

A SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN DISTRICT MISSION BOARD "POSITION PAPER"  
(A study document re: A "new" mission horizon: the established church  
in a declining neighborhood).

Preface: It is the stated objective of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod  
to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people everywhere "while it is  
day" and with all deliberate speed, ever aware of our Lord's imperatives as  
He presents them in Matt. 24. Accordingly, therefore, our Synod has  
designated that the GBHM be its agent, commissioned to carry out the  
Savior's will in their name.

Without belaboring the obvious, the GBHM and its component District  
Mission Boards have established Gospel outposts in the burgeoning  
suburbs of major metropolitan areas throughout our United States. It  
has gone "where the people are"; followed "calls" issued by loyal  
Christian nuclei; served doctrinally disturbed Christians whose native  
bodies may have answered the siren song of modernism. Generally  
speaking, the goal is relatively swift self-support so that others may  
benefit following roughly the well established, time tested and fiscally  
sound route.

It would now appear to us that the time has come to add a new dimension  
to our mission thrust. The social scene, the one in which our Lord has  
chosen to permit us to function, is changing rapidly, and radically.

Evidence of this change may be seen everywhere; but nowhere are these  
evidences more apparent than in the metropolitan areas of our land.

What were once yesterday's solid, staid, pleasant neighborhoods are  
becoming today's poverty pockets and potential ghettos.

The one thing that hasn't changed is the great numbers of people, better still - souls, whose need for Jesus is as great as anyone's at anytime in history. Souls are still present, - in staggering abundance. Their earthly tabernacles may have changed complexion and color; but there is no denying the fact that they are "there".

The question we propose to explore is not -, "Shall we serve them?" (Of that we have no choice as God's committed people) but rather, "How shall we serve them now?!"

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## I.

### THE SITUATION

It is an established fact that Milwaukee, Detroit, and in varying degrees, Minneapolis, Manitowoc, Tuscon and perhaps several other cities of which we are presently not aware, that our Wisconsin Synod has old line, established, self-supporting parishes in changing neighborhoods.

Because of numerous factors: desire for room, "better" schools, fear, a raise in economy status etc., etc., the young couples of the parish are exiting swiftly, leaving behind a declining parish fighting for its life.

As its financial base erodes, so does its parish "character". Instead of a cross section embracing all ages, the pyramid becomes inverted with a disproportionate number of "senior" citizens trying to carry the load.

The pastoral role changes as well. To a degree, sometime is spent with the young; those of Sunday School age and/or grade school age. But more and more time is spent on sick calls, shut-in calls, and burial services. A disheartening amount of time may be spent on delinquent calls, processing transfers, and such related items which indicate a dying congregation.

The least amount of time, dictated, surely, not by choice but by circumstance, is spent on what is commonly called "mission work"; prospect calls, follow-up calls, canvassing calls, and hopefully, teaching adults the way of salvation. Concomitant to this, is the time which should be spent in meshing the "new Christian" into the main stream of congregational life. In most cases, it just can't be done. Time for this type of pastoral activity simply is not available.

Still another factor to be considered is the item of aging "Aarons and Hurs" who simply cannot hold up the "prophets" hands any longer. Therefore, those items which once were delegated by the parish administration to the lay "expert", is now either handled to whatever degree the pastor is able to function or it is "buried" or sorrowfully ignored.

The result is quite predictable, - arrived at not only on the basis of an educated and well reasoned thought process, but also by past history and present fact.

- a. Some of our congregations have moved out into the suburbs.
- b. Some have merged - and moved out of the central city.
- c. Some have moved and re-established themselves in new neighborhood away from the central city but not yet into the suburbs.
- d. Some are planning on quietly dying.
- e. Some are still alive and struggling, - but the "death rattle" is becoming more and more pronounced.

But the real tragedy is not so much what has happened and what is happening now, but rather what is not happening! The neighborhoods are not being harvested for the souls that are all around them!

This is not an indictment; it's a sad fact. This does not seek to place blame or point fingers; it's a recognition of reality. Our faithful pastors are not to be viewed as those who must bear the onus of failure; but rather are unwilling victims of circumstances over which they personally have no control; a changing social factor, a mobile congregation, and a lack of time to carry out the number one priority of the Church - MISSIONS!

However, the picture is not all bleak, dismal, and depressing. Not at all! There are definite plus factors which must be considered and, as God gives us the wisdom, exploited.

1. Physical plants, for the most part, structurally sound, are there. Indeed, not all plants, present the same possibilities for future utilization; but nevertheless, many do open up some imaginative possibilities.

2. Experienced, dedicated, manpower is present. Again, in cases of retiring veterans the same possibilities do not always exist in the same precise measure. However, a solid core of extremely capable ambassadors for Christ are available and are anxious to serve.

3. People are present! There exists no other area in our country that presents us with more of an impacted population. Souls, indescribably precious purchased and paid for souls, abound around our present church buildings.

## II.

### THE SOLUTION

It is our considered judgment that this is the time to venture boldly in faith and seize the opportunity which God is presenting us. It will require implicit confidence in God, imagination blessed with divine direction, and a willingness to fulfill the trust our Lord has placed into our hands. It also requires vision; the ability to "see" that "fields white unto harvest" speaks only of bumper crops and not of pigmentation. God's harvest is multi-colored and while stretching out to gather in those coming from all compass points, it must also include those around the center of the compass.

Some specifics are herewith offered.

1. A "new" mission dimension is to be added by Synodical resolution; stating as another objective of the WELS to assist, wherever practicable via subsidized staff additions, struggling self-supporting parishes in changing neighborhoods who find it impossible to invite their immediate community to the banquet feast of the Lamb.

2. Assistance could take the form of

- a. Lay Evangelists.
- b. Seminarians laboring part-time.
- c. Full-time vicars.
- d. Full-time youth and Evangelism Directors.
- e. Associate "Pastors of Missions"
- f. Limited financial aid to maintain attractive practical and efficient facilities to carry out the full work of the ministry by the congregation.

### III.

#### IMMEDIATE STEPS

1. This study document is to be refined and shaped for presentation and adoption by the GBHM.

2. Our GBHM is to be requested to draft a memorial to the 1971 Convention of the WELS calling attention to the challenge, requesting Synodical commitment to the principle of mission assistance

to self-supporting parishes in changing neighborhoods.

3. The GBHM further is to be requested to check the resources of other Christian bodies who have tried this type of program so that potential pitfalls may be avoided. Someone, surely, must possess some type of expertise in these matters. If costly and potentially damaging mistakes which hampered kingdom work be avoided by availing ourselves of resources beyond our Synod, then by all means, let us avail ourselves of them.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The institutionalized Christian Church is under suspicion and under fire to the degree hardly thought possible a few years ago. All sorts of "remedies" are being proposed to "save it" and keep it faithful to its calling. The voices of criticism and concern have proposed everything from revolution to dissolution.

It appears to us that our beloved Synod is in a unique position of possessing the full truth of the Gospel coupled with proper Scriptural principles which have, as their natural by-product, healthy social concerns. If our WELS is to avoid the stigma of serving mainly the Caucasian in the financially restricted suburb and then only if it is fiscally sound by way

of swift self-support, then it must take positive action and progressive steps NOW.

The final few words, in summary, of the preface bear repetition. The only question of serving hosts of people in the center city is "HOW?". The command of our Savior effectively answers all other objections and with Him, all things are possible.

Respectively submitted to the  
Southeastern District Mission Board  
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