

A Policy Analysis of the Ablaze!® Movement

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Introduction

When asked to write an article on Ablaze! I was a bit apprehensive. As in most things, the perspective you have is the perspective you use. I had two choices: either look through a set of lenses provided by my experience as an "insider" of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) World Mission Ablaze! team with years of service or step back and operate as a policy analyst. It is the latter route I have chosen to take because it offers the opportunity to examine Ablaze! through the eyes of individuals other than myself.

The objective of a policy analysis is to evaluate if a specific policy is accomplishing what it has promised. In the context of this article, a policy is defined as a strategy, as a course of action, as a plan—as a guiding principle for operation. As a policy, most supporters of Ablaze! would agree that the following four statements represent how the leadership of LC-MS has described Ablaze! to the church. If there is disagreement, it may be in the scope of each statement but not in the essence of each being a key attribute of the Ablaze! initiative. Each of these statements will frame the policy evaluation process.

- 1) Ablaze! is all about evangelism and evangelization.¹
- 2) Ablaze! is a movement as opposed to a program or campaign.
- 3) Ablaze! requires changing the way the LC-MS in general, and LC-MS World Mission in particular, approach their work.²

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David Bosch defines evangelism as the activities involved in spreading the gospel. He defines evangelization as the process of spreading the gospel. The distinction is important because the first definition talks to the action associated with telling unbelievers the Good News, whereas the second definition refers to the extent in which the Good News is spread. Ablaze! considers both evangelism and evangelization. Evangelism is the means; evangelization is the end. See *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 409.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Ablaze! Resolution 1-01A reads: "Resolved, That the LCMS acting in convention boldly affirms that, in faithful response to the Great Commission and understanding our Lord's changing promise to always be with us (Matt. 28:20), we must be confessional and mission-minded in a world that continues to change; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod acting in convention affirms the historical Lutheran understanding of the

- 4) Ablaze! is intended to grow the sustainable capacity of the LC-MS in general, and LC-MS World Mission in particular, to do evangelism for the long term as implied in statements one, two and three.

The examination of the relationship between evangelism and missions in this article is based on the work of David Bosch, an individual who foresaw the need for a twenty-first century movement that challenged conventional wisdom regarding how the church should approach the challenge of global mission. His thoughts regarding the relationship between missions and evangelism are intended to challenge the LC-MS in its thinking regarding the way Ablaze! is organized. Bosch builds a compelling case by arguing that the segregation of mission and evangelism is important if evangelization is the goal.

Understanding Ablaze! as a movement relies on knowing what made Jesus, Martin Luther, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Albert Einstein unique individuals capable of leading transformational movements which in some way match the global scope of Ablaze!. It is no accident that the Ablaze! mission statement is tied directly to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. By being tied to the Reformation, a strong inference is made that Ablaze! is intended to be the beginning of an effort within the LC-MS that has no end.

Max Weber lends his perspective on how bureaucracies like the LC-MS can move beyond what he calls the "iron cage" and become instruments of change. Clarence Stone, a social scientist, joins the dialog as he helps me explain that capacity building is not about "more," but is actually an approach that allows the organization to improve its ability to lead systemic change. The literature speaks loudly that the nonprofit organization (NPO) board's number-one job is about building its NPO's capacity: "The nonprofit board carries a big burden. It is one of the only forces positioned to help a nonprofit develop the capacity it needs to deliver on its mission."³

priesthood of all believers that God, through the work of His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, has made all believers "a royal priesthood" to "declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9); and be it further

Resolved, That each congregation and school within our Synod, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance through prayer and a determined study of the Scriptures, understands that it is a mission outpost to all of the unchurched "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8); and be it further

Resolved, That fulfilling God's mission today requires The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to expand the work we have been doing in numerous cultures and among various people groups, to witness in various languages, and to engage the unchurched society with a clear confession of Jesus; and be it finally *Resolved*, That fulfilling God's mission today requires all entities of the church to prepare individuals to learn the cultures and languages around us in order to equip all the saints (Eph. 4:12) for mission and discipleship in

our current age, so that all honor and glory is afforded our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who grows His church (1 Cor. 3:6) as souls lost are won by knowing that there is only one name under heaven by which one may be saved and that is the name of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:9-11)."

³ W. Letts, W. Ryan, & A. Grossman, *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations Managing Upstream for Greater Impact* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), 134.

The common thread tying together the discussion of these four key attributes of the Ablaze! initiative is the role that heroic leadership plays in accomplishing grand aspirations. Without heroic leadership, evangelism becomes one more program rather than *the* program. A movement always lies in the shadow of the paradigm it is trying to replace. If change becomes mired in rhetoric rather than propelled by action, capacity building is lost in an attempt to protect past decisions rather than to open minds to fresh approaches to timeless challenges. It is in this light that the leaders of the Ablaze! movement have an opportunity to pause and reflect on what might be learned when the Ablaze! movement is examined in the context of policy evaluation rather than prolonging the debate on whether or not the LC-MS should be involved in the initiative called Ablaze!.

Ablaze! is the right policy for this time in the history of the LC-MS.

Ablaze! is all about evangelism and evangelization.

The following argument is based on the belief that Ablaze! is the LC-MS's answer to the four consecutive questions asked by Paul in Romans 10:14-15, in a large and unconventional way.

"...How can people call on him if they have not believed in him? How can they believe in him if they have not heard his message? How can they hear if no one tells the Good News? How can people tell the Good News if no one sends them?"⁴

Using these verses as a reference, John Stott wrote that the logic of evangelism demands the sending out of evangelists so that people may call on Christ for salvation.⁵ This logic would suggest the need for an intentional effort by the LC-MS to mobilize evangelists with one aim: the telling of the Good News. Contrast this with the language of Ablaze! regarding the sending of missionaries. In the words of World Mission in the August 2008 issue of *Harvester*: "Globally, 35 new missionaries are targeted to be sent through *Fan into Flame* funding." As will be shown, literature abounds with arguments that the roles of the missionary and the evangelist are different. The evangelist has one goal as taught by Paul: tell the Good News. This is distinctively more specific than the role of the missionary. David Bosch wrote, "Mission denotes the *total* task God has set the church for salvation of the World ... it embraces all activities ... mission is the church sent into the world [emphasis added]."⁶

With this said, perhaps what is needed is not additional short-term, long-term or career missionaries, but rather an army of people (i.e. evangelists) who are trained and equipped in all forms of evangelism. Is it possible that the church's emphasis on raising missionaries has hindered the deployment of Ablaze! as a strategy for evangelism? This

⁴ God's Word Translation.

⁵ J. Stott, *Romans God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 314.

⁶ D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 412.

is not to say that the enlistment of missionaries is not important, but that evangelists are what are needed now, especially when one agrees that the role of an evangelist is "not only verbal proclamation"⁷ but the very visible presence of Christ.⁸ It is no secret in most congregations that it is extremely difficult to recruit people to practice evangelism in the lives. As most of us know, Lutherans, laymen or clergy, do not knock on doors. O reflection, perhaps they should. Conceivably, what is needed is a more concentrated effort by LC-MS World Mission in the development of a strategy to make evangelism core component of the LC-MS.

David Bosch's observations regarding the relationship between evangelism and mission are enlightening. His observation that mission and evangelism are not synonyms⁹ is both intriguing and worthy of review, given how neither seems clearly distinguished in the work of Ablaze!. To quote Bosch in his classic *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*:

Mission is wider than evangelism. Evangelism is not proselytism. Evangelism is not the same as church extension. In evangelism, 'only people can be addressed and only people can respond.' Authentic evangelism ... emphasizes both personal responsibility and personal decision. (In contrast) Mission denotes the total task God has set the church for the salvation of the world, but always related to a specific context of evil, despair, and lostness. Mission is the church sent into the world, to love, to serve, to preach, to teach, to heal, to liberate. Evangelism means enlisting people for the reign of God, liberating them from themselves, their sins, and their entanglements, so they will be free for God and neighbor. Evangelism should therefore not be equated with mission. It is better to uphold the distinctiveness of evangelism within the wider mission of the church.¹⁰

Though the magnitude of Bosch's work is much to absorb, what seems clear is the possibility that LC-MS World Mission would be best served if it intentionally organize its work around two distinct efforts. One being evangelism and one being mission. Bosch's paradigm for transforming mission suggests that the success of a global mission effort is highly dependent on an effective and far-reaching approach to evangelism. Bosch makes a clear distinction between the "theology of harvest" and the "theology of seed-sowing" with the argument that "numerical or quantitative growth should have first priority in a world where three billion people are not Christian."¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁸ Bosch writes, "There is no single way to witness to Christ, however. The word may therefore never be divorced from the deed, the example, the 'Christian presence', the witness of life. It is the 'Word made flesh' that is the gospel. The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty. Words interpret deeds and deeds validate words, which does not mean that every deed must have a word attached to it, nor ever word a deed." See *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 420.

⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 411.

¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 411 ff.

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* 415.

A second imperative implied in Bosch's observation is that evangelism is not a delegated action to a select few sent to the masses to evangelize. Evangelism represents a dramatic change in the culture. Stott writes, "The incentive to evangelism arises from the love and the longing of the heart."¹² Stott thus complements Bosch's argument that evangelism is a strong call to serve, suggesting that the goal for Ablaze! may not only be to share the Good News with one hundred million un-churched and uncommitted people, but also to recruit these same people to, according to Bosch, "irrupting the reign of God"¹³ as God's newest messengers. What is also implied in the work of both Stott and Bosch is that evangelism is not successful when institutionalized by man. It is worked out in the lives Christians live. Bosch writes, "How many of the millions of people in the world who are not confessing Jesus Christ have rejected him because what they saw in lives of Christians!"¹⁴

If Bosch is right that the work of mission is much more than evangelism, is it possible that the LC-MS in general and LC-MS World Mission in particular have allowed the broader mission of "mission" to marginalize their ability to deploy Ablaze! The language of World Mission, which rings clear in the correspondence that outlines the accomplishments of Ablaze! are riddled with descriptions of church plants, church revitalizations, leadership formation, new church buildings, and social ministry. Though there is much talk that the end product of these efforts is the critical event of people witnessing their faith to people, would the Ablaze! movement be better served if traditional strategies of missions were narrowed to the single focus of evangelism? Rather than focusing on building new church buildings, renting new centers of worship, and building seminary buildings, LC-MS should primarily focus on evangelism. A primary focus on evangelism suggests that the resources being accumulated for the deployment of Ablaze! would be better spent on solving the problem of why a church body of 2.4 million people does not evangelize very well. Dale Meyer challenged us all in an editorial published in the July 2008 *Concordia Journal* by arguing that the center of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod should not be congregation, synod, or church, but rather the Scriptures of Christ.¹⁵ If the main aim of Ablaze! is telling the Good News as commanded by Christ as recorded by Mark¹⁶, and outlined in the Ablaze! mission statement, would it not be a good thing if LC-MS placed all of its effort on the recruiting, training and sending of evangelists?

Finally, is it possible that the way most LC-MS churches train evangelists is no longer viable? A direct quote from my pastor in this week's sermon sums up a fair argument given the LC-MS as a denomination that is not generally known for its evangelism effort.¹⁷ "You can't simply do yesterday's ministry and expect it to work

¹² Stott, *Romans God's Good News for the World* 314.

¹³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* 415.

¹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* 414.

¹⁵ See Dale Meyer, "Where's the Center," *Concordia Journal* 34 (2008), 153.

¹⁶ Mark 16:15.

¹⁷ With more than a third of the 6073 LCMS congregations not reporting statistical information in 2006, approximate totals indicate the baptized membership Synod-wide decreased by 22,867 and confirmed membership fell by 13,876. See the *Reporter online*, September 30, 2008, archived December 15, 2007.

today." Perhaps it is possible that the way most congregations prepare their people to evangelize needs change. Andragogy—the art and science of helping adults learn—teaches "all learning begins with experience."¹⁸ "Jarvis's model of the learning process begins with a person moving into a social situation in which a potential learning experience occurs."¹⁹ To accomplish this, Harvard Business School professors use carefully developed case studies with their students, which represent real world business experiences. Outward Bound instructors put people on the ropes course when teamwork is their goal. The U.S. Navy's flight school training program eventually moves its aviation cadets from the simulator to the T-34 trainer. One could argue that the LC-MS's failure to be recognized for its evangelism can be attributed to its dearth of experience-based evangelism training. Jesus did not teach His disciples to evangelize in a classroom environment, nor was He himself constrained by the classroom. He modeled the behavior of an evangelist 24/7. As the proclaimer, he proclaimed the Good News. As His disciples heard what was proclaimed, they too became proclaimers (i.e. evangelists). To be an evangelist is to do evangelism. To do evangelism is to be an evangelist. Evangelism is not learned in a classroom and then followed up by "door to door" calls but is rather an intentional and deliberate activity each Christian practices as they go about their daily life. Recently, a close friend of mine was going through a very stressful time ... the untimely death of her grandsons' father. Several of her Christian friends said they would pray for her family. After hearing this, a friend who claims to be an atheist said, "I'll pray to whatever god is up there." Upon hearing this, my friend proclaimed her faith by saying, "That will not do any good—there is only one God." This is an example of the proclamation of the existence of the one true God in the context of an individual's daily life. *This is evangelism.*

Ablaze! is a movement as opposed to a program or campaign.

Movements start with "attitude." When I was young, the word "attitude" meant was out of synch with something or someone. Those who were opposed to Jesus accused him of having a bad attitude. They accused Jesus of being out of synch with the way they saw "church." They accused him of being the devil, an insurgent, a rebel, a liar, a man out of synch with the dominant paradigm of the Jewish community. On Monday, the day after Palm Sunday, Jesus turns over the tables in the Temple. One can feel the intensity in Jesus' eyes when Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are turning it into a gathering place of thieves!" On Tuesday, on his way back to Jerusalem, Jesus became hungry. Mark tells us: "In the distance he saw a fig tree with leaves. He went to see if he could find figs on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, 'No one will ever eat fruit from you again!'" There is an intensity about Jesus this week. You can sense urgency in the words written by the four gospel writers. He turns the

¹⁸ S.B. Merriam & R. S. Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* Second Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 283.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

temple inside out. He curses a fig tree to prove a point, and he puts the legitimate leaders of the Jewish Church on notice. There is no doubt Jesus was on a mission. Jesus had an "attitude."

Movements require an "attitude" that does not placate the system when the system is broken. Martin Luther had an attitude on October 31, 1517, when he posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church. He also had "attitude" at the Imperial Meeting in Worms when he told Charles, "I cannot and will not recant. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God Help me. Amen."²⁰ Luther had an "attitude."

Movements need people willing to be persecuted for their cause. Alexander Solzhenitsyn's courage earned him imprisonment and exile. He spoke truth to power when he wrote "The Gulag Archipelago." George Kennan, the dean of American diplomats, called 'The Gulag Archipelago,' Alexander Solzhenitsyn's account of Stalin's terror, "the most powerful single indictment of a political regime ever to be levied in modern times. By bearing witness, Solzhenitsyn certainly did as much as any artist could to bring down the Soviet system."²¹ Solzhenitsyn had an "attitude."

Movements also need meek voices of trust and humility. Albert Einstein, one of the twentieth century's premier scientists, who changed our view of the universe, had "attitude" when he took on the establishment and rewrote the laws of physics. Walter Isaacson wrote in his biography of Einstein:

(His) joyous nonconformity made him recoil from the sight of Prussian soldiers marching in lockstep. There was a simple set of formulas that defined Einstein's outlook. Creativity required being willing not to conform. That required nurturing free minds and free spirits, which in turn required 'a spirit of tolerance.' And the underpinning of tolerance was humility—the belief no one had the right to impose ideas and beliefs on others.²²

Isaacson recorded Einstein's delicate balance between curiosity, instincts as a rebel, imagination, and knowledge. Like Jesus, Luther, and Solzhenitsyn, Einstein's "success came from questioning conventional wisdom, challenging authority, and marveling at the mysteries that struck others as mundane."²³ Einstein also had an "attitude."

These four men led movements that left a permanent mark on the world. If Ablaze! is going to be more than a program or campaign, Jesus the man, Luther, Solzhenitsyn, and Einstein can all be used as models for the attitude needed to initiate sustainable movements. Other than having an "attitude," each fought the status quo. Each had a disdain for authority for the sake of authority. Each was anti-establishment. Each had a passion for finding truth. Each had an inner belief that he was compelled to make public. Each was *not* risk adverse. Each promoted a culture where "yes" meant "yes" and "no"

²⁰ P. McCain, R. Baker, G. Veith, & E. Engelbrecht, eds., *Concordia The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 47.

²¹ See "Speaking Truth to Power," *The Economist* 388 (2008), 9.

²² W. Isaacson, *Einstein His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2007), 550.

²³ Isaacson, *Einstein His Life and Universe*, 7.

meant "no." Each operated from a platform of what he believed to be more important than his personal agenda. Their voices were not quiet. They did not depend on study teams, task forces, or skunk groups. Their aim was a goal too big for small efforts constrained by budgets. This goal is what allowed their actions to spawn movements bigger than programs and campaigns. No boundary existed in their minds other than the vision that shaped their actions.

As a hard working small business owner, my dad had an "attitude" when it came to poor people. Over twenty-five years ago, he started a small movement in a little town in western Pennsylvania. He called it *Love Basket*. It started out by providing meals at Thanksgiving for the less fortunate. Today *Love Basket* is an inter-faith countywide ministry that provides meals, operates a food pantry, and is a source of funds for many families living in one the poorest areas of our country. Using "attitude," my dad redefined how his town and county view welfare economics.

Movements are people led by individuals who embody attributes fostered by an "attitude" that motivates people to move from comfort to discomfort. What makes this difficult for a church body is that the "attitude" described above is messy. It is not politically correct. It leads to behaviors, which move ideas and beliefs upstream rather than downstream. The "attitude" described above breeds authenticity, and it is authenticity, which causes people to follow an idea and to promote that idea (i.e. movements).

For the LC-MS to lead a movement the magnitude of Ablaze!, it must exhibit an "attitude" that begins with an impatient, un-relentless love for *all* people who are not saved. Is there better authenticity and person to follow than Jesus? Paul Althaus²⁴ writes:

"The witness of the church's ministry belongs in the context of the witnesses of one's whole attitude. Jesus' own witness went forth, not only in words, but in the way in which he dealt with people. The gospel can only be proclaimed in one's whole personal attitude toward people. The credibility of the church when it preaches God's love for the lost depends on whether the church itself goes to people in their lostness, identifies itself with them . . . (and) makes their predicament their own."

The question for the leadership of LC-MS in general and LC-MS World Mission in particular is this: Who in this church body has taken on the establishment with the "attitude" exhibited by Jesus, Luther, Solzhenitsyn, and Einstein? If Ablaze! is to become a movement, it will need to be more dependent on leaders with an "attitude."

Ablaze! requires changing the way LC-MS in general, and LC-MS World Mission in particular, approach their work.

Of the four tenets of Ablaze! outlined above, tenet number three may be the one which is the most contestable, as it implies that what has been done in the LC-MS toward

²⁴ J. Doberstein, ed., *Ministers Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 262–263.

the work of evangelizing the world pre-Ablaze! has failed. The need for change should be self-evident, given that the over-arching goal of the LC-MS is to reach one hundred million un-churched and uncommitted people with the Gospel of God by 2017.²⁵ One hundred million of anything fits in the realm of President Kennedy's challenge to put a man on the moon.²⁶ Even with a period of thirteen years,²⁷ Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, would call this a "Big Hairy Audacious Goal." To think this can be achieved without change on the part of this church assumes that the trend of bringing the Good News to people has approached one hundred thousand people a year for the past ten years. Given that this is not the case, the following argues that the success of Ablaze! may be dependent on what some would call irrational thinking or, in the language of Max Weber, substantive, rather than formal, rationalization. Based on Weber's work, a discussion of both of substantive rationalization and formal rationalization follows.²⁸

Weber taught that substantive rationalism was the consequence of coherent and consistent thought. He described substantive rational behavior as cogent, reasonable and balanced in reflection and action. He characterized substantive rationalism as constant, predictable, dependable and relying on a comprehensive process of strategic thinking, which was not necessarily dependent on what had worked in the past. Weber described substantive rationalism as decision-making that promotes discussions that demonstrate discernment and judgment in small, self-led groups, which tend to empower. Organizations that promote substantive rationalism are led by people described as having charismatic authority; authority characterized by "power with" rather than "power over" behavior.

Weber defined formal rationalism as strategic thinking influenced by unfounded principles, personal interest, and private agendas. For Weber, negative rationalism lacked the rigor, the benefits of logic, and the value of scientific thinking. Formal rationalization was also characterized by hierarchical legal authority that impersonalized people. The products of formal rationalization are anti-democratic problem solving and few creative solutions. Formal rationalism is also defined as a process in which decisions are based solely on past routines led by subject-matter experts who tend to rule with an unhealthy use of authority. The phenomenon of formal rationalization has led to the top-down leadership behavior pervasive in today's bureaucracies. Weber called these organizations "iron cages."

²⁵ The Ablaze! Mission purpose statement reads, "Praying to the Lord of the Harvest, LCMS World Mission, in collaboration with its North American and worldwide partners, will share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017."

²⁶ JFK's Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort September 12, 1962: "We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."

²⁷ The official start of Ablaze! was at the 2004 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Convention. The target date is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation or 2017.

²⁸ B. Fry, *Mastering Public Administration from Max Weber to Dwight Waldo* (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1989), 15ff.

The various levels of LC-MS administrative structure are particularly vulnerable to the behavior described as formal rationalization because it is a bureaucracy. There is no doubt that there are pockets of substantive rationalization in the organization, but unfortunately the LC-MS in general and LC-MS World Mission in particular carry a legacy of being dependent on by-laws, policy based management, resolutions, committee reports, and security-oriented decision making based on bounded rationality rather than comprehensive rationality.²⁹

A great example of decision making that reflects an open-minded posture is what happened in the 2008 Summer Olympics. If Michael Phelps had used conventional wisdom in the race that earned him his seventh gold medal he would have come in second. Conventional wisdom teaches swimmers to never take an extra mini-stroke at the finish. To quote Phelps,

When I chopped that last stroke, I really thought I'd lost the race. But it happened to be the exact opposite. If I had glided, I would have been way too long. I ended up making the right decision, trying to take a short, fast stroke to get my hand on the wall first.³⁰

For Ablaze! to avoid locking itself into the "iron cage" of formal rational thinking, the LC-MS in general and LC-MS World Mission in particular need to embrace tenets of learning organizations.³¹ If Ablaze! is to mark the point when LC-MS changed the way it does its work, it needs to look toward these tenets. To operate otherwise is to be much like Demetrius in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "wood within wood," commonly referred to as being unable to see the forest for the trees. Or, to borrow a phrase that could easily be attributed to Yogi Berra: "How you see things is what you see." LC-MS need not be a chameleon that takes its color from its surroundings but rather it can adopt one of the many change-management models successfully implemented in organizations that have goals much less critical than the goal facing Ablaze!.³² A reality that should make this choice easy is a prevalent belief of many members of the LC-MS membership that their congregation does not need the Synod.

²⁹ Bounded rationality is operating within the bounds imposed by limits on available information and by an individual's reasoning abilities. Comprehensive rationality is not being limited by what Herbert Simon calls human behavior, which does not operate in, bounds limited by experience or individual bias. See *Mastering Public Administration from Max Weber to Dwight Waldo* 181ff.

³⁰ NBCOlympics.com August 8, 2008.

³¹ Peter Senge describes five aspects of a learning organization: (1) systems thinking which provides a "conceptual framework, a body of knowledge over ... years"; (2) personal mastery—"the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening ... personal vision" with the purpose "of focusing energies, of developing patience, and of seeing realities objectively"; (3) mental models that help establish "deeply engrained assumptions, generalizations, pictures, and images that influence how (people in the organization) 'understand the world' as a pretext to the action they take; (4) building a shared vision—"pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance"; and (5) team learning which is "the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine 'thinking together'." See *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday), 5-10.

³² J. Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, 323.

The reduction in local giving to the national office communicates that a concentrated effort for change is necessary if Ablaze! is to reach the goal of sharing the Good News with one hundred million un-churched and uncommitted people by the year 2017.

Ablaze! is intended to grow sustainable capacity of the LC–MS in general, and LC–MS World Mission in particular, to do evangelism for the long term as implied in statements one, two and three.

Contrary to traditional thinking in the church, sustainable capacity building is not more people, more dollars, more buildings, and more programs in for-profit or public sectors. Clarence Stone would suggest that using *Fan into Flame* donation dollars to fund *existing* district staff is not capacity building but rather an attempt to protect the institution. Capacity building is about helping an organization meet both internal and external challenges and opportunities for the long term. In practical terms, capacity building is about strategic leaders creating an organizational strategy—the visions, the directions, and the tactics—that moves the organization toward an ongoing state of formulation, implementation, reassessment, and revision that allows the organization to thrive.³³ Capacity building is intended to move an organization to a point where it is forever adapting to the environment in which it operates.

The capacity-building paradigm will be applied to the policy of Ablaze! based on the argument that unless the LC–MS in general and LC–MS World Mission in particular apply the principles of capacity building, Ablaze! will follow the courses of past evangelism programs and die. The basis of the argument is the work done by Clarence Stone and his work in *Building Civic Capacity*.³⁴

Capacity building is about new politics, new relationships and new decision makers engaged in a process to solve system-wide problems. The proposal is meant to bring a diverse group of people together that will eventually develop new problem perspectives and solutions, and which are systemic in nature. The model does not accept incremental change. Capacity building can best be explained as a new problem-solving space that is not bounded by the politics, policies and practices of the past. The capacity-building model values the trust and reciprocity that happen between individuals in informal settings. It is based on the principle that when people of diverse interests are brought together, a cognitive process takes hold, which promotes innovation—new solutions that are different from anything ever seen before. The bipartisan nature and breadth of the diversity of the group gives the process both conflict and creativity.

Literature points to the board of non-profit organizations (NPOs) when looking to determine who owns the responsibility for building capacity. The Board for Mission Services (BFMS) and its leadership are in a unique position. The BFMS sits between two lines of sight and one truth: one being the donor and the other being the mission. The

donor elicits a conservative perspective from the NPO board on how to best use the resources they provide. The mission, on the other hand, begs for decisions from the NPO board, which increases the NPO's ability to accomplish its purpose. NPO board capacity-building activity includes strategic planning, increased openness to standard business practices, funding for capacity building, use of outcome measures, and collaboration of other NPOs. Effective boards problem solve with visitors from across the community. They map the forces at play. They redefine problems and come up with systemic solutions.³⁵ This paradigm needs to be the mantra of the BFMS for Ablaze! to satisfy the fourth tenet.

Applying capacity building to Ablaze! has the potential to produce systemic change. The first step would be to recruit a diverse group of people that represents a comprehensive cross-section of the community. It would include business leaders, civic leaders, and leaders from the faith community, as well as representatives who are experts in global evangelism. Given the wide scope of Ablaze!, it would also be important to include critical thinkers from all areas of society: health care, education, housing, and police. In the context of those called to participate, they may not even be Lutheran.

To date, no such group has been legitimized. The guardians of Ablaze! have carefully selected members of its Ablaze! steering committees, task forces, etc. from a pool of people, that in Bosch's terms, talk alike, think alike, look alike and, in all kindness, reflect the prevailing culture which Ablaze! is targeted to change.³⁶ Without the deepest commitment from the most senior political leaders of LC–MS to adopt the building-capacity model, history dictates that the current Ablaze! policy will muddle along and never evangelize the world.

Conclusion

One thing history teaches about movements is that they are *not* carefully planned. The leaders of these movements *intuitively* do the things discussed above. They lead with an "attitude." They fight the status quo and willingly see change not as a threat but rather an opportunity to operationalize their vision. The leaders of movements surround themselves with diverse people who are not afraid to question their leadership. Jesus had Thomas. Luther had Melancthon. Solzhenitsyn had Susi. Einstein had Born. For Ablaze! to become a movement it will take someone with enough courage to move out of the pack and trade in his position of leadership for a leadership role which operates outside the norm.

Movements normally operate on the margins of the order they are trying to reform. Jesus operated on the fringe of the Jewish community. Luther operated on the fringe of the Roman Catholic community. Solzhenitsyn operated on the fringe of the Russian community. Einstein operated on the fringe of the European scientific community. Yet

³³ "Individuals and teams enact strategic leadership when they think, act, and influence in ways that promote the sustainable competitive advantage of the organization." See *Becoming a Strategic Leader*. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 9.

³⁴ C. Stone, *Building Civic Capacity: The New Politics of Urban School Reform, Studies in Government and Public Policy* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

³⁵ W. Letts, W. Ryan, & A. Grossman, *High Performance Organizations Managing Up Stream for Greater Impact*, 131ff.

³⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 413.

each boldly and relentlessly insisted on the value and significance of his ideas. After a period of time, each of these reformers saw his movement overtake the conventional wisdom and become the new center.

Toward this end, if Ablaze! is going to live up to the expectations of LC-MS World Mission, they must be prepared to accept the possibility that in nine years, at the 500th anniversary, Ablaze! will have reshaped the way LC-MS does missions. Taken to the extreme, a successful Ablaze! Movement implies that LC-MS World Mission would no longer be needed. What would replace LC-MS World Mission would be a sustainable movement of Christian people from the pews in which they sit, with the single objective of joining the thousands of Christians before them in telling all the unbelievers the words of Christ.

Toward this end, there is nothing more important for LC-MS leadership than facilitating this process through the power of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God, and with the help of the Jesus that lives in their heart.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) If you are a congregation, mission society, or education institution that has identified with the Ablaze! Movement, describe your evangelism strategy. What level of participation do you have from your members? If it is less than 25 percent, what is your strategy for mobilizing evangelists so that it becomes your organization's core competency?
- 2) Name three people with "attitude" in your life. Can you tell stories about them that demonstrate how their "attitudes" have impacted the world? How has *your* "attitude" affected the world?
- 3) Give an example of a decision your organization has made in the context of the Ablaze! Movement that represents substantive rationality.
- 4) Think back to your last strategic planning session. Were there people outside your organization present? If so, were there any non-Lutherans or un-believers? If not, whom might you invite to the next session that would help your organization build its capacity?
- 5) How would your organization explain the acronym A.B.L.A.Z.E. if it were asked?