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1989Involving the Congregation in Jewish Evangelism

The Thailand Report, No. 7 (1980) entitled Christian Witness to the Jewish People in the section, "Mobilization of the Church," says:

The local churches should be motivated and educated for effective outreach and witness to Jewish people. Such evangelism should be seen, not only as a legitimate activity of the church, but as an obligatory activity and responsibility of all Christians.

That is a wish statement, a should dictum, a dream of what we would all like to be the fact. But, in fact, it is not the fact. In preparation for the Consultation on Jewish Evangelism in England in 1986, I surveyed 50 Protestant denominations with a survey form to try to measure the attitudes and activities of those denominations relating to Jewish people. I received 25 responses or a 50% return. My general conclusion at that time was that most mainline denominations were soft on Jewish evangelism with a primary focus on dialogue.

The more evangelical or conservative denominations were often involved in Jewish outreach but some were also schizophrenic about it, saying one thing but not following through with action or they would allow two different positions or views toward Jewish outreach and vacillate back and forth. But more on that later.

My point at this moment is that desire to have the local church or congregation be "motivated and educated for effective outreach and witness to the Jewish people" as an "obligatory activity and responsibility of all Christians" is not happening. That is the reason for this paper. I assume that this is the reason why I was asked to present it and this is the reason why I was interested in preparing it.

And from my experience of working in a mainline denomination, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, during 40 years of ministry and 15 years of direct association with Jewish evangelism, I am convinced it will not happen very quickly in the majority of the congregations of this country. Some of it is happening in my denomination and we see a growing interest as 300 attended a workshop on Jewish evangelism at our Great Commission Convocation last fall. But the joint efforts of denominations and missionary agencies working together can help make it happen.

What I say and suggest in this paper is colored by my own experience in Jewish evangelism. Let me share that background for it will help you understand what I present.

I grew up in a Lutheran community in Bay City, Michigan, and did not know any Jewish people. I am sure there were some Jewish people in Bay City but they did not have any relationships with Lutherans that I knew as a child and their identity as Jewish people was not commonly known. The population of Michigan is 5.3% Lutheran and less than 1% is Jewish. The only Jews I was aware of were those in the Bible and I thought that there were two kinds of them, the good ones and the bad ones. The good ones were the patriarchs and heroes of the Old Testament and the bad ones were the grumbling Israelites and those mean Pharisees and Sadducees.

I left home to go to college in Milwaukee and the situation did not change. Wisconsin is 20% Lutheran and only 0.7% Jewish. Today I have Jewish friends in Milwaukee, but in my college days in the early 40's I was not aware of any. Even my college education did not make me aware of the Jewish people in our generation, either in the world or in our country. If it did, I do not remember it.

My Seminary training was in St. Louis and for the first time I became aware of Jewish people. A professor teaching Old Testament History kept talking about them and even had us visit a synagogue. But I had no personal dealings with any Jew.

I left the Seminary to serve in the Marine Corps for several years but while I met guys of other national backgrounds and religions, Greeks, Italians, Checks, Poles, I did not personally know any Marines who claimed to be Jewish.

After graduation from the Seminary I served as a pastor for 14 years in congregations in Southern Illinois. The only Jewish people I heard of were through the grapevine that this family or that business man was Jewish. I served 9 years on a college campus as chaplain and professor in Seward, Nebraska, and the story was the same. Nebraska is 15% Lutheran and 0.5% Jewish.

The first time I became aware of the concern to witness to Jewish people was in Buffalo, New York. I was helping to lead an evangelism weekend for some Lutheran congregations where we planned a door-to-door survey of a neighborhood near the church where we were meeting. As the pastor and I discussed the arrangements, he pointed to the map and said, "We can't go into that area. Those people are Jewish." I was not sensitive enough to question him further at the moment, but later I kept wondering, "Why? Don't we witness to Jewish people? If not, why not?" Now I know that the same attitude is prevalent in many congregations and I call it the great "Lutheran passover."

I am telling you all of this because I am a typical Lutheran and I assume, to a degree, a typical member of a mainline denomination. Most members have this kind of background and these kinds of experiences. The main difference that I see in society today is that our members become aware of the Jewish people through the daily news that comes from the problems between Israel and the Arabs. But this, most of the time, does not create favorable feelings toward Jewish people nor connect with local Jewish people, much less foster a concern for sharing the Gospel with them. It is in this climate that we must talk about involving the congregation in Jewish evangelism.

I was forced to become involved. In 1972 I accepted the call of my church body to serve as the director of evangelism. In the following year a resolution was presented to our national convention, which was eventually assigned to my department to carry out.

Resolved, That the Synod instruct the District Boards for Evangelism to focus their attention on the task of bringing the Gospel of the atonement through faith in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah to the Jewish people; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod's Board for Evangelism produce guidelines and materials which will aid individuals, congregations, and districts in this effort.

In order to carry out this resolution my Board decided to appoint a committee of specialists, but first we had to find them. We had some difficulty and did an extensive search to find people who had an interest in Jewish evangelism, some experience in doing it or were Jewish believers. That committee, first appointed in 1974 and called a Task Force on Witnessing to Jewish people, is still in existence with changed personnel of course during these 15 years.

In my position as the chief staff person of the Board for Evangelism Services, I have worked closely with this committee. This is how I have come to be involved in Jewish evangelism, have come to know some Jewish believers both in and out of the Lutheran Church, have come to learn about the work of many Jewish evangelism organizations and agencies, and learned more about the attitudes within my own church at all levels. It is from this background that I dare to talk about "Involving the Congregation in Jewish Evangelism."

I have to speak out of the context of Lutheran congregations but I hope that much of what I say will fit other denominations and the proper application can be made. I have tried to organize my thoughts under the following points, which are shaped in the form of direct suggestions.

1. Be Sensitive to the Church's Tradition

- a. The Church Body Background

In our country denominational loyalty is eroding and there is a growing migration between congregations. Yet there are strong attitudes in congregations that are shaped by their connection with particular mainline denominations. Lutherans are proud of Luther. They are ashamed of some of the things he said about Jews, especially when Jewish people quote them or when Hitler used them as a basis for his actions.

For years Jewish people knew more about what Luther said concerning the Jews than Lutherans. Two reasons which contributed to this situation was that Luther's book, On the Jews and Their Lies, was not published in English until 1971 in the 55 volume American Edition of Luther's writing, and those who did know about it were ashamed of it and did not talk about it.

A Jewish man, who grew up in a Jewish community in Brooklyn, came to faith and joined the Lutheran Church, the church of his wife. Some years later Jewish friends taunted him with the statements which Luther said about how to treat the Jews: burn their synagogues and schools, destroy their houses, abolish safe conduct on the highway, forbid the rabbis to teach. He couldn't believe it and went to his pastor at the time in Orlando, Florida. When he found out that it was true, he almost left the Lutheran church. But he stayed and became instrumental in having our church body pass a resolution, the only one that Lutherans have ever passed which deals with this issue. It said:

...while we are deeply indebted to Luther for his discovery and enunciation of the Gospel, on the other hand, we deplore and disassociate ourselves from Luther's negative statements about the Jewish people and, by the same token, we deplore the use today of such sentiments by Luther to incite anti-Christian and/or anti-Lutheran sentiment. (Resolution 3-09, St. Louis, 1983)

Let me add here some further comments about Luther. It is necessary to deal with this issue in a congregation in order to put those vicious statements by Luther into the proper context without necessarily excusing him. Unless this is done a congregation will resist becoming involved in Jewish evangelism.

Luther was very concerned about Jewish evangelism, so much so that he wrote five books about the Jews. Some historians even trace the beginning of evangelical Jewish missions to Luther's first book on the Jews, That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew. In that book he wrote:

Our fools, the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks - the crude asses heads - have hitherto so treated the Jews that . . . if I had been a Jew I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings . . . I hope that if one deals kindly with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs. (Luther's Works, Am. Ed., vol. 45, p. 200)

The immediate reason why Luther wrote the book which contains those strong statements, On the Jews and Their Lies, was his "literary temper tantrum" over the Jewish interpretation of such passages as Genesis 49, 2 Samuel 23, Haggai 2 and Daniel 9, combined with his deep disappointment that more Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. He was, of course, a child of his times and absorbed some of the anti-Semitic attitudes of his day, and he was extremely sensitive to the wrath of God over any rejection or blasphemy of Jesus. He wrote in the infamous book, in his usual strong, overstatement:

Shame on you, here, there, or wherever you may be, you damned Jews . . . You are not worthy of looking at the outside of the Bible, much less reading it. You should read only the Bible that is found under the sow's tail, and eat and drink the letters that come from there. (Luther's Works, Am. Ed., vol. 47, p. 212)

Deep in Luther's heart, despite whatever else was there that led him to those nasty statements, there was a concern for the conversion of Jewish people. He even closes his book On the Jews and Their Lies with this hope: "May Christ, our dear Lord, convert them mercifully and preserve us steadfast and immovable in the knowledge of him, who is eternal life." (Luther's Works, Am. Ed., vol. 47, p. 306)

I don't want to oversimplify Luther. His feelings toward the Jews were complex and ambivalent, sometimes filled with compassion and love but at other times vulgar and abrasive, but his main theme was his hope for their salvation. He was even concerned about the practical questions relating to their conversion. In his "Table Talk" he gave the following instructions as to how a Jewish person ought to be baptized: "Fill a large tub with water and, having divested the Jew of his clothes, cover him with a white garment. He should then sit down in the tub and you ought to submerge him in the water." (Bruce Lieske, "A Lost Heritage" Concordia Journal, May, 1976, p. 105)

In his last sermon, preached three days before he died in Eisleben on February 15, 1546, Luther said:

We want to act in a Christian way toward them and offer them first of all the Christian faith, that they might accept the Messiah, who, after all, is their kinsman and born of their flesh and blood and is of the real seed of Abraham of which they boast. . . . We still want to treat them with Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord. (Armes Holimino, The Lutheran Reformation and the Jews. Hancock: Finnish Lutheran Book Concern, 1949, p. 127)

But enough on Luther. Let's get back to our first major point which says that to involve congregations in Jewish evangelism we must be sensitive to the church body's tradition and background. Missouri Synod has always been a mission minded church but our approach to missions was always through sending others to do it for them, to foreign shores of China, India and Africa, to the Indians of America, and even at the beginning to the Jewish people.

The first missionary to the Jewish people in Missouri Synod circles was to the immigrants in the person named Daniel Landsmann. He had become a Christian while living in Jerusalem and then for 18 years was a Christian missionary to the Jews in Constantinople under the auspices of a Scottish Society for Jewish Missions. Three parishes in New York called him to work for them as a Missouri Synod missionary, which he did from 1883 until his death in 1896. During the following years there were also full time missionaries in Chicago and St. Louis. But that ended in the late 1930's.

Yes, Missouri Synod has a background of Jewish missionary activity. There was even a Kommission fuer Judenmission (Commission for Jewish Mission) in the Missouri Synod for 48 years, from 1884 until 1932. But Missouri Synod has little background of personal witnessing and sharing the faith with one's neighbors and friends. So when formal missionary work among Jewish people stopped, all Jewish evangelism stopped and it did not start again to any

degree until the appointment of the Committee on Witnessing to Jewish People in 1974.

b. The Local Congregation's Background

In approaching the congregation with Jewish evangelism, we need not only to be sensitive to the church body's background but also to the local congregation's background. This is shaped largely by where the original members came from, the community in which the congregation exists, and the pastors who serve it. If the members are largely German Lutheran background, one might expect what Steve Cohen found when he first came to know Jesus as his Messiah in 1973 and visited a Lutheran church in Seattle. In a Bible class he asked the simple question of how Lutherans share their faith, how they witness. All Steve knew was his experience with his friend Alan who had prayed for him for two years and had shared the Bible with him. He was not prepared for the answer of a little old lady in the Bible class, "We Lutherans don't do that sort of thing."

My point is that in many older congregations the real need is to motivate the congregation to do personal witnessing to gentiles, as well as Jews, to be concerned about the lost, to be active in all kinds of local evangelism. That lady in the Bible class probably gave her offerings to send missionaries around the world, but she did not connect that action with talking to her neighbor about Jesus, whether he be Jew or Gentile.

On the other hand, we find congregations, especially younger ones or ones which are made up of many people from non-Lutheran background who have joined the church, to be excited about witnessing and have very active evangelism programs. The main concern in such a congregation is often to sensitize them to Jewish people so that both in formal programs and in personal witnessing they are not guilty of the "Lutheran passover" and that they develop a program of intentional Jewish outreach. So our starting place, as our first point, is be sensitive to where the church is, both the church body and the local congregation.

2. Nurture the Congregation

Before a congregation will become involved in Jewish evangelism there needs to be some education, some nurturing and development of the attitudes which will accept and include Jewish evangelism. This is point 2, the need to nurture the congregation. There appears to be a need for two kinds of nurture, at least in Lutheran congregations, in understanding Jewish people and in understanding the need to witness to them.

a. In Understanding the Jewish People

It is an oversimplification, but I confront it all the time. Gentile Lutherans who have had little contact with Jewish people think of the Bible whenever Jews are mentioned. They think of the "children of Israel" in the Old Testament or of the kind of Jews that Jesus spoke to, that resisted him and plotted his death. That is relatively easy to deal with for Christians can readily understand the difference when it is shown to them. Bruce Lieske

tells of the lady who visited a synagogue and asked after the tour, "Where is the altar? Where do you keep the lambs?"

Most Gentile Christians have some prejudiced stereotypes of Jewish people. Perhaps the only way they have read the word Jew is as a verb. They think you can tell who is Jewish by the way he looks and how he or she talks. They must be made aware of the fallacy of these stereotypes and learn that there are Jews in many nations of the world and learn that some of their favorite people are Jews: Jack Benny, Barbara Walters, Paul Newman, Dinah Shore.

Not so easy to deal with are other issues which are biblical and about which there is some difference of opinion. One of those issues is the dispersion and regathering of Israel. The dispersion is accepted as biblical and historically true. The problem comes with the regathering. How many of the Old Testament prophecies refer to the restoration of Israel under Zerubbabel; how many refer to the church and the coming of Christ, and how many refer to the future Kingdom of Glory - or do they refer to the physical return of Jews to the land in modern times? Was the land permanently given to Abraham, Isaac and Israel and their descendants? Is the modern state of Israel a fulfillment of prophecy?

Another area deals with the end times. One of the basic Lutheran confessions, the Augsburg Confession, Article 17, states: "Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless." The traditional understanding is that this is a rejection of the millennium in terms of a physical rule of Christ on earth, but the question remains as to why these are "Jewish opinions." Does this include restoration of the land and the conversion of all Jews? Lutherans have different opinions about the understanding of the phrase "all Israel will be saved" in Romans 11.

There is no easy way to deal with such issues in a congregation, but in seeking to help a congregation become involved in Jewish evangelism, one must be aware of the varying views and avoid letting them become the center of attention which draws so much heat that there is no warmth left for Jewish evangelism.

b. In Understanding the Need for Witnessing to Jewish People

Churches in the United States are caught up in a pluralistic society which puts a high priority on toleration, acceptance and individualism. In the Gallup study of The Unchurched American 1988, 80% of those polled said that one should arrive at their own beliefs without the help of a church or synagogue. There is strong resistance to accepting some of the unpopular views of Scripture: there is only one way of salvation, through the name of Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12); anyone who does not believe in Jesus will be damned (Mark 16:16, John 8:24). To insist that this is true means that one must say that the Jewish person's faith in Judaism is incomplete without Jesus as the Messiah. Jewish people, as well as many Gentile Americans, call this intolerant narrow bigotry, even anti-Semitic.

What is the church to do? The individual Christian often does not logically think this through but just lets two views exist even though they are inconsistent. I came across this first in the book by Roger Staubach, First Down, Lifetime to God (Word Books, 1974). He confessed to be an active member of the Roman Catholic church. On one page he writes, "I believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He is the Redeemer of my sins and Savior of all mankind." Some pages later he writes, "It disturbs me when fundamentalist Christians say the Jewish person is not saved because of ignoring Christ. I believe all people have a chance for salvation based on their own situation and God's all fair judgment."

As far as church bodies are concerned, there is the same kind of inconsistency. In the survey which I took in 1986, 18 out of 21 denominations which filled out the survey form said "yes" to the statement, "We should witness to Jewish people so that they may come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah," and yet very few had assigned this responsibility to any group in the church or had any intentional work in this area. The national Commander of the Salvation Army at the time said in a letter, "We definitely believe in evangelizing the Jewish people even as we would evangelize any who are outside the orb of the Christian faith. . ." but two paragraphs later he added, "It is a sensitive matter to evangelize Jewish people for, on the one hand, you do not wish to condemn their Jewish faith - many of them are 'living up to the light they have' - but, at the same time, we should make a positive Christian witness."

It seems to me he is bordering on what many more liberal churches accept as the two-covenant theory which allows the Jewish people to have their covenant and Christians to have theirs, as two separate ways to peace with God and eternal life. This is not the place to discuss the implications and many variations of that approach.

There is another concern, however, that we need to be aware of in dealing with congregations, that is to allow every congregation or every member to believe whatever they want to about Jewish people. The World Council of Churches used this approach in the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People which met in Jerusalem, June 20-23, 1977: (Underline added for emphasis)

Some of us believe that we have to bear witness also to the Jews.

Some among us are convinced, however, that Jews are faithful and obedient to God even though they do not accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The American Lutheran Church used similar language in a statement on the Jewish community which they adopted in 1974: (Underline added for emphasis)

Some Lutherans find in Scripture clear directions to bear missionary witness in which conversion is hoped for.

Others hold that when Scripture speaks about the relation between Jews and Christians, its central theme is that God's promises to Israel have not been abrogated.

The one approach tries to bring Jews into the body of Christ, while the other tends to see the church and the Jewish people as together forming one people of God, separated from one another for the time being, yet with the promise that they will ultimately become one.

Much education is necessary in most congregations. It is a slow ongoing process. As Jesus began with 12, so a pastor may need to begin with a small group of leaders. Resource material is essential. We provide a Manual on Witnessing to Jewish People for personal reading or group discussion. It has material and statistics on understanding Jewish people today and what they believe, as well as help in learning to witness to them. Another tool is a set of 8 "teaching tapes", Beginning at Jerusalem. Two tracts are available for Christians, "Don't Try to Convert Jews" and "Israel Failed?" A Bible study course is also available, "Comfort, Comfort my People."

3. Assign Responsibility

Now let's move into some more practical points. The first of these is to assign responsibility for the entire area of relationship with Jewish people in the community, and for efforts in the congregation. This assignment might be given to the board or committee that deals with the entire area of evangelism or to a special group appointed for this task, depending on the size of the congregation and the number of Jewish people in the community. Many of the things which are suggested in the other points which follow could be carried out by this group. Two specific things they would need to do as they begin their work are:

a. Discover the Jews in the Community

How many Jewish people are in the area which the congregations considers its parish area or the area which it can adequately reach in its outreach program? What synagogues or temples are in the area? Are the Jewish people Reform, Conservative or Orthodox? How religious are they?

b. Assess the Needs of the Congregation

While studying the Jewish people in the community, the committee needs also to look at their own congregation to assess what is needed. If the members of the congregation have had little contact with Jewish people and have little understanding of them, one of the needs might be to plan for such contacts through visits to synagogues and temples as part of the educational program of children, as Bible study activities or special efforts by groups within the congregation.

c. Organize for Work

After comparing the situation in the community with the needs of the congregation, the committee needs to set goals and make specific assignments. Some group must be responsible for developing good relationship with the Jewish people in the community, planning a "Jewish Fellowship Week," "An

Evening of Understanding," or other activities to develop relationship and contact. Someone needs to review the education program of the Sunday school and other children programs so that Jewish concerns are included. Someone needs to be assigned the responsibility of training a group of callers who can make visits to Jewish homes or canvass Jewish areas.

4. Develop a Congregational Library for Jewish-Christian Relations

The average church member has little or no access to material which could help them to understand Jewish people, their history, beliefs and current situation. A special section could be established in the congregational library and a variety of subjects covered with special material. Areas to include: church-synagogue relations, Jewish holidays, the holocaust, the State of Israel, modern Jewish life and practice, anti-Semitism, how to witness to Jewish people, fulfillment of prophecy.

5. Deal with Anti-Semitism

The church does not like to admit that anti-Semitism still exists but I see evidence of it wherever I travel around the country in Lutheran churches. It appears in comments using old cliches about the Jews controlling the media, having the money, controlling business and in newer issues relating to the State of Israel and the problem with the Arab nations. Leaders of the church who are honest about the situation admit its existence.

In my survey of 1986, 18 out of 20 denominations that checked this specific question admitted that some evidence of anti-Semitism among the laity still exists and 15 said there was also evidence among the clergy. The major concern is that, while a high percentage admitted to the existence of anti-Semitism, most confessed that they have no programs for dealing with it in order to try to change the situation. The same is true for congregations.

Some of the anti-semitism in our churches is theological, connected to two-covenant theology. In my church, the Missouri Synod, we have made a conscious effort for 10 years to sensitize and motivate pastors and congregations for Jewish outreach through synodical resolutions, articles in periodicals and journals, special publications and some workshops. Yet, after 10 years of effort, in a survey taken in 1984 we still received comments like:

I personally think this emphasis on Jewish evangelism is a racial slur.

It seems rather odd to me to be telling the people of God about God.

Please let the Jewish people alone, or listen to what they have to say about themselves.

If there are racial slurs toward Jewish people heard in a congregation this needs to be confronted through sermons, Bible classes, and discussion groups. Perhaps it is best discussed under other topics such as the holocaust which is more popular and captures the interest of the people.

While discussing the history of how the church and society has treated the Jews, the question of how we feel about them today is appropriate.

Many of our congregations have found it helpful to use a filmstrip which our Task Force developed, "The Apple of God's Eye." It traces the history of the church's treatment of the Jews since Pentecost and then confronts the question of how we treat them today

6. Appreciate our Jewish Roots

Many Christians do not understand or appreciate the Jewish roots of their faith. While they readily admit that Jesus came to us through the Jewish people, they find it difficult to acknowledge their debt to the Jews for much of the style of their worship, especially the liturgical churches: the use of the vestments, the form of the church building, the church year, and elements of their liturgy as the Nunc Dimittis and Benedicamus. They don't know that both the synagogue service and their service ends with the Jewish Aaronic benediction. One way to help sensitize them to the connection with the Jewish heritage is to take specific note of the Jewish festivals as they occur.

The week before Pentecost I spoke in our daily chapel at our headquarters, the International Center where I work, on a comparison of Pentecost to Shavuoth. Visiting our building that day was one of the TWA pilots held hostage in the highjacking of TWA flight 847. He is an ordained pastor of the Missouri Synod and serves a small congregation in Cascade, Idaho. He was impressed with the message and asked me after the service if there was a way in which he could be aware of the Jewish holidays and understand a little about them.

I suggested the Bible studies our Task Force had prepared on each of the holidays, but a 30 to 50 page Bible study was not what he was looking for. He wanted something simple and brief. I promised him that we would develop something. The result was the 12 page booklet, Jewish Holidays which has been quite popular in our circles. It has one page devoted to each of the major festivals. We also continue to offer for group or individual study the larger Bible studies.

A growing custom is for congregations to celebrate the passover with a seder meal. We have prepared a special booklet to help them do that, "A Passover Haggadah for Christians" or we encourage congregations to use members of our Task Force to lead it or to use staff from organizations, like Jews for Jesus, who make a fine "Christ in the Passover" demonstration.

We need to teach the message of the Olive Tree from Romans 11. Jesus is the main stem, rising out of the "root of Jesse." The Jews are the branches, most of which were cut off because of unbelief. We Gentiles have been grafted in. But the broken off branches can also be restored and there will be one tree of Jew and Gentile.

7. Support Jewish Missionary Agencies

We have discovered that in the Missouri Synod the Jews for Jesus organization has made presentations in 21% of our congregations, if our survey information is correct. We get many phone calls and letters asking whether this is acceptable, what their theology is, and if we would recommend it. We always do.

There are some Christians who are always cautious about supporting missionary agencies which are not those of the national body itself. I believe, however, that support of independent agencies does not detract from the mission work of the church but contributes to a general mission interest. So I urge congregations to support missionary agencies which function in their area and to which they can relate, all of them, but especially the three which are Lutheran which touch many of our congregations: Good News for Israel, a pan-Lutheran organization from Minneapolis-St. Paul area; the Lutheran Institute for Jewish Evangelism from Trenton, New Jersey; and Ministry of Hope also in New Jersey.

The Thailand Report stated, "Parachurch missionary agencies can offer expertise and support to the church in its missionary task." That is the challenge for all of the agencies. Some of their materials can be very helpful. I think of a simple piece like "Some Pointers on Witnessing to our Jewish Friends," or the paperback Y'shua which we have used. I am sure there are many others.

One concern here is that if the parachurch agencies seek the financial support of congregations they must also help the local congregation to motivate its members, to sensitize them to the task, to equip them and provide materials which they can use. The materials must respect the theology of that denomination and not make an issue of points of difference.

Areas where there are differences are the sacraments, the millennium and all the issues connected with these. Another example is the emphasis on "The Jew First." For a local congregation not into Jewish concerns it is hard to accept the interpretation that the scripture teaches that our evangelistic outreach must focus first on Jewish people and only after we have done this should we reach out to Gentiles and, as some even say, only then will our efforts be successful. For centuries the church has understood those passages from Paul "to the Jew first" in a historical, situational sequence and not as a principle of missions for the churches through the centuries.

If it turns churches off, why focus on it? What difference does it make? Aren't we concerned about the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles? Why pit a priority of one over the other?

8. Respect the Heritage of the Jewish People

The surveys that I have seen, including the ones I took of denominations and within my church, all say that the mainline denominations still think of a Jewish believer as being assimilated into the life of a traditional congregation. I know that most of the Jewish people who have come to faith through our congregations have done this. Perhaps this is the only kind of Jewish person we can attract and win, the one who is willing to assimilate, at least to a degree. Less than half of the denominations surveyed said yes

to the statement "A Jewish person who accepts Jesus as the Messiah, in my opinion, may continue to observe some Jewish customs as Passover, circumcision, etc." Only 4 out of 20 who answered this statement said that they could join a non-denominational Messianic congregation.

A related factor was the response to the statement about what one should call a person who accepts Jesus as the Messiah. The order of preference selected from the choices listed was:

1. A believer
2. A Christian
3. A Jewish Christian
4. A Hebrew Christian
5. A Jewish Believer
6. A completed Jew
7. A Messianic Jew

Among the written comments in the survey were statements that indicated some denominational leaders did not understand the terms "Messianic Jew" or "completed Jew." It seems that denominational Christians are more comfortable with treating Jewish people like any other Christian and do not want to make a fuss over their Jewish heritage. Our members need to learn the difference between the essence of the Christian faith and what is cultural or optional. When a German becomes a Christian he is not required to give up his beer and brats, or his sauerkraut and "umpa" music.

Related to this may be the suspicion which denominational Christians have over the concept of a Messianic congregation or synagogue. They are concerned over whether this leads to legalism, to separatism, or to judaizing as in Paul's concern with the Galatians.

Despite these misgivings, I am suggesting that if a congregation is serious about reaching Jewish people they must take special care to respect the heritage of Jewish people. The practical way this can be done in an established denomination is uncertain. One way was tried by our congregation in Beverly Hills, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church. That congregation, under the leadership of its pastor, Rev. R. John Perling, consented to have Ahavat Zion Messianic Synagogue meet in their former church building which is now used as an educational and fellowship hall. Ahavat Zion is a viable, authentic Christian Jewish group which draws several hundred for worship on holy day services.

The result of this partnership has been some cooperative projects between the two groups, and some flow back and forth in their services, but it also increased the reaction of the Jewish community and the anti-missionary activities of Jewish organizations in the Los Angeles area. The Jewish reaction was both to the approach which used the terms "synagogue" and "rabbi" which were called deceptive, and to the legitimizing of a Jewish-Christian group by a Gentile Christian congregation.

There is no one best way to recognize the Jewish heritage of Jewish believers, and no one best way to attract Jewish people to a Christian group. Another approach might be to have a special group, recognized by the congregation, made up of Jewish people, or designed to attract Jewish people,

which meets separately but also with the entire congregation. In any case, we have a lot to learn in this area and need to be open to experiments. We generally know what does not work, but not what does.

After Daniel Landsman worked for 13 years among the Jewish people in New York, the result of his labor was 37 Jewish believers who reached the baptismal font of Lutheran churches. Part of the problem was that the churches for whom he worked insisted that when he began instructing a Jewish person in the faith, at a certain point he had to turn the Jewish believer over to a Missouri Synod pastor who then tried to prepare the person for membership in a traditional German-Lutheran congregation. This didn't work too well.

For many years most denominations have been committed to a parish approach in Jewish evangelism. If a Messianic congregation, sponsored by a denomination, which is closer to the center approach, works better, we may need to consider it.

In conclusion perhaps I can again compare the problem of involving congregations in Jewish evangelism to my personal journey. It took me many years to move from ignorance and indifference to a point where I can say:

I have learned to love and respect the Jewish people.

I am ashamed of how Christians have often treated Jewish people.

I thank Jewish people for the heritage which has enriched the life of my church.

I am convinced that the Jewish people need Jesus as their Messiah.

I want Jewish people to believe that Jesus is their Messiah and I pray for that.

It took me many years to come to this attitude and it will take some congregations that long too. Anything that Jewish evangelism or mission agencies can do to help that happen will be a real blessing. I think that these points when put into practice will help to make it happen.

1. Be sensitive to the church's tradition
2. ~~N~~^uture the congregation
3. Assign responsibility
4. Develop a congregation library
5. Deal with anti-Semitism
6. Appreciate our Jewish roots
7. Support Jewish missionary agencies
8. Respect the heritage of the Jewish people

I close with Paul's words, which I know are yours as they are mine, "My hearts desire and prayer to God is that they be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Involving the Congregation in Jewish Evangelism

1. Be Sensitive to the Church's Tradition
 - a. The Church Body Background
2. Nurture the Congregation
 - a. In understanding the Jewish People
 - b. In Understanding the Need for Witnessing to Jewish People
3. Assign Responsibility
 - a. Discover the Jews in the Community
 - b. Assess the Needs of the Congregation
 - c. Organize for Work
4. Develop a Congregational Library for Jewish-Christian Relations
5. Deal With Anti-Semitism
6. Appreciate our Jewish Roots
7. Support Jewish Missionary Agencies
8. Respect the Heritage of the Jewish People