The Peter Plan

Part 5 of 5 – The Plan Helps with Evangelism Too

Dear friends in Christ,

Over the past four weeks, we have laid out some goals of *The Peter Plan.* All of the goals could be classified as “in-reach.” In-reach is any ministry that a congregation performs to help members that are in need, including helping members who are perhaps straying from the faith.

But that is only half of what God calls a congregation to do. It is also God’s will that a congregation engages in evangelism, doing all it can to share the gospel with unbelievers or unchurched individuals. *The Peter Plan* will help us with evangelism too.

St. Paul says, **“If an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”** (1 Corinthians 14:24,25). Paul tells us to expect that occasionally unbelievers and people curious about Christianity will come into our worship services. (The word “prophesy” is being used in the broad sense here, referring to preaching and teaching the Word.) We want that to happen! In the liturgy and sermon, the law and gospel is clearly proclaimed. Therefore, “unbelievers” and “inquirers” can benefit greatly from attending worship.

This is why we encourage our members to invite friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors to accompany them to church. Sometimes, for special services (such as Christmas Eve or Easter), we even provide our members with invitations they can distribute to those people. Sometimes we send out postcards inviting our community to join us for a special worship service.

When a worship visitor does join us, one of the biggest challenges is getting their contact information. The percentage of visitors who will sign a guest register in a church entry foyer is very low. This is a problem.

For a prospect to realize that he needs to be part of a church, it often takes more than visiting one worship service. It typically takes repeated contact with God’s Word. It almost always takes some one-on-one time with that prospect and the pastor or a trained evangelist. In a worship service, the pastor is speaking to a group. However, when the pastor or an evangelist is sitting in the living room of someone who has visited worship, he can make the message more personal. Perhaps the worship visitor attended because of some major life challenge he or she is facing. The pastor or evangelist can apply the gospel to that *specific* situation. What a blessing! However, none of this can happen unless visitors provide us with their contact information when they visit worship.

This brings us to a third goal of *The Peter Plan*. (We said the primary goal is to identify members who need assistance due to changes in schedule or circumstances that prevent them from attending worship. We said the secondary goal was to encourage members who are straying from the means of grace.) In our WELS congregations, using worship registers has been demonstrated to be *substantially* more effective at collecting visitor contact information than having a guest register in the entry foyer. Why? Because as the register is passed down the row, everyone is filling it out. Members all do it because they know it is part of *The Peter Plan*. Then when the register gets to the worship visitor, there is a bit of a positive peer pressure to do the same. *“Everyone else filled this out. I guess I will too.”*

Just as there is a system in place for how to handle when members are persistently absent, there is also a system in place to encourage worship visitors. They are thanked for joining us. They are visited and given a small token of our appreciation. They are put on a mailing list, receiving invitations to future worship services and other fellowship opportunities.

Therefore, *The Peter Plan* does not just help us feed our flock (in-reach). It can also help us in our efforts to bring new sheep into the pen (evangelism). All of this is to the glory of God!