BLUE STATES NEED PREACHERS, TOO! by Al Diestelkamp

Though it may not be obvious to those who live in areas where congregations of the Lord’s people are numerous, those of us living in sparser regions know there is a shortage of faithful gospel preachers—especially a shortage of men who are willing to venture out of their comfort zones.

I’ve noticed an increased number of larger congregations in the “Bible belt” are recruiting young men fresh out of college (or while still in college) to work with a more experienced preacher for a couple of years. While I recognize the value of such an arrangement, it has contributed to the shortage of men available to work with more needy congregations. It’s also noticeable that, upon completing their “internships,” many of the young men are quickly snapped up by other large congregations desirous of enjoying a two-preacher arrangement.

Don’t get me wrong! I am not critical of having two preachers in one congregation. In fact, I have long been an advocate of it, especially in places where the local work is small. However, where is the need the greatest—in a congregation with multiple elders, deacons, and an experienced preacher, or in a congregation not so blessed?

There are also a number of efforts by individual preachers to hold “preacher training” sessions—often on an annual basis. Where are all those men who have availed themselves of these opportunities? I recognize that there is benefit for men who don’t intend to make preaching their career in learning how to preach, but surely there are a few who are eager to preach the gospel more than just “filling in” when local preachers are away.

Perhaps you think that the problem is that my perspective is a result of living in Illinois. It’s true that Illinois’s corrupt politics, high taxes, and crime has caused a significant exodus of population—including some Christians—mostly to “red states” near and far. But “blue states” need the gospel, too!

And we haven’t even begun to talk about the weather. Admittedly, the climate in the north is not ideal, but it has its benefits. We don’t have hurricanes, wild fires, or severe earthquakes. Our summers are more tolerable than many of the more desirable locations. Our winters provide opportunities for adventurous ones to engage in activities such as sledding, snowboarding, skiing, and snowball fights and help the rest of us to better appreciate each onset of spring.

I’m thankful for the men and their families who have chosen to work in places where the churches are few and far between, where support may have to be raised, and where others are reluctant to go. A few of us from the oldest generation remain, as well as some who are close behind. Some from the following generation, most of whom grew up in the north, have also spent many years here and show no signs of leaving. I’m also thankful for those of the youngest generation—some who are native to the north as well as a handful of young men who grew up in southern climates who are faithfully laboring in the gospel in needy fields. Still, there are congregations that lack the benefits of a full-time worker and have very few prospects due to a shortage of available preachers.

I realize this article won’t be viewed as a great recruitment tool for attracting preachers to the north, but I hope it will challenge some to consider sacrificing a few temporary comforts for the sake of the gospel, postponing their search for ideal living conditions until the day when the Lord comes and takes us to the perfect dwelling place (Jn. 14:3).