

A Cry from the City: WELS' Need to Address Multicultural Issues

Peter Kruschel

[The second in a series of papers presented at Issues In Multi-Cultural Worship, a conference sponsored by the WELS Commission on Worship, July 1998. Pastor Kruschel serves as Associate Administrator for WELS home missions.]

Open your eyes and look at the fields," Jesus told his disciples, "they are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). Months later he commissioned them to go out into those fields as harvesters when he said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

I doubt there is a single person among us who does not hear those words and understand that they apply to us today just as surely as they applied to the disciples of Jesus who first heard them. Of course they apply to us! Our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has never doubted that. Our beloved synod owes its very existence to European forefathers who saw their brothers and sisters set sail for North America and who felt a Spirit-wrought compulsion to send missionaries to gather them into congregations in their new homeland. For decades those European forefathers followed pioneers to America, for many more decades their sons and grandsons followed the next generations as they scattered throughout the upper Midwest, and then for 40 years our own fathers followed families and fellow WELS members as they spread out across the continent.

It would be incorrect to imply or to labor under the impression that only German-Americans were of concern to our forefathers. "Real" mission work, that is, reaching out with the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who did not know him as Savior and Lord, also went on. As opportunities arose, our missionary forefathers also proclaimed the gospel to other Europeans—and to Native Americans in Arizona and African-Americans in Alabama. Mission work to one degree or another, in one form or another, has been woven into the fabric of WELS from its beginning in 1850. In fact, "our church body's tradition has not made missiology a distinctly separate focus of study in theology in order to underscore the principle that this first commission of the Lord to his Church (Matthew 28:16-20) be a part of all its theological teaching."¹

One may always wish that more outreach work had been done, that it had been done in more places, that it had involved more of us in those gospel-outposts, that it had been done among a larger number of ethnic groups and cultures, but the fact remains, as a church body we have recognized the need for mission work, and it has happened through us. Instead of lamenting what has not been done, perhaps we ought to thank God for what he has accomplished because he has made do with *us*—imperfect human beings gathered into an imperfect Synod looking at a dying world through imperfect eyes.

“Open your eyes” still means gospel mission work to us. In 1998, by God’s grace, the call of the Savior is still enough to make us stop short, re-examine our priorities, and rededicate ourselves to seeking opportunities to proclaim God’s grace to the lost souls in North America. We are still sending out missionaries to locations scattered all across the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Today we are augmenting our missionary corps with staff ministers, vicars in mission settings, summer student assistants, Travel-Canvass-Witness teams, and countless other volunteers. We still hold mission rallies and festivals—even if we are not sure they meet

¹E. Allen Sorum *Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures*, p. 14, quoting E. H. Wendland “An Evaluation of Current Missiology,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 79, Number 3, (Summer 1982): p. 168.

the purposes for which they were created years ago. We do it because we care. We care about souls. We care about souls who need to hear the saving gospel. We care, and so we go into the world.

But now when we go “out there” we find a world that is so different from our own that we scarcely recognize it. Were it not for the compelling love of Christ working in us (1 Corinthians 5:14) we would find it much safer and easier to stay back in our comfort zone, because, frankly, those people out there don’t act like us, they don’t talk like us, they don’t look like us, and they don’t share our values!

In the pages that follow we will take a brief look at the people who are in need of the gospel today. It’s a new world, and the more we know about it, the more likely we will be able to provide a good witness to it. You will also see how the Board for Home Missions is addressing its assignment of “sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ for the discipling of all people within the domestic mission fields of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.”² Finally we will look at the impact all of this may well have on worship life and worship styles in WELS in the years to come with specific application to the role of the WELS Commission on Worship as it supports gospel outreach in North America.

The American Scene Surveyed at the End of the Twentieth Century

Something is happening in America today. Changes are occurring. When we look around us we see that society is changing. Moral and ethical values are in flux. The civil rights movement is in disarray, with even its proponents divided over its desired outcomes. Our cities are changing: poverty spreads even as old neighborhoods are regentrified. The new wave of immigrants is different. Never before have so many non-Europeans arrived in such numbers! Let’s take a moment to examine the changing face of America from three vantage points: immigration, migration, and separation.

Immigration

More than once a home missionary or missions administrator has noted (half in jest) that the Lord seems to be saying to WELS today: “Since you can’t go to all the world, I’m going to bring the world to you.” Consider these facts:

The great American melting pot now contains a higher proportion of foreign-born individuals than at any time in the past six decades. In 1997, 1 out of every 10 U.S. residents was born in another nation.

Last year, 9.7 percent of the nation’s population was foreign born; in 1930, the last time the figure was higher, 11.6 percent of the population had been born elsewhere.

Today, 1 in 4 Californians is foreign born, as is 1 in 5 New York residents.³

Who are these people and where are they coming from? It should not surprise any of us to learn that the newest wave of immigrants to the United States and Canada does not come primarily from northern and western Europe. So, it is more than likely that our newest neighbors will speak a different language, look different, and come from a completely different culture than the northern/western European culture that has predominated in Lutheranism for the last five centuries.

² Bylaws of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Section 6.00, *Constitution and Bylaws of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1997.

³ *U.S. News and World Report*, April 20, 1998, p. 35.

So where do the new Americans come from? Your answer will be determined more than likely by the new neighbors you see in your own neighborhood. This is what the U.S. Census Bureau⁴ reports: half of all foreign-born U.S. residents are natives of Mexico, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. Just 1 in 5 came from Europe.⁵

David Schwartz, a planner with the Archdiocese of Chicago says, “When I speak with church groups, I compare the change in size in Hispanic population to the Great Migration [from Europe] at the end of the last century. Historians 100 years from now will look at the two as being very similar.”⁶

Philip Martin, an expert on Mexico at the University of California at Davis, draws another parallel: “The emigration from Mexico is very analogous with the migration that occurred within the United States out of the South, when African-Americans joined ‘the Great Northern Drive’ and other movements to work in wartime industries in northern cities.”⁷

Hispanics are not the only ethnic group emigrating to America. Asian-Americans are the nation’s fastest-growing racial/ethnic group, but are fewer in number than Hispanic- or African-Americans. They also are not as widespread.⁸ Many Asian-Americans have made their home in the same places that earlier waves of Asians settled. Until recently, Asians have not come to America out of economic necessity as much as for political reasons. The turnover of Hong Kong the mainland Chinese control resulted in a mass exodus of Chinese nationals carrying British passports to the large urban areas of Canada (e.g., Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia). Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmong have come seeking refuge from oppressive regimes and at the invitation of a U.S. government that feels responsibility for its one-time allies from the Southeast Asian conflicts.

Migration

Coupled with the arrival of record numbers of new immigrants is the migration of existing minority groups to areas of the country where they have not located historically. Like their European predecessors, the newer Hispanic arrivals, for example, have tended to cluster in large cities in populous states.⁹ However, as new arrivals move into traditional settings, earlier arrivals are moving out.

Recent population surveys confirm that a new minority tapestry is emerging in the suburbs, reshaping old assumptions. Hispanics, buoyed by a wave of migration from overcrowded Mexico, are becoming the predominant minority in the “edge cities” of the future.¹⁰

Asian-Americans, like their Hispanic counterparts, are also making their way to areas not considered historically to be centers of Asian immigration. Minneapolis-St. Paul, Boise, Wausau, and Manitowoc have relatively large numbers of Asian-Americans as part of their population count. That is different from the San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, or Houston population centers that were once assumed to host the only sizable Asian-American communities.

⁴U.S. Census Bureau report of the numbers of legal immigrants for 1995 as reported in *USA Today*, Monday, October 13, 1997.

⁵*U.S. News and World Report*, p. 35.

⁶“The Next Wave,” an article in TempoNorthwest section of the *Chicago Tribune*, Sunday, March 15, 1998, p.1.

⁷*Ibid*, p. 6.

⁸*Visions*, vol. 1, no.1, January 1998, published by Visions-Decisions, Atlanta, GA.

⁹*U.S. News and World Report*, p. 35.

¹⁰“The Next Wave,” p. 6.

Separation

One might suppose that more than 200 years after America's Declaration of Independence intoned that "all men are created equal" and more than 100 years after the emancipation of all slaves in America there would be full harmony and complete integration in American society. Anyone who has traveled in America knows this is not the case. Words and phrases like inner city, ghetto, barrio, clan, and enclave are well known among us. We also know instinctively that these are catchwords to describe areas or gatherings of people who are different from the white majority.

We know surprisingly little about people who are different from us in one way or another, a fact that is illustrated in a column that appeared recently in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*:

A new web site is the brainstorm of Phillip Milano. It's called "Y?" and was created by the National Forum on People's Differences (www.yforum.com) for the posting of cross-cultural questions and answers. There people can ask questions like how long it takes a black woman to have her hair braided.

And then there's the woman who asks, "What would take place during a typical weeknight in a black family?"

There's something heart-breaking in the mundane nature of the questions....After all these years of town hall meetings and cross-cultural exchanges, we're still a nation of strangers.¹¹

"Separate but equal" is the norm rather than the exception. Our purpose here is not to delve into the reasons why this is so, only to point out that this is the way it is in America in 1998. We need to be aware of it and be prepared to address it when we attempt to reach out across cultures.

Some Conclusions

The cumulative affect of immigration, migration, and separation is beginning to be felt in a number of ways.

Long held beliefs about who is THE minority may be challenged. The number of Hispanics is increasing four times as fast as the rest of the population, and they are expected to surpass African-Americans as the largest minority group by 2005. It is projected that nearly 1 of every 4 Americans will be Hispanic by the year 2050, up from 1 in 9 today.¹² This in turn *accentuates even more the status of African-Americans in the United States.* The current debate about the future of affirmative action, the continuing specter of overt racism in America, and the crossroads to which the civil rights movement seems to have come, all point to yet another challenge facing America and, specifically for the purposes of our consideration, for outreach to minorities by WELS.

Changes in immigration numbers have forced us to recognize that we can't lump together large numbers of immigrants into a single mass simply because they speak the same language, have the same color of skin, or come from the same continent. We have learned, for example, that there are many different types of Hispanics.¹³

¹¹"Who are those people?" by Leonard Pitts, Crossroads Section, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 22, 1998.

¹²*U.S. News and World Report*, May 11, 1998, p. 27.

¹³*U.S. News and World Report*, in its May 11, 1998 issue identifies 17 distinct Hispanic groups, each with its own culture: *Californians*: 1. Immigrant Mexicans, 2. Middle-class Mexicans, 3. Barrio dwellers, 4. Central Americans of Pico Union; *Tejanos*: 5. South Texans, 6. Houston Mexicans, 7. Texas Guatemalans; *Chicago Latinos*: 8. Chicago Mexicans, 9. Chicago Puerto Ricans;

The same is true of Asian-Americans. As a group, Asians are more diverse than Hispanic-Americans. Differences among various nationalities, for example, in education and birth rates, can be dramatic.

Some Asians are young educated professional immigrants while others are illiterate elderly refugees with few English skills. Many cluster into dense communities in major cities, as do refugees such as Cambodians and Laotians. Still others with college and professional jobs spread into the suburbs and small cities. Some are Christians, such as Koreans, who are often Protestant, and Filipinos, who are often Catholic. Some start new denominations (Korean Presbyterian Church in America) or spread theirs here (Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India in America). Others are Buddhist and Hindu. Some adopt their new homeland's religions. More highly educated immigrants, such as Japanese and Asian Indians, may display scant interest in Western religion, and in some cases, in religion at all. Finally, family or clan ties are central to Asian cultures, so they may directly bear on a person's religious outlook.¹⁴

What are the implications for WELS?

The present wave of immigration and migration has brought more and more WELS congregations and members into contact with people of other cultures. A 1991 survey conducted by the Board for Home Missions' Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee revealed that 400 of our congregations were then located in multicultural neighborhoods.¹⁵

WELS has congregations that are less than 20 years old in 14 of the top 19 U.S. counties with the fastest rates of growth of Asian-Americans. WELS has congregations less than 20 years old in 13 of the top 21 U.S. cities with the fastest rates of growth of Hispanic-Americans. WELS has congregations less than 20 years old in 7 of the top 23 U.S. counties with the fastest rates of growth of African-Americans.¹⁶

These statistics tell us a number of things. First, since most of these fast-growing counties are "rim areas" of large metroplexes, it demonstrates how minorities are moving into the suburbs. Second, it shows that our newer missions are more and more likely to come into contact with minorities of a variety of cultures, races, and ethnic groups. Third, rates of growth statistics can be misleading because they tend to reflect areas that had very low numbers to begin with and hence any growth exaggerates percentage figures. Therefore, while WELS may be fairly well represented in areas where minorities are starting to move, it is woefully under-represented (if represented at all) in the metroplexes with the largest numbers of minorities already present.

For the first time (at least to my knowledge) *recently arrived immigrant groups or individuals have approached WELS seeking some level of cooperation, fellowship, or support.* Although not yet common, within the last few years this has happened with growing frequency especially in the west. It continues to happen on America's secular college campuses as well. With 400-500,000 internationals studying or teaching on our American college campuses there are ample occasions for WELS campus pastors to come into contact with the

Miamians: 10. Cubans, 11. Nicaraguans, 12. South Americana; *Neoyorquinos:* 13. Puerto Ricans, 14. Dominicans, 15. Colombians; *Elsewhere in the U.S.:* 16. New Mexico's Hispanos, 17. Migrant workers.

¹⁴*Visions*, p. 3.

¹⁵*Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures*, p. 67.

¹⁶1996 county racial/ethnic estimates, Bureau of the Census, December 1997. The counties and states are listed here. *For Asian-Americans:* Douglas CO, Gwinnett GA, Fayette GA, Columbia GA, Williamson TX, Collin TX, Lake FL, Loudoun VA, Charlotte FL, Cobb GA, Clay FL, Wake NC, Osceola FL, and Clark NV. *For Hispanic-Americans:* Benton AR, Washington AR, Gwinnett GA, Fayette GA, Columbia GA, Douglas CO, Wake NC, Cobb GA, Loudoun VA, Deschutes OR, Mecklenburg NC, Sarpy NE, and Clark NV. *For African-Americans:* Ft. Walton FL, Loudoun VA, Dakota MN, Anoka MN, Washington MN, Fayette GA, and Williamson TX.

"brightest and best" of other nations and to proclaim Christ to these students and their families who are inquisitive about things American, including religion. This adds a new dimension of expectation for stateside pastors who must learn about their new neighbors in short order!

As our WELS missions in other countries grow in number and in numbers, it has become *more and more common for members from our world missions to emigrate to the United States and Canada*. We know of members already living in North America from Hong Kong, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia, and Antigua. Members from these last two countries also include native East Indians, Guyanese, Syrians, and non-German northern Europeans. Add to this number the Native Americans who first came into contact with the gospel on one of the Apache reservations in Arizona, and who now have two homes and two home churches: one each on the reservation and one each in an Arizona metropolitan area.

As a result of the immigration and migration of recent years, *the lines have begun to blur between the division of duties and geographical areas assigned to the Home Missions and World Missions areas of ministry*. We cite several examples:

- The Caribbean, which has been served by both mission boards, has witnessed joint missionary conferences and lay leader workshops for several years involving world mission representatives from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic and home mission representatives from Antigua, St. Lucia, and Grenada. Spanish language work has been carried out in the home mission field of Antigua by world mission pastors and leaders from Puerto Rico. Recently the Board for World Missions authorized a missionary from Puerto Rico to spend a year full time developing the Hispanic field in Antigua.
- Home Missions work in Farmington, NM, has led to extensive contact with the Navajo nation. It has been agreed that the home missionary to the Navajo will work among the Navajo off-reservation while a world missionary will concentrate his efforts on-reservation near Farmington.
- The many Internationals attending school and working in the U.S. for limited periods of time have proved to be a ripe harvest field. But what happens to these men and women when they return to their homelands? How will they be served? A joint effort of the two mission boards is in place to train Internationals in America so that they are prepared to maintain their Christian faith back home. Where possible, this will involve follow-up efforts on the part of our world missionaries and the national churches.
- Recently, the Board for World Missions undertook the development of a multilanguage publications program. The program has cataloged hundreds of titles and documents of scripturally sound materials from around the world. Stateside home missionaries and pastors are finding the collection to be an invaluable resource for their own work among people whose first language is not English.
- As more "nations, tribes, peoples, and languages" are making their way to America, the two mission boards are finding it increasingly necessary to understand fully each other's mission operating procedures. The need for cooperation, coordination, and ongoing communication has led to a series of meetings at which individual situations are discussed and common issues are resolved.

The implications are gradually coming into clearer focus for WELS, even as the awareness of the challenges to gospel outreach in coming years seem greater than ever before. Ours is not the only church body facing these challenges. Casual contact with mission folk in other church bodies provides anecdotal evidence that every church body is struggling with the issue of increasing outreach across cultures.

In general, it appears that established denominations find it difficult to retain their heritage while setting aside some of their most cherished traditions and are unprepared to include legitimate customs of other cultures in congregational life. Since most denominations in America have developed from a specific cultural, ethnic, or racial base, it is extremely hard to demonstrate to those outside the base that "we are serious in sharing our message with you." The impression may be given that "we have evangelized all the people who were like ourselves, so now we're coming to you" or "you have to be like us in order to be one with us."

It might be tempting to open our eyes, look at the fields that are ripe for harvest, and then close our eyes again, hoping against hope that this new world in which we find ourselves will go away. But it won't. Someone once said, "We dread clearly, but we dream vaguely." How will we respond to the new challenges? How can we prepare ourselves to seize the new opportunities to reap a rich harvest for the Kingdom?

The Response of Home Missions

The Board for Home Missions has adopted a written missions philosophy, procedures, and guidelines in response to the changing environment. Taken together these are resources to assist new missions and missionaries as well as existing congregations and their pastors to seek out their neighbors. These did not develop overnight, needless to say, and it is important to see not only *what* resources have been developed but also *how* and *why* they were developed.

There are three changes that I would especially call to your attention because of their significance for the subject at hand. These are (1) development of the outreach exploratory as the core model for new mission openings, (2) development of a philosophy and process for reaching out across cultures, and (3) development of the Multi-Ethnic Pre-Seminary Training Program. I would like to speak about each of these briefly but in some detail.

Development of the Outreach Exploratory as the Core Model for New Mission Openings

In the early 1980s a "new mode" of opening up home missions was developed and adopted by the Board for Home Missions. This new method involved extensive canvassing and prospecting work by the missionary until he had gathered a sufficient number of people (at least 100) in a core group. Then public worship services could be held. It was felt that it might take as long as a year for such a group to come together, but it was also felt that this would result in a mission congregation that was large enough to support the nurture and evangelism activities that a new generation of Unchurched Americans (mostly baby boomers) might look for in a church. The philosophy for funding the exploratory had also changed. It was believed that a larger infusion of funding support up front, tailing off more quickly at the end, would give the new congregation a better start. Money was made available for better office equipment, mass media and other outreach materials, worship resources and, if necessary, and office or ministry center.

This was a visible change in missions methodology that many in WELS followed with interest. With some revisions over the years, it is still the model that is used in the vast majority of home mission starts today. For at least a decade now it has been called the "outreach exploratory" method of opening new missions.

What was not so visible was the significant shift in focus that had been initiated in those years. Although the number one stated objective of the Home Missions Division always had been to reach out to the Unchurched with the gospel of Jesus, the standard operating procedure was to open missions in places where there was already a WELS nucleus or a gathering of dissatisfied confessional Lutherans from other Lutheran bodies. Mission activities and programs which helped these missions become clones of their larger sister congregations "back home" were standard.¹⁷

Before, outreach to the unchurched was primarily the responsibility of the missionary. Now, lay involvement in evangelism, although a novelty in many quarters, was encouraged, and congregations set up evangelism committees and conducted evangelism training. (Even then, in its earliest form, the "new mode" method encouraged the missionary to do the lion's share of the outreach work. In fact, the WELS nucleus was not to be invited to participate in the outreach work until after the first public worship service was held.)

Along with the "new" emphasis which set the missionary free to concentrate his efforts on reaching the lost came the establishment of a support system to help the missionary. Mission counselor positions,¹⁸ the WELS Mass Media Office,¹⁹ and a full-time WELS evangelism administrator position²⁰ were established in these years and were placed under the umbrella of Home Missions. All of these developments came together to produce a home mission program geared first and foremost to reaching the lost.

It is interesting to note that, prior to 1985 the Special Ministries Committee and Lutheran Collegians, both with emphasis on *member conservation*, were part of Home Missions. After synodical restructuring in 1985, the Special Ministries Board became a unit under the Board for Parish Services. Lutheran Collegians was disbanded and then reconstituted as the Campus Ministry Committee. The Campus Ministry Committee still is administered by the Board for Home Missions because of the potential for mission congregations to be established through or near campus ministries.

One cannot underestimate the results of this change in emphasis in mission work at home. Allocation of resources was affected as more budgetary funds were being spent on fewer mission openings. The Church Extension Fund, established to provide low cost loans for mission sites, parsonages, and facilities, was affected as well—expecting new Christians to support debt repayments in the same measure as more mature, long time Christians made for interesting times. The old policy of generalized program planning in each mission congregation evolved into particularized ministry planning as the basis for support.

Worship was affected too. Christians new to WELS and new to Lutheranism struggled to understand and appreciate liturgical worship and Lutheran hymnody as they were formulated in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. In the late 1980s and early 1990s this led many, if not most, home missionaries to print out entire worship services in their Sunday morning bulletins.

It is only now, looking back from the perspective gained through 20 years of experience with the outreach exploratory methodology, that a person sees the enormous effect the change in home mission work has had in WELS.

¹⁷That is not to say that outreach to the unchurched was not done nor that it was unimportant to missionaries or mission boards. In most instances there was more than enough work to do following up on contacts with scattered WELS and other Lutherans.

¹⁸Although originally established in the late 1970s to provide administrative assistance to the district mission board, the mission counselor position quickly evolved into a mission/missionary support role devoid of administrative duties or authority.

¹⁹The position was authorized by the 1981 synod convention. In 1982, John Barber was hired to fill the position, which he has held until his retirement this year.

²⁰Pastor Paul Kelm was the first evangelism administrator, beginning in 1984.

Development of a Philosophy, Principles, and Process for Reaching Out Across Cultures

To avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation, it would be good to define several words at this point.

Culture. We like the concise, yet encompassing, definition offered by E. R. Wendland:

Culture refers to the sum total of a people's system of beliefs and associated attitudinal as well as behavioral attributes—both verbal and nonverbal, symbolic and non-symbolic, institutionalized and customary, material and immaterial—all of which are shared to a greater or lesser degree by all of the members of a given society and passed on from one generation to the next by means of explicit as well as implicit learning experiences. There are two primary focal points in this view of culture, which is always people-or group-specific. These pertain to: (a) their way of thinking, or world-view, and (b) their way of behaving, or life-style. These two aspects are, of course very closely connected?²¹

Multicultural. As we use this adjective in the Home Missions Division we mean simply "the ways of thinking and behaving among many societies." Unfortunately, that is not the way it is used in our world today, especially in academic circles and the political arena. There the adjective "multicultural" and the noun "multiculturalism" have taken on added meaning. It is a meaning that we do not agree with and that we do not imply when we use the word "multicultural." Today, most academicians and politicians equate multiculturalism with cultural relativism, that is, the belief that "all cultures are basically equal; no culture is superior or inferior, better or worse than another."²²

That may sound fine until one remembers that there are worldviews and life-styles within every culture that are condemned by God. Not every aspect of every culture—even the German-Northern European culture—is God-pleasing or scripturally permissible. At the appropriate time and in an appropriate way we need to confront the sinful elements in every culture.²³

One wishes there were another adjective to use in place of "multicultural," but we have not found one. Even the word "crosscultural," meaning "working from one culture to accomplish a task with or for another culture," doesn't quite catch the same flavor.

Diversity. In the simplest sense of the word, the way in which we use it, we mean "variety" or "differences." However, like "multicultural" this word has taken on a lot of baggage so that today an American company, to be truly diverse, must accept all lifestyles (e.g., homosexuality) and socio-political philosophies (e.g., feminism) as being as valid as any other. This is not what the Board for Home Missions means when it speaks of "diverse" or "diversity."

For well over twenty years the Board for Home Missions has had a standing committee called the Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee or MC². This committee was formed initially to administer programs designed to meet the needs of congregations in the central city of Milwaukee. Over the years its area of responsibility has been expanded to include administrative and advisory roles for ministries among all non-Anglo Americans. Today it facilitates work among African-Americans, Asian-Americans (Vietnamese-

²¹*Bridging the Gap: African Traditional Religion and Bible Translation*. E.R. Wendland, ed. With Philip Stine, 1990, pp. 7,8.

²²Dinesh D'Souza, speaking at a luncheon forum sponsored by the Independent Institute, October 5, 1995. D'Souza is the author of *The End of Racism: New Prospect for a Color Blind Society*.

²³For a more complete discussion of the proper application of law and gospel when working across cultures, cf. *Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures*, pp. 93ff.

Laotian-, Hmong-, Chinese-, and Korean-Americans), Hispanic-Americans (Mexican- and Cuban-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and individuals from various Central American countries), and Native Americans (Navajo, Cora, and individuals from a variety of nations who are connected with Anglo congregations).

One of the committee's objectives is to help all of us become aware of what is happening in our world. More and more people around us come from a different background, have different values and beliefs, and a strange (to us, that is) culture. We can wish it weren't so, we can try to ignore it, we can grouse about it, but that won't change anything—and it won't help us accomplish the commission our Savior has given us. The truth remains:

North American evangelism efforts must address a surging wave of immigrants who come to our borders with no knowledge of Christianity. Moreover, there are the folks who have lived within our borders for generations but have turned their back on historic Christianity. Church attendance in Seattle, Washington, averages less than 3% on Sunday mornings according to an article in the Seattle Times. Islam explodes in the cities. Mormonism grows exponentially in urban areas. Because people are still moving to the cities and because our church and the Christian church is still "losing" the cities, that is to say, because the activity of the Church of Jesus Christ in carrying out its Lord's commission to make disciples of all nations in cities is not sufficiently active, we need to focus carefully on what God has done to save the world and apply earnestly and immediately what we learn to North American cities!²⁴

It is for these reasons that the Board for Home Missions, through the Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee, approved the production and promotes the use of *Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures*. *Change* is largely the work of E. Allen Sorum, drawn from his personal experience as pastor of Garden Homes Evangelical Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, and six years of extensive research, interviewing, field testing, and writing.²⁵ It represents the operative philosophy and strategy (process) of Home Missions for use in cross-cultural home mission efforts today.

The book is not a program. "It offers a process to be carried out anywhere among any culture or compilation of cultures. The process is itself ministry and leads to a ministry plan."²⁶ If I were asked to find a one-word summary for the process as well as for the philosophy and, most important, the theology that underlies the process, it would be the word "partnership."

Our ultimate objective in cross-cultural ministry is to create partners who will stand side by side with us sharing the Word of salvation, growing in faith through the Word, and nurturing others with the Word. Having white pastors preaching the gospel to people of other cultures is not the *end* goal (although gospel preaching is a continuing goal, and we want to have many opportunities to preach both law and gospel to people of other cultures since the law shows us we need the Savior and the gospel is the only Means of Grace). Having people from other ethnic groups become WELS members is not the *end* goal (although we desire to experience fellowship with them and so exhibit our oneness in faith). Having people of other cultures learn and appreciate our heritage, including our worship heritage, is not the *end* goal (although we desire to join in worship and daily living to praise the God of our salvation together). Having people of other cultures and ethnic groups standing side by side with us as equal partners as we proclaim sin and grace together—that is our end goal. Only then, we believe, will we be able to say that we have evangelized ACROSS cultures.

²⁴*Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures*, op. cit. pp. 14-15.

²⁵A portion of the book, in abridged form, appeared in the Fall 1997 and Winter 1998 issues of *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. A review of the entire book appears in the Winter 1998 issue of WLQ as well.

²⁶ *Change*, p. 2.

Let me illustrate my point. There are at least five, probably more, "stops" or steps along the way to creating full gospel-proclaiming partnership across cultures.

At the first stop or level, we become aware that there are people of other cultures, ethnic groups, or races in our neighborhood. One of the goals of the Seeking Our Neighbor (SON) Committee was to create awareness among our WELS members that we are all surrounded by people of cultures, etc., different from our own. Obviously, awareness is important, yet it cannot be the final goal. Awareness does not save people.

At the second stop, we learn to tolerate our new neighbors. It assumes that we make little or no effort to get to know or understand them. It presupposes that they have their ways and we have ours—and we believe that some day they will come to see that our ways are better.

Concern is the third stop. At this level we have approached our new neighbors because we are concerned about their souls and what will happen to them eternally. We care enough to proclaim sin and grace, but we do it in our way, on our terms and in our own language. We may see results, but there is the nagging feeling that our neighbors are saying the things they think we want to hear.

The fourth stop or level is endorsement. Here we have shared Christ with our neighbors, and we have learned much about them and why they do things the way they do them. We accept them for what they are, brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are still people from different cultures.

The fifth level is partnership. We know each other's culture. Better yet, we respect each other's culture. God-pleasing aspects of each culture's styles and behaviors are welcomed and supported. Most important, the leadership is fully shared—maybe even tilted toward the host culture (i.e., the "new" people's culture). Leaders are trained, enabled, and empowered to carry on the work when we are gone.

Each stop along the way represents a challenging step for a congregation or new mission to take. Each stop is a critical step for a congregation or mission to take. But unless we are moving consciously toward that fifth stop we will fall somewhat short of our goal to have cross-cultural ministry be all that it can be.

Development of the Multi-Ethnic Pre-Seminary Training Program

The third development in Home Missions is the Multi-Ethnic Pre-Seminary Training Program. With the development, adoption, and publication of *Change*, the Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee faced a new challenge: when the Lord leads us to gospel ministry partners from other cultures, how will we train them for full-time gospel ministry? How will we train men for full-time ministry if they are not conversant enough in English to understand or keep up with the classes offered at Martin Luther College? How will men be prepared if neither they nor we are sure at what academic level they should be placed? Is it even wise to take a man—well respected by the Christians gathered from his culture/group—out of familiar surroundings and away from the place where he can best serve as a gospel partner, and place him into a culture that is very "foreign" to him and expect him to thrive for three, four, or five years?

There was another set of questions as well. These questions centered around form of ministry. Up until the last few years, there were two commonly recognized parish offices in WELS, that of pastor and teacher. This has now been expanded to include a growing number of staff ministry offices. The questions arose in connection with the training of ethnic or cross-cultural workers: How much training is necessary for a man to be recognized as a pastor eligible for call in our synod? How much training is necessary for him to be recognized as a pastor among his own people? Should there be different standards for ethnic workers? If they do not receive a full seminary training at Mequon should they be considered staff ministers? Should new offices, such

as evangelist, be created for them? More importantly, are we "jumping the gun" even talking about ethnic and cross-cultural evangelists, staff ministers and pastors? Shouldn't we be training these fellow Christians to be lay leaders first?

These were some of the many questions that were addressed by representatives from Home Missions, the Conference of Presidents, and the Board for Ministerial Education in the early 1990s. The result of many, many hours of meetings was the Multi-Ethnic Pre-Seminary Training Program, presented to the synod in convention in 1995 by the Board for Ministerial Education. In 1996, Professor Glen Thompson, who up until then served as part-time director of the new program, was called full time to establish the training program from a base at Martin Luther College.

The program now in place has as its goal "to assist men from minority cultures to achieve their goal of serving the Lord as pastors in the WELS."²⁷ The training program has two levels. Level One is open to all congregational lay leaders. Its two-fold purpose is to train people for service in their congregations and to help their pastors determine which men have gifts for pastoral ministry. The courses are offered locally by the home or a neighboring pastor. The curriculum, course materials, and tests are sent to the teaching pastor by the program director. The director maintains regular contacts with students and teachers to measure progress and discuss issues that may arise.

Upon completion of Level One and with the recommendation of their pastor and congregation, qualified students are eligible to enter Level Two. At this level actual pre-seminary instruction takes place through the use of textbooks, video and audio cassettes, and other programmed materials.

What have we learned to date? It is too early to provide anything approaching a final report; however, two early concerns about the program have not materialized. First, there was a concern that there would be little need for the program; however, the remarkably large number of ethnic groups and cultures represented across a wide geographic area appears to demonstrate the need for an alternative to the standard worker training system. Second, there was a concern that potential students would use the program as a "fast track" into the public ministry. That is not occurring. If anything, the training time needed to complete course work is longer than the more standard route.

What are the Implications for WELS with Particular Reference to Worship Forms and Worship Style?

In this section I would like to offer what I see are implications that need to be considered by those responsible for facilitating worship in WELS (pastors, instrumentalists, choir directors, worship committees and commissions, etc.) as we look toward the future.

People are being brought into our fellowship who are unfamiliar with worship in general and historic Lutheran liturgical worship in particular. For several decades now our missionaries in the outlying, salt-water districts of WELS²⁸ have had regular contact with people who, although they are practicing Christians, reflect the religious traditions and practices of the region in which they live.

When visitors attend our worship services in these areas, they are met by a "culture" that is foreign to them. At first blush it can seem too structured, stilted, or cold; or the music is too classical or doesn't speak to the heart. You've heard all of this before, and in truth, commendable efforts have been made in our worker

²⁷“Preparing for Ministry: The WELS Multi-Ethnic Pre-seminary Program,” a brochure written by Prof Thompson, was produced to introduce WELS pastors and lay members to the program.

²⁸At present these are North Atlantic, South Atlantic, South Central, Arizona-California, and Pacific Northwest districts.

training schools and at conferences in recent years to help pastors and musicians find ways to make worship a more comfortable experience for visitors while still retaining the important elements of historic Lutheran worship.

But now we are entering a new arena. Nearly all of our mission efforts up until now have been carried out among people whose basic culture is at heart white-Protestant or white-Roman Catholic. Now we find ourselves reaching out to and serving cultures that are far different from what has been familiar to us and whose customs are foreign to us. If even simple, everyday actions and practices have different meanings (e.g., the time and place for shaking hands and hugging; ways of disciplining children, eating customs, etc., etc.), why wouldn't we expect that worship styles, customs, and practices would be affected as well? If it is becoming difficult enough just to introduce Christian worship to our own post-Christian, post-modern entertainment-saturated people, how much more difficult will it be to educate patiently those who come from non-Christian societies?

As a result we see a *critical need to develop Bible studies that will help us and people of other cultures (re)discover and understand scriptural worship principles*. With these scriptural principles laid out, we can show how our historic Lutheran worship principles developed on a scriptural basis. Then we can work with people of other cultures as they develop worship forms of their own or, more likely, as they adopt or adapt our historic Lutheran forms as their own.

We must *create a climate that allows for variety and that embraces cultural inclusiveness appropriately*. This means change, and change can be frightening. It means leaving our various zones of comfort and allowing ourselves to experience what makes us less than comfortable. This is demanding work, but it is necessary work. As the Seeking Our Neighbor Committee learned through the many interviews it conducted with WELS members of many cultures, change is a two-way street that is best navigated when we meet in the middle. And it is navigable only when we take our eyes off ourselves and keep them fixed on Jesus who says, "Open your eyes and look at the fields."

Worship with brothers and sisters to whom we have reached out across cultures means that *training, patience, and understanding are essential for all* (including pastor, congregation, newcomer, and Commission on Worship). Once we have decided which elements of our worship must be retained—and this only after prayerful, careful, continuing study—then we must be ready to accept the fact that a long, slow process of worship education and a continuing effort to create a climate of tolerance for God-pleasing change and a culture of inclusivity lies ahead for us.

Given the predisposition of long-time and new Americans alike to be entertained, *quality music, variety in instrumentation and musical styles, and an appropriate array of worship styles are necessary*. The skill levels of worship leaders and musicians both with regard to planning and leading worship services will be put to the test. If this seems threatening to worship leaders in a large congregation, imagine how it causes missionaries whose resources are limited to shudder. The Commission on Worship can perform a great service by promoting and demonstrating excellence in worship while at the same time offering realistic examples of what is meant by quality, variety, and style.

We would ask that the Commission on Worship and Board for World Missions *be ready to assist in the production of cultural resources like hymnals and service books that have been developed by and are reflective of other ethnic /cultural groups in our fellowship*. In this regard I believe there is merit in the approach suggested by Todd E. Roeske, an LCMS missionary serving in the Philippines, in an article that appeared last year in *Missio Apostolica*. He summarizes his balanced approach to developing a worship form with these words:

The missionary must teach biblical guidelines for worship while offering help in developing new worship resources and by providing access to time-tested worship resources that may be adapted for worship in the new context....This approach implies a continual process of evaluation as a young church grows in its understanding of the gospel....Its strength is that it allows a young church freedom to develop a worship form that is indigenous and yet connected with the larger church.²⁹

I invite and encourage all who are responsible for preparing and promoting materials that encourage worship that gives glory to God and proclaims his grace to (1) study the principles and process put forth in *Change: Mission and Ministry Across Cultures* and then (2) conduct community and neighborhood interviews to learn firsthand about different cultures so that worship forms, styles, educational materials, and training are not based on assumptions or presuppositions. I do not mean to impugn the motives or the work of committees, congregations, or individuals that have been done up to this point but only to say, "Come and learn even more"—not just as an observer—but as a participating partner who asks questions. Ask representatives from the various Hispanic-, Asian- and African-American groups among us how they like to worship, what they are thinking when they see our worship in practice, and what suggestions they might offer to make the worship experience as meaningful for people in their culture as it is for us in ours.

It is not my intent to put anyone on the defensive or to create barriers or walls between us. My intent is to lay out for all to see what we think needs to be addressed as we work together to extend God's kingdom of grace. Brothers, let us join together, raise our heads, open our eyes, look at the fields ripe for harvest, and strive to accomplish God's will through a gospel partnership that includes more and more from among all languages, peoples, nations, and tribes—right here in North America.

²⁹"Christian Worship in a Cross-Cultural Setting," *Missio Apostolica* (Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology), Volume V, No. 1 (Issue No. 9), May 1997.