

PREFACE

A Jubilee – Immersed in the Missio Dei

During my fifty years as a pastor in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I've often wondered what it would take to reverse the trend that had already begun before my ordination in 1970. That trend was a slow but steady decline in the number of members in LCMS congregations.

The four congregations I served comprised faithful people who loved the Lord Jesus and who, for the most part, were faithful in worship, Bible study, and reception of the Lord's Supper. Each of those congregations grew incrementally but not exponentially.

My role as ecclesiastical supervisor and church leader provided opportunity to hear from many pastors and lay leaders the blessings and difficulties their congregations were experiencing. Some were growing slowly. Others were declining steadily. Very few were expanding rapidly.

My question during those years was a simple one: Why? Why were most of our churches not enjoying the kind of rapid growth described in the book of Acts? What was happening in the church two thousand years ago that's not happening today? And what can be done to reverse that trend?

My conclusion is also a simple one: Many in the church today have lost the sense of purpose so clearly understood by the first Christians. The first Christians knew Jesus personally. They lived with him and learned from him. They saw him die. They witnessed his resurrection. He said he would come back. They believed him and led their lives as if he were going to return

during their lifetime.

That was two thousand years ago and he still hasn't come back. Yet his message is just as relevant, just as urgent as it was back then: "You will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8); and, "As my father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21).

Respectfully I commend to you this special resource, prepared by faithful, missional, passionate pastors and church leaders. We, like you, are sent by God: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

That's our message. That's our calling. That's our sending. By God. For God. With God.

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