visible church organization. The confession of the association of congregations mirrors that of the individual congregations aligned together. While some differences exist between a local congregation and an organization composed of a collection of local congregations, the larger group has the same task as the separate congregations: **retain the truth, teach God’s truth, prepare leaders, and extend the kingdom by proclaiming the gospel.**

Because the larger assembly is derived from the member congregations, it is not a hierarchy but a confederation. Nevertheless, the separate congregations of the association may depend on the larger association to do things that the separate congregations cannot do as efficiently without the assistance of the other congregations drawn together by their common confession. This larger assembly we call synod becomes important to member congregations when it carries out its mission for them and with them.” *(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)*

For what reasons do local congregations gather together into a larger group called a synod?

1 Timothy 4:6 (NIV) — 6 If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

1 Corinthians 1:2 (NIV) — 2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, **together** with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

Matthew 28:19 (NIV) — 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Romans 10:14–15 (NIV) — 14 ... And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? **15** And how can they preach unless they are sent?

- When it comes to maintaining doctrinal unity and purity? (1 Tim 4:6)
- When it comes to expressing the blessing of a common faith and our fellowship? (1 Cor 1:2)
- When it comes to the scope and reach of gospel proclamation?
- When it comes to providing effective recruitment and training of future church workers?
- When it comes to providing assistance in calling and caring for church workers?

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Lesson Two – Separate, yet Together Individuals working Together



Application:

- If the mission of the synod is really a part of the extended mission of each congregation, how will congregations view the financial support that they provide for the synod's work?
- What are some of the obstacles that prevent congregations from greater financial support of the mission and ministry of the synod? How can these obstacles best be overcome?

Historically, the purpose of our synod has been to do together what we cannot do as individual congregations.

The object and purpose of the synod shall be to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church:

- a) By assisting and counseling in every appropriate way the pastors, teachers, and congregations affiliated with the synod;
- b) By establishing and maintaining theological seminaries, colleges, academies, schools, and other institutions of learning;
- c) By establishing and maintaining home and world missions and such charitable institutions as it may deem appropriate to its calling;
- d) By printing, publishing, purchasing, selling, and disseminating literature that maintains Lutheran doctrine and practice;
- e) By furnishing appropriate literature for parish schools, Sunday schools, missions, institutions, and churches.

- **Why is “extending and preserving the true doctrine and practice” properly listed as the first and foremost purpose of the synod? (Matt 28:19)**

Your Synod:

Extending and conserving the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church by assisting and counseling in every appropriate way the pastors, teachers, and congregations affiliated with the synod.

Acts 20:28 (NIV) — 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

- After the local pastor, to whom have we given the responsibility of overseeing doctrine and practice in the synod?

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Lesson Two – Separate, yet Together Individuals working Together



Consider the various ways in which the synod is organized to help achieve the purpose of “Extending and conserving the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church by assisting and counseling in every appropriate way the pastors, teachers, and congregations affiliated with the synod.”

- *Districts and district presidents*
- *Conferences*
- *Circuits and circuit pastors*
- *The Conference of Presidents*

The synod in convention is the legislative body that determines the direction the organization should head to fulfill its mission of making disciples throughout the world, using the gospel in Word and sacrament to win the lost for Christ, and nurturing fellow believers for lives of Christian service. Representatives from each of the synod's 12 districts meet every other year to set the course for upcoming ministry.

The **synod president** is responsible for carrying out that ministry plan. Two leadership groups help the synod president. **The Conference of Presidents** funds and communicates that ministry plan as well as makes sure that WELS stays united in its teachings and practices. **The Synodical Council** is responsible for managing the activities of the synod, including coordinating ministries and determining a budget.

<http://www.wels.net/about-wels/leadership>

The Conference of Presidents:

Rev. Mark Schroeder, president and chairman

Rev. James Huebner, first vice president

Rev. Joel Voss, second vice president

Rev. Robert Pasbrig, secretary

Rev. Jon Buchholz, Arizona-California District

Rev. Peter Naumann, Dakota-Montana District

Rev. John Seifert, Michigan District

Rev. Charles Degner, Minnesota District

Rev. Joel Frank, Nebraska District

Rev. Joel Petermann, North Atlantic District

Rev. Douglas Engelbrecht, Northern Wisconsin District

Rev. Theodore Lambert, Pacific Northwest District

Rev. John Guse, South Atlantic District

Rev. Vilas Glaeske, South Central District

Rev. David Rutschow, Southeastern Wisconsin District

Rev. Herbert Prahll, Western Wisconsin District

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Lesson Two – Separate, yet Together Individuals working Together



1 Timothy 3:1 (NIV) — 1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

Acts 20:28 (NIV) — 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

- Are those who work full time in synodical positions leaders or servants? Explain your answer.
- What should congregations expect from those who have been called to synodical positions?

Application:

- How can the district president help if a congregation is experiencing difficulties or troubles?
- Can the synod “dictate” the decisions that a congregation should make?

Examples:

- Can the Synod and by extension, the District President, dictate what a congregation should pay their pastors and teachers?
- Can they dictate to a congregation to remove a pastor or teacher?
- Can they dictate to a congregation what teaching they are to believe?
- Consider the following:

Those elected or called to roles of oversight, administration, or service, such as district presidents, circuit pastors, and others, encourage congregations to maintain the truth, confront the doctrinal distortions that develop, and offer assistance when congregations and their workers face challenging issues. Through the encouragement of others in Christ, we foster unity in doctrine and practice. We preserve our commitment to the gospel so that we can proclaim it with one voice.

Yet our synod does not dictate to local congregations. District presidents do not and cannot force a congregation to adopt the common confession of the larger group. They present the truth, encourage study, and promote unity.

(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)

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Lesson Two – Separate, yet Together Individuals working Together



History Lesson: The Cincinnati Case

The Cincinnati Case began in the fall term of the 1899 school year when a Mr. Schlueter withdrew his son from an LCMS (Trinity Lutheran) parochial school. The father wanted his son to attend a public school so that his skills in English could improve. At a later time he intended to send his son back to the congregation's parochial school.

During the next weeks, the congregation demanded an explanation for his actions. The explanation came in the form of a written statement acknowledging both his appreciation for the congregation's parochial school together with its shortcomings. The congregation demanded that Schlueter apologize and return his son to the parochial school. When Schlueter refused to do so, he was then considered as one who had excluded himself from the congregation.

The Cincinnati Case soon reached synodical proportions. District officials and professors Dau and Pieper (LCMS) disagreed with the congregation's dealings with Schlueter. Eventually, Pastors A and F von Schlichten together with the Trinity congregation were suspended from Missouri Synod membership.

Soon the congregation applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. Our synod's officials raised objections due to the fact that the Missouri Synod was still dealing with the matter. (Remember – The Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod were at this time in fellowship with each other.) In 1905, the application was made again. Wisconsin President von Rohr appointed a committee to analyze the case. The committee reviewed material provided and analyzed the testimony of the participants involved in the affair.

Eventually, in 1909, von Rohr's committee made the following report to the synodical convention: "We deem it well to refrain from expressing any opinion of ours; but we do wish to express the hope that the Missouri Synod to whom the case originally belongs, may find ways and means to a God-pleasing settlement."

A settlement was finally reached in 1911 when the congregation ousted F Von Schlichten and the council that had backed him in the dealings against Schlueter. The congregation returned to the Missouri fold and Schlueter was given the opportunity to present his side of the case. Having heard his case, the congregation rescinded the ban of excommunication. At that point, the Cincinnati Case could have been considered a closed book.

However, the issue wasn't resolved. The Cincinnati Case soon touched off a controversy between the two sister synods that would continue to have reverberations up until the split in 1961. In 1909, a number of Wisconsin Synod pastors began practicing fellowship with the suspended Trinity congregation and its pastors, to the chagrin of many.

The Cincinnati case was important for this reason: Which is supreme? The congregation or the Synod? The answer – both are gatherings of Christians. The lesson learned from this case is one which is today expressed in the ad hoc Committee's report when it says – "... a congregation may withdraw from the synod or the synod may suspend a congregation from membership if its confession is different from the other congregations gathered together to form the synod."

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are bound to each other in encouraging, rebuking, and correcting – all out of love for each other in Christ. When a congregation acts in a sinful way, the Synod – as a gathering of Christians – will seek to bring God's Word and lead such to repentance.

Next Lesson: Working together in Ministerial Education

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Lesson Three – Working Together in Education



Romans 10:14–15 (NIV) — 14 ... And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

The object and purpose of the synod shall be to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church:

b) By establishing and maintaining theological seminaries, colleges, academies, schools, and other institutions of learning;

- ⇒ How many Area Lutheran High Schools are affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod?
- ⇒ How many Schools are operated by the Wisconsin Synod? What is their purpose?

Did you know?

- The Synod used to operate a high school in Mobridge, SD called **Northwestern Lutheran Academy**.
- **Michigan Lutheran Seminary** began as a Theological Seminary, closed, and then reopened as a high school.
- **Northwestern Preparatory School** (now Luther Prep School) was joined for many years to the College was based on the 6 year education system with Latin names for the classes
 - Freshman – Sexta
 - Sophmores – Quinta
 - Juniors – Quarta
 - Seniors – Tertia
- **Northwestern College** (now part of Martin Luther College) used to be called Northwestern University.
- **Dr. Martin Luther College** (now part of Martin Luther College) used to be a Seminary
- **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary**
 - began in a living room in Watertown with two students. Over the year, one was dismissed because of disciplinary problems.
 - Was joined with Concordia – St. Louis for awhile.

Side Note: Why was the word “Northwestern” used so extensively? (Used to be the name of the magazine – Forward in Christ)

The History of Ministerial Education in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Confer Diagram on Handout.

Ever since the Synod was founded in 1850, there was a need for more pastors and teachers. The available sources for pastors could not be depended upon to furnish enough candidates for the ministry to supply the congregation which were asking to be served. Two German Mission Societies – Berlin and Langenberg – and one American Seminary – Gettysburg, PA, had each sent a number of men. Other pastors had come from a wide variety of sources, sometimes quite questionable who proved themselves unworthy of the trust which had been placed in them. Because of this, there was a exceptionally high rate of turnover. For example, in 1862 there were 13 pastoral vacancies, but no more than 26 pastors in the Synod at that time. President J Bading declared – “We must dig a well in our own country!” – referring to ministerial education. The need was there – to fill the pulpits of the Synod and to fill them with men thoroughly trained in the Bible and Lutheran Confessions.

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Lesson Three – Working Together in Education



In 1863, the Synod decided to start a Seminary. Remember what was happening in the country at this time! Even with the financial struggles, the Seminary opened in the fall of 1863 with an enrollment of two. The Seminary proved to be vital in moving the Synod from a Synod lax in God's Word, to thoroughly grounded in the Word.

In 1870, the Seminary was combined with the Missouri Synod Seminary - Concordia - in St. Louis, MO. The facilities at Watertown were still to remain, but solely as a pre-seminary school for St. Louis. But after 8 years, the Seminary moved again – this time to Milwaukee, WI. It would move twice more, finally settling in Thiensville, WI in 1929 where it continues today.

The other schools which are operated by the Wisconsin Synod today were also started out of the need to provide and train Lutheran pastors. In 1884, the Minnesota Synod founded Dr. Martin Luther College. In 1885, the Michigan Synod founded Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Over the years, and in joining with the Wisconsin Synod, these schools took on a different look, but still held the same purpose – to train workers to serve the Lord in the public ministry. Dr. Martin Luther College soon became the school which trained teachers to serve in the Synod. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, after closing in 1907, reopened in 1910 as a High School to provide students for the College and Wisconsin Seminary.

Another Synodical High School was opened in 1928 in Mobridge, SD – Northwestern Lutheran Academy. This was in addition to Northwestern Prep School in Watertown, WI; Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, MI and Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm, MN. Northwestern Lutheran Academy and Martin Luther Academy merged into one as Martin Luther Preparatory School in 1979 and was located in Prairie du Chien, WI. But in 1995, Martin Luther Prep and Northwestern Prep merged into what we have today – Luther Preparatory School. At this time, Northwestern College also merged with Dr. Martin Luther College to become Martin Luther College.

It is interesting to note that throughout the many years, there has always been financial troubles plaguing our worker-training system. But today, as in years past, members of the Synod see the value of supporting these schools. The need to fill the pulpits and classrooms still exist. The need to send pastors and teachers to various missions across the world still exists. The need and desire to have pastors and teachers thoroughly trained in God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions still exists. The need for our Synodical Education System still exists. And so we continue to support these schools, each congregation together as a Synod.

1 Timothy 4:6 (NIV) — 6 If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

- Why is the work of educating called workers properly considered to be an integral part of the mission of the synod? (1 Tim 4:6)

Application:

- How do congregations benefit today from a synodical program for ministerial education for today? What is the benefit for the future?
- What are the challenges of maintaining our ministerial education system?
- Why should recruitment of young people for ministry be a primary emphasis in each congregation? What practical steps can congregations and members take to do this?

Next Lesson: Working together in Missions

Our Synod

Lesson Three – Working Together in Education



(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)

As an association of believers we also work together to maintain the truth of the gospel among us. We take another step when we work to share the gospel with the next generation. The constitution expresses this second step when it says that we “extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church . . . by *establishing and maintaining theological seminaries, colleges, academies, schools, and other institutions of learning.*” Each congregation of the synod has that responsibility, and each congregation chooses to conduct its educational efforts in a way that it deems important. Some establish elementary schools; others choose not to establish elementary schools but to teach their children in other ways.

Some efforts to train the next generation in God’s truth are more difficult for local congregations to do on their own. A local congregation may desire to train its youth beyond elementary school, only to face the reality that it does not have enough students or financial resources to undertake the task alone. Establishing Lutheran high schools or any institutions of learning beyond the congregation’s elementary school is best done when the resources of the congregation are pooled with those of other congregations who share the same goal.

In another application of the same principle, the congregations that align themselves together and form a synod pool their resources to educate the next generation. But for us, such an effort has concentrated on training a new generation of called workers. The single purpose of the schools of the synod—whether on the high school level, the college level, or the seminary level—has been to supply congregations of the synod with called workers to carry out their own ministries. Congregations have long understood that a day will come when they will need to replace a teacher or add an additional teacher in order to expand their schools. Likewise, congregations anticipate the replacement of pastors or the expansion of their pastoral ministries. Congregations joined together assign to the synod the task of training future called workers grounded in the truth of the gospel. Clearly, what one congregation would find difficult to do alone can be carried out together with the other congregations.

Our Synod

Lesson Four – Working Together in Missions



Isaiah 54:2 (NIV) — 2 “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.

Note: “lengthen” and “strengthen”

- How do each relate to each other?
- What does this mean for mission work in our congregations and synod?

The object and purpose of the synod shall be to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church:

c) By establishing and maintaining home and world missions and such charitable institutions as it may deem appropriate to its calling;

Did you know?

- The Board for Home Missions (BHM) helped establish six new congregations in 2008 in the following locations—
 - Battlement Mesa, Colo.
 - Crossville, Tenn.
 - New Lenox, Ill.;
 - Sparks, Nev.
 - Northwest Las Vegas, Nev.
 - Rochester, Minn
- Approximately 190 congregations are now being assisted by Home Missions’ district mission boards.
- In addition, Home Missions oversees three full-time campus ministries, six part-time campus ministries, and approximately 390 other campus ministries serving more than 8,500 students.
- The Board for World Missions (BWM) co-ordinates efforts to bring the Gospel to 23 countries around the world.
 - The 23 mission churches in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod contain 78,976 baptized souls and 37,854 communicant members.
 - Most of those souls are nurtured through the ministry of 125 national pastors and 199 national evangelists.
 - The enrollment of 144 Bible institute students and 112 seminary students in the various world mission fields points to a future bright with promise.
- Multi-Language Publications has made it possible for the Synod to spread God’s Word in nations where we cannot send missionaries - Nepal and Pakistan falls into this category
 - Since 2005, more than 16,000 people in Pakistan and 3,000 people in Nepal have enrolled in WELS Scripture learning programs in these countries using guided self-study Bible Teaching Series books published by Multi-Language Publications.
- A/D – The purpose of our Board and World Missions is for the churches to become indigenous.
- A/D – A missionary works to put himself out of a job.

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Lesson Four – Working Together in Missions



The History of Missions in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Board for Home Missions (BHM) –

In the early years of our Synod, home mission work did not present the difficulties which confront our missionaries today. The real task was to find the places where groups of German immigrants had settled. When these Lutherans heard that a German Lutheran pastor was in their neighborhood, they themselves usually took the necessary steps to come under his ministrations of Word and Sacrament.

So it was simply a matter of finding German Lutherans and then sending a pastor to serve them. That is how the Synod grew in the early years. The problem of finances was felt and has been since. The need to train pastors, the need to support them as they carry the Word abroad, the need for resources to minister to various congregations – these all required funds. Yet, even with limited funds the early members of the Wisconsin Synod were still able to found many congregations – mostly in the Midwest and in the 1960's and 1970's more in the South.

Interesting note: The first home missionary to be sent out by the Synod was Pastor Fachtmann. He was commissioned about 10 years *after* the founding of the Synod. Pastor Fachtmann made missionary trips into what is today called the Fox River Valley in Wisconsin and into northeastern Wisconsin, and later into the western part of Wisconsin and Minnesota. That was the beginning of our Synod's home mission work as we know it today.

The synod then resolved in 1878 “that each conference commission one of its pastors to go out and journey through such sections of our country where they are brethren of our faith who must be served with the Gospel of Christ.” Thus, we can see in this resolution a kind of District Mission Board beginnings.

Responsibilities and Seizing Opportunities:

In the Wisconsin Synod, there is a Board for Home Missions (BHM). This board oversees the various missions (churches that are not self-supporting) in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean. The Board also decides where to begin mission work in those areas and designates financial support and manpower to such places. They make their decisions based on the input from the Mission Boards from the Twelve Districts of the Synod.

The District Mission Board (DMB) of each District works closely with its member congregations in scouting out various places where a new mission may start. They also work closely with the various missions in the District in supporting them as they carry out the work of the Gospel.

Finally it comes down to an Evangelism Board or Committee of the congregation. The committee or board looks for various opportunities which God places before them to proclaim the message of Christ in their communities, as well as opportunities in which there might be another area in which to begin a mission congregation.

Through it all, those serving on the various boards and committees have a difficult, yet joyful responsibility. They may see the many opportunities which God has placed before them to spread the Word, yet limited funds entail them to use good stewardship in seizing those opportunities. That is the difficult work. Yet, the joyful work is seeing the Gospel continue to change hearts and seeing God continue to extend the “tent” of His kingdom.

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Board for World Missions:

The first world mission undertaken by our Synod was the mission to the Apache Indian's in Arizona in 1893. Please note that this was barely 7 years after Geronimo had been taken off to prison in Florida. The Apaches were considered the most war-like of the Native-Americans. Yet, the Synod sought to seek a Native-American tribe where no missionary of any denomination had as yet set foot. This led our Synod to the Apache Nation where it has had a presence ever since.

Interesting note: This area of Arizona was still an active frontier military post. A rutted wagon road and the military telegraph line were the only avenues of contact with the outside world.

The first mission of the Synod on foreign soil had its beginnings in the year 1924. It was, of course, never a heathen mission. It was a mission with a very specific and limited objective, to serve those citizens of Poland who were of German extraction.

Gradually, the Synod began to work in other countries. In 1936 – they ventured into Nigeria, Africa. In 1951 – they ventured into Japan. In 1953 – they began work in Central Africa. In the 1960's – Mexico and Puerto Rico. And so on so that the Synod is now working across the globe – from Thailand to Brazil, from Japan to Mexico, from Europe to Africa, from Russia to Arizona.

Side Note: In 1948 – the Synod called Pastor Venus Winter of Flint, MI to begin Spanish work in one of the cities of the Southwest. He concentrated on Tucson, AZ. Of particular interest was this – In his first year of work, for as many as 16 consecutive Sunday, the missionary himself was the only soul present in the rented building for services. “On those trying Sundays,” he wrote, “when he had no one else to preach to, your missionary preached to himself by memorizing Bible verses and hymns in Spanish, for he still hoped to have an audience to whom to apply those precious verses and hymns.”

Further Side Note: Great book to read about World Missions in the Wisconsin Synod – “To Every Nation” by Pastor Theodore A. Sauer (yes, we're related. 1st cousin to my Dad.)

Application Questions:

- ⇒ In what ways can the synod facilitate a proclamation of the gospel that is wider and broader than what a single congregation can do?
- ⇒ Why is the value of a synodically planned program of missions as opposed to many separate and uncoordinated efforts?
- ⇒ What about people who want to specify exactly how their mission dollars are used? Should there be flexibility to allow this? What are the possible drawbacks if individuals choose to fund specific mission programs? What are the possible benefits?

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Quotations:

(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)

In addition, the congregations focus on sharing the gospel and extending the reach of each local congregation. Local congregations have the privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the communities in which they are located. They are to make energetic and ongoing efforts to “make disciples.” They are simply organized in this way so that each can address the issues at hand, following the outline of its constitution. Outreach efforts are a primary part of each congregation’s ministry. But sharing the gospel stretches beyond the horizon of the local congregation. As believers, gathered first into local congregations and then bound together by a common faith into a larger association, we desire to extend the stakes of our “little tent.” The Lord directs us to “make disciples of all nations,” and together that is exactly what we try to do through pooling our resources for home and world missions.

In all three of these cases—unity of doctrine, education, and missions—it should be clear that the synod—the voluntary gathering of local congregations—is doing what is more difficult for individual congregations to do on their own. In order to carry out its role, the synod requires congregational resources. The synod acquires the responsibility of funding the gospel ministry given to it by local congregations and administering it. The administration of the work given to the synod also requires human resources in other areas in order to manage the resources wisely and efficiently.

Because the synod as an organization looks beyond the work of any local congregation, it has the opportunity to raise the vision of those in local congregations. While a congregation might see the fields “ripe for harvest” in its own backyard, the Lord places opportunities and opens doors far beyond that local field. The synod’s perception of the fields “ripe for harvest” is wider and broader. The larger church will have the task of communicating its wider and broader vision and encouraging God’s people to rise beyond their own horizons. In another example, the congregation may be content with its called workers and its ministry. It may not see or wish to see a time when its ministry or its called workers will change. But the vision of the synod extends beyond the years of any faithful servant’s ministry to the time when a new called worker will need to be called as a replacement. The vision of the synod then includes a commitment to training enough called servants to meet the needs of the future, and it will seek to prepare qualified and competent called servants for the fields it sees as “ripe for the harvest.” With the resources committed by the individual congregations, the synod will exercise faithful stewardship and wisdom in using those resources to walk through the doors the Lord opens for us while maintaining essential core ministries for the present and future.

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Conclusion:

(From the Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission—WELS Convention 2009)

We have one task to do together “to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the evangelical Lutheran church.” When we make use of the gospel, the Holy Spirit does his work. He has promised to work through this powerful means, and we have no such promise when we fail to use this “power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). When we use the gospel, God’s work will be done. But we will not be satisfied with anything but the best efforts at sharing God’s truth. Our desire for excellence in the ministry of the Word leads us to **encourage one another to continue to grow spiritually by regular study of the Word in an individual and personal way and also in a formal, organized way. For members of our congregations, this means encouraging attendance at worship services and Bible classes. For pastors it means personal study and making use of educational opportunities beyond graduating from our seminary. For teachers and other called servants, it means the same commitment to personal study and continuing education.**

A simple note is in place at this point concerning the use of God’s Word. As Lutherans we understand the necessity of both the law and the gospel. We are confronted daily with our own failures and sins, and the law reveals them clearly and painfully. We are led daily to despair of our failures, because they deserve the judgment of Christ the Lord. But the Lord does not leave us in despair. Instead, he announces his sweet love and forgiveness. Daily we turn from what is so foul within us and by his power turn toward his grace. In that daily repentance we find the comfort, strength, courage, and commitment to live as his witnesses here in this world. So often an exhortation to turn to the Word of God means to follow the recipes found there, and it becomes so easy to make the Word of God a legal canon. It is, instead, a powerful tool by which God leads us away from our own shortcomings to his grace. This understanding is important for each member of each congregation, each called worker in local congregations, and everyone entrusted with the joint work of those congregations of the synod.

Finally, any human effort, discussion, decision, or debate within the visible church here on earth will be flawed by our sinful natures—individually and corporately. Unintended consequences often attend actions even when carefully and prayerfully taken. We therefore turn to the Lord of the church, humbly asking for his guidance in all we think, say, and do. Our goal is the welfare of our visible church, and we cling to the promise of our Lord that he will make all work out for the good of his saints in spite of our shortcomings. May he keep us faithful to his truth and bless our humble efforts to witness to his grace.

Final Applications:

1. What is it that alone accomplishes the mission that God gives to congregations and the synod?
2. Is it a bad thing when members of the synod have differing ideas as to how best to carry out the work that God has given us to do? Why is discussion and debate important?

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3. How should we react when what seem to be good plans do not seem to work out in keeping with our desires? (cf. Acts 16:6-9)

Acts 16:6-9 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bythina, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

4. Once a decision is made regarding mission and ministry programs, what is important to remember and to do regardless of your own personal opinion?
5. List some ways in which your congregation can become more aware of and involved in the work we do together as a synod.
6. How can your congregation provide input to those who have been given the responsibility of planning and carrying out the synod’s work?
7. How would you complete the following statement: “What is the synod? The synod is . . .”

