

CHURCH STRUCTURE

In those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word." This proposal pleased the whole group. Acts 6:1-5

The New Testament church was growing and with that growth came some problems. It seems that some of the widows were being overlooked when it came to the distribution of food. These widows had no one else to care for them and the Christians were trying to help everyone, but some were missed. Someone brought this to the attention of the Twelve apostles and asked them to fix the problem. The Twelve, however, knew that their main work was to preach the Gospel and instruct people in God's Word, not feed people. They suggested that the believers elect seven men to take over the work of helping those in need. This could be considered the first New Testament Church Council.

Today, congregations elect men to serve them and help their pastor with the work of the church. Your pastor is called by your congregation to preach and teach God's Word. He doesn't have time to handle all the many other things that go on in the church, like mowing the lawn, cleaning the building, locking the doors, painting and changing light bulbs. That is where the various church boards and committees come in. They can help the congregation to see that all of this gets done.

As you grow older you will be asked to help out with the work of your church. There are many roles to fill and many places to use the special talents God has given to you. In this chapter we will talk about some of the work that members of the congregation can do.

PURPOSE AND MISSION

The Twelve apostles had the right idea. They knew what the main mission or purpose of the church was. God has called each of us to serve Him by reaching out to others with the saving Gospel message of Jesus Christ. As fellow believers we gather together to worship and enjoy each other's company. There are many things that we can do better by using all of our talents together. This is why we form congregations, to do a better job of serving our Lord and doing His work. Your congregation probably has a written Mission Statement. Ask your leader or pastor to show it to you. You can also have them explain its meaning to you if you are not sure what it means.

CONGREGATION STRUCTURE

The New Testament church formed their first "church council" by choosing seven men and installing them. Your congregation has some type of structure that it uses to carry out its work. How big or detailed that structure is depends on the size of your congregation. It might also depend on if your church has a Christian Day School or not.

The top group in the congregation structure is your Voters' Assembly. This is made up of the adult male members of the congregation. They may hold meeting during the year to conduct the business of the church and elect officers who take care of the business between meetings. Most churches have quarterly voters' meetings.

To carry out the day to day work of the church, voters elect men to serve as officers of their congregation. Usually there is a Church Council (like a Train Council), that is put in charge. In some cases they elect their own officers and in others the officers are elected by the voters.

Under this Church Council will be several boards or committees. These groups will be in charge of various parts of the work that needs to be done. In most congregations the following boards will be formed: evangelism, stewardship, finance, property, education, elders, worship, budget and worker's care. The number and size of these boards or committees will depend on the size and activities of your congregation.

Have your Lutheran Pioneer leader explain your congregations structure. Maybe you can talk to your pastor or one of the officers of the congregation about this.

PASTORS AND TEACHERS

Your congregation has a pastor who serves you. He has been called by your voters to preach and teach God's Word. He is asked to baptize people, teach instruction classes, marry people, conduct funerals and conduct regular worship services. He also will guide the various boards and committees in spiritual matters. Another job he has is to guide you and other members of your congregation in ways to best use your gifts and talents to God's glory.

If you have a Christian Day School you have one or more teachers who are called to instruct the children of the congregation in God's Word and in the various skills taught in a school. Some congregations have called a teacher even though they do not have a school. This person oversees the Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and other education activities. He also assists the pastor in his duties.

Talk with your pastor and teachers about the work they do. They can also tell you about the schooling they have had.

YOUR SYNOD

Your congregation, its pastor and teachers are part of a group of churches, pastors and teachers we call a synod. Congregations with Lutheran Pioneer Trains are part of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS.) In a couple of cases the congregation is independent but is in fellowship with either of the two synods.

A synod is group of churches, pastors and teachers that believe the same things based on God's Word. We say they are in fellowship with one another based on their beliefs. Your pastor can explain the details about our fellowship. Ask him to come and talk to you and the rest of your Train about it.

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) began in Milwaukee, WI many years ago. It was formed by congregations that were mostly made up of people who had come to America from Germany. Their services were conducted in German and children learned their catechism in German. Since its beginning the WELS has grown to well over 1200 congregations in all 50 states and Canada. It also has missions throughout the world. The WELS is headquartered at N16 W23377 Stone Ridge Drive, Waukesha WI 53188-1108.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) began as a group of churches started by people who had come to the United States from Norway. It has over 125 congregations throughout the United States. The ELS is headquartered at 447 Division St., Mankato, MN 56001.

The synod usually has a convention every other year. At the convention delegates hear reports on the work that is going on. They also make decisions on how to carry out the work of the Lord in the coming two years. At the convention, the delegates elect the synod's officers. There is a president, vice president and a secretary that are elected.

The synod is divided into districts. In the year that there is no synod convention, the district will hold a convention and elect its officers, hear reports on the Lord's work going on in the district and plan the work for the coming years. Each district is divided into conferences and each conference into circuits. At the lower levels of this structure, pastors and teachers often get together to hold meetings and training sessions where they can improve their skills.

By joining together in a synod, we are able to do more than if each congregation tried to do things alone. With a synod we are able to have area Lutheran High Schools, synod-wide high schools, pastor and teacher training college and a seminary where pastors can be trained. Our synod also has its own publishing house where books, catechisms, hymnals and other materials can be published for use by our churches. By working together we are able to do mission work in foreign countries because we can use the resources of all of us.

You can find out more about your synod by talking to your pastor, teacher or one of the leaders of your congregation. Ask them to come to one of your meetings and explain the synod's work to you.

As you can see, by being a member of your Lutheran Pioneer Train and your congregation, you are also part of a much larger group of believers. As you grow older you will have the

opportunity to serve your Lord in many ways. Maybe you will be a pastor or a teacher and be able to share God's Word on a full time basis. If you can't do that, you can serve in your congregation on one of the boards or committees to help carry out God's mission of spreading the Gospel to all who have not heard it. God has given us many challenges and opportunities to serve Him. We need to answer with the hymn writer "Here am I, Send me. Send me."