

White Flight

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The Response of WELS Churches in Central City Milwaukee  
to a Major Cultural and Ethnic Change.

by

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It is always exciting whenever the synod announces that another WELS church is opening to serve the people of a certain community. At the same time, it is also sad, and somewhat disheartening, whenever it is announced that the WELS has had to close down a church for some reason or another.

Perhaps, then, one of the sadder stories in the WELS is the one told of the churches which once served the central city of Milwaukee. Why is the north side of Milwaukee, the central city, which was once so densely filled with Lutheran churches now so sparsely populated with Lutheran churches? Why did so many WELS churches leave this area which was once so rich with some of the most beautiful and most filled Lutheran churches in all of the WELS? What caused these churches to fold? Why are some still serving their communities and others long since gone from the neighborhoods they once served?

One of the simplest reasons to give that the face of the Lutheran church in the central city of the north side of Milwaukee changed so drastically is that the central city of the north side of Milwaukee changed so dramatically. Around the time of World War II, there were approximately 20,000 blacks living in Milwaukee. Today there are over 200,000 blacks living in Milwaukee, and most of them live in the central city. Why should this effect the Lutheran church in the central city?

#### MILWAUKEE IN THE PAST

When the Lutheran church was founded in Milwaukee, it was generally a matter of finding the Lutherans and building a church for them to go to. Many Germans had immigrated into Milwaukee. Most of these Germans had a Lutheran background. The people in the Motherland had a concern for their fellow Germans who had come to America. They wanted to be sure that they had pastors who could take care of their spiritual needs, so the Mission houses and societies in Germany managed to send over to America a number of pastors who would be able to minister to these now unchurched Lutherans who came to America.

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As a matter of fact, it is reported that one recently ordained pastor was taken to Milwaukee to minister to a church that did not yet exist. He was taken to Milwaukee by his professor who showed him the neighborhood in which he would be serving. There was no church building, no parsonage, and not even a nucleus of parishioners to serve. The professor walked around the neighborhood, and whenever he came up to one of the neighbors in the area, he would say something to the effect of, "Pardon me, but you look like a German." Upon finding out that the person was a German, the professor followed up with, "There are going to be worship services at such-and-such a place on Sunday morning." This was the evangelism technique used for this new pastor. That following Sunday, the pastor led services for about 200 souls. Perhaps this was not too uncommon an occurrence in 19th century Milwaukee.<sup>1</sup>

Another story is told of a Lutheran church that was holding services for a relatively small number of souls. The German Lutherans in the neighborhood became aware of the services that were being conducted and came to worship at the church. The pastor announced that anyone who wished to become a member of the church could announce to the pastor their intentions to join after the service. After the service, there was a line outside the sacristy of people wanting to join that Lutheran church.<sup>2</sup> Today, these stories are the fantasies of pastors who are working on evangelism programs.

Why were Lutheran churches in the central city of north Milwaukee so "successful" back in the 19th century while today some are struggling just to survive and others have not even done that? From the above stories, one can draw a rather simple conclusion: In earlier days, the Lutheran churches were only gathering people who were already Lutheran but did not have a church to attend. Today, these congregations are struggling to find black prospects, whose religious backgrounds are most likely Baptist or Pentecostal, to become members of a Lutheran church.

This solution does not really do justice to the truth, however. While it is true that many blacks living in the central city have Baptist or Pentecostal backgrounds, it is equally true

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that many of these same blacks do not attend worship services--some not regularly, some not at all. Despite whatever background they may have had, many of them now bear this identity: "Unchurched." Many have been unchurched for quite some time. Their church background in many cases ends when their childhood does. Their parents knew the importance of their children going to church or Sunday School, but the parents' own apathy toward going to church made much more of an impression on their children than the church's stressing the importance of going to church and hearing God's Word. The result of such attitudes, modeled by actions, leaves many black people in central city Milwaukee without a church that they attend.

Where does the WELS come in? The WELS comes in where the black people came in--the central city in northern Milwaukee. This occurred shortly after World War II at an incredible rate. After World War II, there were jobs available in Milwaukee, seemingly more jobs than the population of Milwaukee could supply workers for. It has been suggested that some of the mayors in Milwaukee at that time rented billboards down south, in states such as Mississippi, advertising the fact that Milwaukee had jobs and needed workers to fill the positions. There is some debate as to the truth of this.<sup>3</sup> At any rate, black people moved up north to Milwaukee. They could not afford much of the costly housing that was being constructed following the war, so where to live? Naturally, they moved into the housing that they could afford--into the central city where people were leaving to go to those new homes in the suburbs.

In some instances, homes were let go during the war while the man of the house was serving his country. They fell into a state of disrepair; and rather than go to great lengths to repair what had been left unmaintained for a few years, it became easy to look at moving to a brand new house going up outside the crowded city. These are the houses that many blacks had to move into. These were the only homes that many blacks could afford. And all of these houses were in the central city, restricting the black population to a very limited area--especially after they first came to Milwaukee.

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"With the arrival of the spacious suburbs, the value of those old houses declined. People tried to sell them quickly, before the price dropped out of sight, and in so doing they flooded the market with homes that no one really wanted. Either they took whatever they were offered, or they became reluctant landlords, hoping that rent would pay for the taxes and repairs.

"Who would want to live in these old and undesirable dwellings? No one, to tell the truth, but there were many who had to live in such dwellings, because they could not afford to live elsewhere. Thus the neighborhood declined, from middle class to poor, a neighborhood we now call the 'inner city.'"<sup>4</sup>

In retrospect, WELS churches in the central city were, to a certain degree, victims of circumstance. It was the spirit of the day among the people in Milwaukee that certain ethnic groups live among their own people. The Poles were on the south side, the Italians lived along the lake shore on the south side down where Henry W. Maier Festival Park is today, and the Germans were on the north side of Milwaukee. This is the way it was, and this is the way that many people liked it. Now the black people moved in. Where shall they live? Amongst themselves, just like everyone else is doing; and they inherited the central city, whether they wanted it or not. Was this racist--to keep the black people limited to themselves? When the spirit of the day said that the Poles live with the Poles, the Italians live with the Italians, and the Germans live with the Germans, why would anyone think it to be racist to suggest that the blacks would live with the blacks? Was there racism? To say there was not would not be the truth; to say everyone was a bigot would be unfair. In any event, the intent here is not to judge hearts or to condemn attitudes that were certainly not God-pleasing, the point to be made here is just that everyone was, for the most part, segregated into his own ethnic background and that everyone, for the most part, was pleased with things that way.

The immigration of blacks from the south continued for some time. Eventually, the need for housing demanded that they spread out, which they did. This is where racism comes into play, as well as dishonesty and greed. The racism was on the part of the white home owners who left the central city for the suburbs when the black people moved into their neighborhoods. (It would be unfair, however, to say that *every* move to the suburbs

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was racially motivated.) This dishonesty and greed came on the part of corrupt real estate agents who saw their opportunity to make a mint by playing on the fears and, in many cases the bigotry, of these white home owners in the central city.

"There was no 'open housing' in those days. Block busting was rather the way of life. White home owners held on to their property for dear life. To sell to a black was to earn the eternal enmity of neighbors who had been friends for years. Once the first black-owned home appeared on the block, the rest rushed to sell before their property became worthless, which action inevitably rendered their property practically worthless. White Lutherans evacuated their old neighborhoods in droves, leaving their churches behind."<sup>5</sup>

These churches that were left behind were left in neighborhoods that were very much different than the neighborhoods they were originally built to serve. The neighborhoods no longer consisted of white, Lutheran residents, but rather black residents with non-Lutheran backgrounds. Even though the population of the central city increased when the black people moved in (many homes were divided into duplexes or apartments), the attendance at the WELS churches in those neighborhoods did not reflect the increased population. What happened to the membership of these churches? Why didn't more population equal more membership? What happened to the members of these stately old churches which for years had been filled with white, German Lutherans?

"These churches still stand tall and proud in the midst of the crumbling houses that surrounded them. The buildings were built solid, much more solid than the mere mortals that worshipped in them. Seldom does the cry of a baby echo among the vaulted arches. For the young people have gone, and their babies with them. Only the elderly remain, some because they still live in the neighborhood, and the streets are relatively safe on Sunday morning. Some still come because they love that beautiful church which saw the burial of their parents and the marriage of their children.

"They elderly die and their numbers decline. Soon there aren't enough of them to purchase the expensive gas that now fires the aging boilers. Finally their house of God grows dark and silent on Sunday morning as the survivors retreat to the churches their children have built in the suburbs."<sup>6</sup>

This tells us why the white Germans are no longer attending the central city churches with the numbers that they once had. Since they left their old neighborhoods, they in turn

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left their old neighborhood churches. Only the few who have not left those neighborhoods and those who feel an undying devotion to their churches still continue to sit in those same pews Sunday after Sunday.

Here is where the WELS has taken her lumps in the central city. The north side of Milwaukee was at one time swarming with Wisconsin Synod churches, even more so with Lutheran churches in general. The author has noticed that in general, if one is driving through the central city and just aims his car at a steeple pointing up, odds are that the church is, or at one time had been, a Lutheran church. It has been said that if, back in the 1950's, one were to make Divine Charity (1st and Chambers) a focal point and then were to draw a circle with the radius of a mile around Divine Charity, that person would encircle twelve Lutheran churches!<sup>7</sup> The same could hardly be said today.

What happened? There are more people now living in these neighborhoods than there have ever been. Why are the WELS churches disappearing from the central city? Was there a lack of commitment to their ministry? Did one church do something that another church failed to do? Are the people who left bigots and racists? Did the congregations that left fail to do what the other central city churches did? Did someone do something wrong while another did something right? Is the WELS church the "White" church? Was the WELS guilty of sin whenever we left a neighborhood in the central city? What happened?

The following section of this paper will briefly examine the story of a number of central city congregations. Some have closed or have followed their people by moving out to the suburbs. Others still maintain an active ministry in their community. Some may be currently entertaining some serious thoughts about their existence in the central city in the near or distant future.

For the most part, the histories of the congregations below have been reported by the pastors who used to serve them. These pastors were asked to answer questions about their congregation's involvement in "White Flight" and with evangelism to and relations among

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members of the black community. Only pastors were asked because this author assumed that the pastor could speak for the members he had served and could accurately portray the feelings and attitudes of those members who were also involved in congregational life and central city ministry during "White Flight." (The author is fully aware that assumptions are dangerous and can result in misguided facts, but the author also knows that a pastor ought to know the people he is serving. That is why pastors were asked what congregational reactions and attitudes were to these events in the 50's, 60's, and 70's.) The author is also fully aware that some of the information may be somewhat tainted for understandable reasons. These same pastors who are reflecting the attitudes of their congregations certainly would not want to defame or bad-mouth the people they had grown to love in their service with them. Not many would care to admit their own shortcomings and/or failures, either. This is the light in which these responses and evaluations shall be made. It is entirely possible that the picture of the WELS in the following pages is not really as nice as it would sound. It is just as possible that this will be a very accurate picture--not of every aspect, but in general.

The information is reported as accurately as possible in the form that it was offered. The author did his best not to speak for anyone, to interpret what was said, or to presume to know "what *really* happened." The author was not even living for a good portion of this era and will not pretend to know what it was like to live in a central city congregation or to serve one at this time. A debt of gratitude is owed to those who offered information to make this paper possible.

This intent of this paper is not to find fault with anyone. The intent is to see what was done or what was not done in churches that were in the middle of neighborhoods undergoing dramatic cultural and ethnic changes in a very short period of time. Hopefully, the information in this paper will benefit the next congregation that faces a similar situation of cultural and ethnic change on any scale. It is also hoped that the WELS may learn from



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past mistakes or "successes," that future generations will learn from what has been done in the past, and that God's Kingdom may be advanced from what has been learned.

The following is a brief overview of what happened in the past in a number of WELS congregations in central city Milwaukee:

### Divine Charity (1st and Chambers)

Divine Charity was founded as a response to all of the other Lutheran churches in the inner city which had service only in German. A small group of people from Jerusalem congregation were interested in English services. Their requests to the Synod for these services went unheeded for a while, but finally they were given permission to meet for English worship services once a month on a Sunday evening. (After all, when God spoke on Sunday mornings, he only spoke in German. Therefore, English services were later in the day.) After a while, the group requested that they might meet more often. The Synod, eventually, consented to this as well.

Meanwhile, the group that was gathering for English services was growing. They became weary of gathering for worship only in the evening. Since it was very unlikely that German services would be changed to English at Jerusalem, they began to consider gathering in a facility that they could call their own.

Throughout most of this time, this group of people was being served by a Missouri Synod pastor, Dr. Dallmann from Mt. Olive Lutheran Church. Dr. Dallmann saw that English services were going to become more predominant in the coming years, so he began establishing Lutheran churches which offered English services. He had already established two churches for Missouri: Faith (on S. 27th) and Hope (35th and Cherry). Now he was serving this English speaking Lutheran church which was becoming independent from Jerusalem. Since Faith and Hope had already been established, Dr. Dallmann named this third English speaking church Divine Charity. The official name of the church was "The English Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Divine Charity."<sup>8</sup>

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Divine Charity's drawing power from this neighborhood was the fact that it was an English speaking church. However, the rest of the Lutheran churches in north Milwaukee soon followed suit by offering English services as the years went by. As a result, Divine Charity had reason to do some serious thinking, for it had lost much of its drawing power or base. Already in the late 1950's it started talking about starting at least a daughter congregation or branch in the far north outskirts to help keep some of the members.

The "flight" to the suburbs was not all racially motivated. When the children of the older members grew up, got married, raised families, and prospered, it was only natural that they chose to buy newer and more modern homes in less congested and newer areas. Sadly, when some of the newcomers in the inner city became stirred up and turned to lawlessness, then the flight to the suburbs intensified.<sup>9</sup>

There was canvassing of the neighborhood and personal invitations to worship at Divine Charity were extended to the neighborhood as well. There were a number of black visitors to Divine Charity, and although it is not clear how they reacted to Lutheran worship, one lady who visited remarked that she liked Lutheran worship services because the sermons were shorter than the Baptist sermons to which she was accustomed. The members of Divine Charity, as one pastor recalls, were warm and friendly to the black visitors who attended worship there.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that at the time their last pastor came to serve them, Divine Charity was ready to close their doors. Their numbers had been declining for some time, and their members were heading for the suburbs. Talk of moving out became a reality when in 1962 Divine Charity merged with Divinity in Whitefish Bay. Divinity-Divine Charity still worships in Whitefish Bay.

### Garden Homes (24th and Roosevelt)

Garden Homes is an interesting story because they <sup>it is</sup> are perhaps the only congregation in central city Milwaukee that both benefited from and suffered the effects of "White Flight." Garden Homes was founded in 1935. At that time, it was on the edge of Milwaukee. As

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members moved out of town to the suburbs of that day (around Garden Homes), they left churches such as Grace, St. Marcus, and St. John's and filled Garden Homes. In many cases, the great numbers at Garden Homes resulted from nothing more than WELS members leaving from what was then the central city for what was then the suburbs, and transferring from their central city churches to Garden Homes.

But eventually, the city grew and the suburbs moved out with the city limits. Now Garden Homes was no longer the suburbs; it was the central city! The same phenomenon which had supplied Garden Homes with all of its members in the 40's was now happening again in the 60's and 70's -- "White Flight." "The changing neighborhood set off a white exodus from the area. The well of new members by transfer, a rich source of members for Garden Homes in the past decade, had dried up. The current membership was beginning to transfer out. Up to the late sixties, transfers out of Garden Homes were almost unheard of."<sup>11</sup>

The members of Garden Homes were well aware of the flight from the central city, and then from Garden Homes as well. They began to look seriously at relocating the Garden Homes congregation. However, these suggestions never became realities. The problem was that the Garden Homes membership was not relocating in a specific area where there might be a strong nucleus of Garden Homes members.

Pastor Erhard Pankow, who had served Garden Homes during its entire existence, did not react favorably to the membership declining and the people leaving. Pastor Pankow reacted just as Pastor Brenner from St. John's had before when he was faced with the same situation--he refused to transfer members out.

"...Pankow was in favor of keeping Garden Homes where it was rather than relocating. But those close to Pankow recall that this was no easy decision for him. Regardless of his strong ties to the church building he designed and helped build and to the community he had served so long, Pankow was still watching his church's attendance and membership slide because of white flight. Pankow made it very clear to the members that they shouldn't even consider transferring out. He

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was very compelling, but as the statistics will show, not entirely successful in persuading everyone to stay."<sup>12</sup>

Garden Homes then committed itself to continue its ministry in the central city and to reach out to those who were moving into the homes that their members were leaving. They knew full well about the mission field that was moving right into their neighborhood, whether some wanted it there or not.

"In the early '70's Garden Homes made a sound commitment to ministry in its community. This was a most exciting time, and the unfavorable attitudes were lessened. A ministry of outreach was established. Members remaining were committed to reaching out to the community. Once the commitment was made, many, many efforts were made. Phone canvassing, home visits, literature about church and school distributed, etc...."<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Duane Polack, who served as the principal at Garden Homes from 1968-1991, became very much involved in this outreach program. His duties as the principal were reduced, and he was put in charge of the evangelism program at Garden Homes.

"Polack's position as school principal was redefined. He was called to serve as Director of Education and Evangelism and Assistant to the Pastor. Polack pursued instruction in the areas of evangelism and community outreach. It became his responsibility to develop a team of trained evangelists who would lead the way in evangelizing new neighbors in this changing neighborhood. As Assistant to the Pastor, Polack would assist in the instruction of all those who were evangelized."<sup>14</sup>

Evangelism efforts by the members of Garden Homes were blessed by the Lord as a good number of black people from the neighborhood came to know of Garden Homes. Many visited the church, many became aware of and began sending their children to the school, and many also were enrolled in the Bible Information Courses. In general, the members of Garden Homes assisted the evangelism program by supplying the evangelism committee with names and addresses of new residents.

The evangelism efforts were blessed by the Holy Spirit, and black people from the neighborhood began coming to Garden Homes. This is when prejudice began to rear its ugly head at Garden Homes and became manifest when a good deal of people left the church. From the years 1973-1982, the number of new adult confirmands was 131 -- 126

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of them being black. During that same time period there were 470 transfers out of Garden Homes -- 460 of them being white.<sup>15</sup> Whether all of these moves were the result of racism would be hard to believe and even harder to prove, but that does not matter. When the blacks were coming into the church in pretty good numbers and at the same time whites were leaving in much greater numbers, it is not hard to draw a "cause-and-effect" conclusion.

The barriers between the cultures and the suspicions about one another increased all the more. No one wanted to be at a church where the attitude was "you don't belong," and the only things that decide who doesn't belong are who was there last and who are there less of. Somebody would have to give. In many cases, it would be the white people who left for the suburbs. One of the first key black councilmen at Garden Homes remembers:

"There were some people in high places who had some responsible positions -- and I'm not talking about Pastor Pankow -- who were very prejudiced, very biased against blacks and I worked around those people.... Subtly I tried -- with the help of other (black councilmen) -- to put pressure on those people to show their hand. And ultimately they did. They transferred away.... I didn't think that was bad. To the contrary, I thought that was good. You don't always regard a departure as a failure; it might be a success."<sup>16</sup>

The numbers went down, and it was hard on Pastor Pankow. Duane Polack reflects on how Pastor Pankow may have felt:

"When the major changes of the '70's took place it was difficult for the pastor. He had served this congregation for forty years. He had seen it grow from a handful of people to over 1000 -- then the decline, as a result of the 'White Flight.' I think, at least to a degree, he blamed the blacks for the changes taking place. Also, challenges were perceived as problems in types of counselling, etc., the 'desertion' of long time members. They were forsaking the 'mother church' and him. Nevertheless, a commitment had been made by the church and there was no going back to the 'good old days.'"<sup>17</sup>

Even with the "good old days" being gone, Garden Homes has an active ministry among the people in its community. Their school is what attracts the most attention to themselves, and it serves as their greatest evangelism tool. Today, Garden Homes is an integrated congregation served by Pastor Allen Sorum with a membership of 451 souls.

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### Parkside (Shermann and North)

Parkside Lutheran Church was established in 1938 and its building was located on the corner of Sherman Boulevard and North Avenue. During the majority of its existence, Parkside was served by Pastor Richard Stiemke from 1947 until its close in 1983.

At the arrival of Pastor Stiemke and his wife, the neighborhood around Parkside was 100% white. As the neighborhood changed with an influx of black people, it was at first very pleasant. Parkside was looking forward to integrating them into their congregation. But as time went on things changed. There were constant break-ins and disruptions in the schools and neighborhoods. Mrs. Stiemke also recalls that she and her husband were victims of a number of break-ins and that her husband was mugged at knife-point and cut up.<sup>18</sup>

As crime increased there was some anger and a desire to flee in the neighborhood, but the members of Parkside were determined to integrate the church and made every effort to do so. One summer they hired a Seminary student full time to canvass and evaluate the results. It did not seem too promising, but members of Parkside were determined to make every effort to encourage those who were prospects to join the church.

Parkside made use of a number of evangelism tools in their outreach to the neighborhood. The Sunday School and the Vacation Bible School were utilized to bring children into the church, and then hopefully also their parents. Although there were visitors to the Sunday School and VBS, it seemed to have limited "success." Mrs. Stiemke recalls such limited "success":

"Quite a few children came to our Sunday School and Vacation Bible Schools, but when it was suggested they should be baptized, often it was not the children but the parents or grandparents who would not permit the children to be baptized because of the strong Baptist Church background many of them had. We did have one family of Indians who joined our church, and had their four children baptized. But suddenly the family discontinued coming. Where my husband called on them, they said they had joined a Baptist Church (who) would pick up their children by bus for Sunday School, and they, the parents, could sleep on Sunday mornings."<sup>19</sup>

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Parkside also had a gymnasium which was also opened to the neighborhood, and which the neighborhood also made use of under the supervision of the members of Parkside. Parkside did not have a day school through which prospective members could be made aware of the church and become members. They did have an arrangement with St. James School, but that was for their members only. Besides these means, Parkside canvassed the neighborhood regularly, inviting all to services and Sunday School.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs. Stiemke does not recall any racial prejudice from the members of Parkside. She says that if any members did not want the black people who were moving into the neighborhood to become members of Parkside it was not apparent to her or to her husband. As a matter of fact, Parkside did have a few black adults become fine members. But Mrs. Stiemke also recalls that those few who did become members had had some slight Protestant church background. And although there were a few who became members, and although it appeared that the congregation was warm and welcomed all who came to visit Parkside, the number of those who came was not large and the number of those who became members was even less.

How did "White Flight" affect Parkside? In reality, not nearly as badly as it affected other congregations. If White Flight occurred at Parkside, it was only in the last few years of Parkside's existence. However, if one looks at the statistical report, one cannot help but notice a declining membership from about 1964 right up to the closing of Parkside. If this is not "White Flight," how does one account for the disappearing members?

"In the case of Parkside, the destruction of our membership numbers was not caused by White Flight, until possibly near the end, in the early 80's. What caused a large portion of our membership to leave the area was the construction of one freeway, and the plans for the construction of a second one. The first freeway was built west and south of Parkside. Hundreds of homes were torn down for that one, including many Parkside members'. Then a few years later another arm of the freeway system was planned to cut directly through our membership. Hundreds of homes were torn down there also, and the owners were given whatever the city decided (way below value). There was no recourse, and the homes were destroyed swiftly. The people had very little time to find another place to live. And then the freeway was never built. Most of it stands empty today."<sup>21</sup>

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The demise of Parkside was not, then, a lack of effort on the part of its members or its pastor. It was not a lack of desire to have the new neighbors become members of Parkside, nor was it a failure to invite the new neighbors to Parkside. For the most part, Parkside seemed to be a victim of the city of Milwaukee and their plans to build two freeways, one of which was never built. It destroyed the homes of members who were living in Parkside's neighborhood; and the freeways, not the blacks, sent the members out to the suburbs. The end of Pastor Stiemke's ministry was also marked by the end of Parkside Lutheran Church.

"The people who left or were forced to leave the area did drive back to attend services until my husband reached retirement age. To some extent they had continued membership out of loyalty to him. They now felt the church should be sold and all join a WELS church near their homes. So with much sadness and many tears, the last service was held on New Year's Eve of 1982. The church had been sold to a large black Baptist church in the inner city for \$250,000 -- 60% of which was given to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, 20% to Wisconsin Lutheran College, and 20% to Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Each member was given a transfer to any WELS church of his choice."<sup>22</sup>

### St. John (8th and Vliet)

Some would consider St. John's on Eighth and Vliet to be perhaps the biggest disappointment in the inner city. This church, which can seat approximately 1100 people, was once filled for every Sunday service. This was back in the days when John Brenner served as their pastor (1908-1958). Today Pastor Kevin Hastings says the average Sunday attendance is around 25 people. It is a saddening experience to worship in such a monumental structure, which had been dubbed "The Lutheran Cathedral" in Milwaukee, and to have it so empty.

In many respects, St. John's has never changed. The building has not changed, and in some cases has not been maintained. This lack of maintenance is more from lack of funds than from lack of concern. The incredible amount of light bulbs which line the church still reflect the days when Wisconsin Avenue was lit up with electric light bulbs in front of all of



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the theaters. The people have not changed. The only thing that has changed among those who still attend St. John's is their age. Their love for their Lord and for their church has not changed. If anyone were to visit St. John's for Sunday worship, he would not have a hard time getting the life-long members to talk about their church or the pastors who served them. They enjoy their Lutheran worship, and they are glad to enter the house of the Lord every Sunday.

Then what has changed? Obviously, the numbers changed. St. John's in 1890 had a membership of 2403 (and it is suggested that this may even be number of communicants rather than number of souls<sup>23</sup>). This congregation <sup>which</sup> had 575 members in 1958 has shrunk to only 62 members as of 1992. One of the reasons that St. John's lost so many members after Pastor Brenner retired was that Pastor Brenner refused to release people from membership at St. John's. Even though they may have moved away, Pastor Brenner made it clear that this was "their church" and insisted that those who had moved away return for worship at 8th and Vliet.<sup>24</sup> It was after Brenner retired that many transfers were granted to people who had already left the neighborhood if not the church and the numbers dropped.

The neighborhood changed.

"During the prime years of St. John's ascendancy, Eighth and Vliet was a location surrounded by a fine residential neighborhood of solid middle and upper class citizens, among whom were some wealthy leading citizens who belonged to St. John's.... By 1921...decline had already set in. This was the period during which the palatial residences on Lake Drive were being built, and some of the owners of these homes, including a few St. John's member, had formerly lived in the St. John's neighborhood, during which time they had made their fortunes. When St. John's members first began moving out of the area, they retained their membership at St. John's, and continued attending there. These faithful members with strong ties to St. John's, loathe to sever their connections with their beloved church. But a trend like this can be bucked only for so long; the rate of membership attrition began to pick up."<sup>25</sup>

The neighborhood around St. John's was at one time filled with the well-to-do, but they moved out. Those who moved into those homes, who were blue collar workers and not as well-to-do as those who moved out, inherited homes which were more run down than they

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once had been. There were more renters in the neighborhood; and when there is no pride in ownership of one's residence, it is not hard to let it slip into a worse condition. Finally, these homes, of which the majority had once been owned by St. John's members, were destroyed. In the late 1950's, the city of Milwaukee built in their place the Hillside Housing Development--low income housing. It seems, however, that even though the Hillside Housing Development stands where the old houses used to stand, the neighborhood is not nearly as residential as it had once been. Most of the people living there today are renters, and it would appear that few have interest in becoming members at St. John's.<sup>26</sup>

The school changed. St. John's school was not unfamiliar with non-members in attendance. Nor were they unfamiliar with non-Germans attending the elementary school. "Already in the 1920's half the children in the school were from non-member families. The school was a veritable melting pot, with up to eleven different nationalities represented: Negroes, Yugoslavs, Slovaks, Greeks, English, Norwegians, Swiss, Italians, German-Russians, Indians, and Mexicans...."<sup>27</sup> The trend seems to continue throughout the remainder of St. John's Lutheran School's existence.

"By 1961, the final year of operation for the school, there were still 93 children enrolled, but not one of them was from a St. John's family. All but a dozen were black. The membership had dwindled in number considerably by this time, and was finding the school to be an increasing financial burden. The principal had to resign that year because of failing eyesight. The school building was in critical need of extensive expensive repairs. Faced with this combination of formidable obstacles, the congregation voted to close the school. The building was sold for \$500 to a Black Baptist group, but they soon abandoned it, and the City of Milwaukee took over and footed the bill for wrecking it."<sup>28</sup>

While cost was certainly a factor in the closing of the school, and while the reasons above also played a big part of the closing of the school, perhaps the greatest reason the school closed is because almost no one became a member of the church through the school. The members of St. John's were not blind to what was most likely their greatest evangelism tool. The people in the neighborhood used St. John's school as a chance to get away from the poorer education that the public schools would have provided their children.

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Those who attended were also confirmed at St. John's, but once the children were confirmed and their elementary education at St. John's ended, so their association with St. John's ended too. The frustration of this continuing pattern made the members of St. John's feel that the school was a money pit from which no fruits were being produced. Therefore, they closed the school in 1961.<sup>29</sup>

The city of Milwaukee changed. When Interstate-43 was constructed in about 1960, it cut St. John's neighborhood in half. The street cars were no longer able to get members from 12th street to St. John's. Members were no longer able to walk to church from the west, which some members still fondly remember doing. While this was a factor in some people in the neighborhoods west of I-43 leaving for churches which were west of the freeway, Pastor Hastings now refers to the freeway as a mixed blessing. He says that the freeway serves as a protective wall from the neighborhood of 12th and Vliet which he considers to be among the worst neighborhoods in the city.<sup>30</sup>

It has also been suggested that one of the most dearly loved pastors of St. John's, John Brenner, is partly to blame for the mass exodus from St. John's. Pastor Brenner saw little use for social activities in his church. He seemed to be somewhat legalistic as he considered such things as card-playing, dancing, football, etc... to be sinful.<sup>31</sup> There was no youth group, no men's club, and almost no other kind of social activity at St. John's. Any activity that bordered on a social function had a definite purpose dealing with worship and little else, e.g., the choir and Ladies Aid which was actually a Bible study only.

As a result, there was little interaction among the members of St. John's. No one really got to know anyone else all too well. The small number of marriages involving just St. John's members is evidence that the youth did not associate with one another that often. St. John's members, then, did not have too hard a time going off in separate directions when they left the church. Their lack of communication with one another also appeared to have been evident to those outside of the church.

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"The observation was also made, in retrospect, that St. John's could easily have been termed an 'unfriendly church'; not because of an unfriendly nature of the individual members, but due to habits developed from the lack of opportunity for social interaction with each other. This impression not only hurt St. John's witness to the outsiders and guests from other synodical congregations, but the resultant lack of friends and acquaintances within the congregation made it that much easier for members to transfer out when other pressures made this desirable."<sup>32</sup>

It is certainly unfair that St. John's has received the nickname that some have given it-- "St. John's the Bigot." St. John's members would certainly be hurt by such a remark, and their past record goes to show that the nickname is unfounded.<sup>33</sup> St. John's seems to have been the impetus in the founding of St. Philip's Lutheran church.<sup>34</sup> St. Philip's was not founded by St. John's to keep blacks out of St. John's. It was more of a reaction to the mutual discomfort that blacks and whites felt in joining in worship; and this mutual discomfort was the attitude of the day more than it was racism or bigotry.

It cannot be said that St. John's did not care about the neighborhood or try to reach out to them. St. John's had what was called an "almoner fund" which gave money out to those who were in need in the neighborhood. "This was quite active during the years when the congregation was still a 'going concern' and a number of poor people came into contact with the church, mostly through the school. St. John's even developed somewhat of a reputation as a 'poor farm,' with a certain amount of abuse of its generosity by neighboring residents."<sup>35</sup>

Members can also remember an eighty year old Pastor Brenner canvassing the neighborhood for prospective members. Even though the neighborhood was canvassed, the church met with very little success in finding people in the neighborhood who eventually became members. This was not unique to St. John's as Trinity, St. John's Missouri Synod neighbor to the south, also made some ambitious outreach efforts and met with very limited success in finding prospects who became members.

On the other hand, Pastor Norman Engel, who served St. John's from 1976-1986, says that very little outreach was done in the 1960's when there was so much change in

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Milwaukee and in the black community. He says that members at St. John's were "not interested in welcoming new residents" and that when blacks did join them for worship they were met with a "cool" reaction and "seldom returned a second time." According to Pastor Engel, St. John's had the reputation as a white church and there was "no effort made to change" that perception.<sup>36</sup>

Today the situation has not changed much. The Hillside Housing Development consists of almost all renters who do not have permanent roots and are, therefore, not very interested in becoming active members in a church that they may very well be leaving in a matter of months. St. John's has never had a bad relationship with its neighbors, but on the other hand, they have had a terrible time trying to develop a good one. Pastor Hastings refers to the situation today as a "happy disassociation" with one another.

### **St. Marcus (Garfield and Palmer)**

St. Marcus seems to have produced the most fruit in achieving a multi-cultural church. This is evidence of God working in a congregation despite obstacles that would tempt many to give up or to move out. They were among the first to witness "White Flight" from the central city, although it seems that there was a fairly equal mix of black and white for some time in that neighborhood.

St. Marcus called Pastor Paul Knickelbein to serve them, which he did from 1955 to 1967. Mrs. Knickelbein said that they did not stand out as the only white people down there because there was a good mix. She also recalls that she did not feel there was too much danger since she would walk down to Schuster's and Gimbel's on 3rd and North with her two youngest children in a stroller. Mrs. Knickelbein also recalls that the neighborhood became more violent as the years went by.

When St. Marcus called Pastor Paul Knickelbein, he was serving at St. Philip's. Pastor Mark Jeske suspects that the reason St. Marcus called him was because they wanted to begin outreach to the black members of the community. St. Marcus did reach out to

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blacks in the community with door to door evangelism, Sunday School, VBS, and other methods. But their school was their greatest evangelism tool.

St. Marcus did struggle with the thought of closing up and moving out. They seemed to be hit the hardest by these thoughts in the late 1960's when the race riots were most prominent. Pastor Richard Seeger recalls: "By the time I arrived in 1967 (riots in the city, parsonage fire-bombed, president of the congregation hit on the head with a rock at my installation), the congregation was ready to fold. They were sick of the violence and endless repair of property."<sup>37</sup>

By God's grace, St. Marcus did remain and still does. Pastor Seeger said that they did not allow anyone to transfer out. "After all, they called me to work there and I needed their support."<sup>38</sup> They tried reaching out all around the church for Vacation Bible School, but with little success. They eventually relied on their greatest outreach tool, the school, to introduce people to St. Marcus. This worked better than anything else they tried. Black people began to become members of St. Marcus. They were welcomed by the members there, patiently and painstakingly learned the liturgy, and learned that Lutheran was not synonymous with "Whites only."

St. Marcus members also continued to support the church and many, even if they had moved some distance away, continued to come to St. Marcus for meetings and activities. Pastor Seeger remarks that this took quite a bit of courage, because the neighborhood was violent.

Pastor Jeske said that it hit rock bottom in 1982, and he credits the neighborhood itself for turning things around in the area surrounding St. Marcus. The neighborhood seems to have been sliding down hill for quite some time. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, it was not a safe place to live. Once when Pastor Gary Schroeder was serving St. Marcus, he was canvassing the neighborhoods around St. Marcus and was approached by some police officers. They asked him what he was doing in that neighborhood. When Pastor Schroeder explained that he was a pastor serving in that neighborhood, he was instructed to

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wear a collar for identification and for his own protection. The area around St. Marcus was not safe, especially for white people to be walking around a lot.

After the neighborhood had hit rock bottom, they got together on a plan to clean up the area in which they were living. They joined forces to close down some of the more shady establishments in the area. They also tried to get many drug dealers to leave the neighborhood too. Since that time, the neighborhood around St. Marcus has improved dramatically and continues to improve as new housing is being developed in the area.

St. Marcus also made it known that they were not intending to go anywhere. They recently purchased more land adjacent to their church and made other improvements to their property. This advertises to the neighborhood St. Marcus' commitment to serve the people who live there. St. Marcus also goes out of their way to show the neighborhood their concern for them by operating a food pantry. On any given month, St. Marcus hands out 500 to 600 bags of food a month to the truly needy and poor people in that neighborhood.<sup>39</sup>

Even with all that St. Marcus has done to show the neighborhood their desire to serve them, St. Marcus' biggest evangelism tool remains the school. This has been their greatest outreach for many years. Neighbors who wish to keep their children out of the public schools send them to St. Marcus. This allows St. Marcus to get them into a Bible class, encouraging them to become members at the church that provides a school for their children.

Today, Pastor Mark Jeske continues to serve this integrated congregation in which both blacks and whites are learning from each other and working together. Their membership as of 1992 is 414 souls.

### **St. Phillip (1st and Chambers)**

St. Philip's was founded in 1955 as a Lutheran church set up especially for blacks to worship in. The spirit of the day said that blacks and whites do not join together for anything. This was not necessarily racism; this was the mind set that blacks lived with

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blacks, whites lived with whites. In the same way, the Germans lived on the north side of Milwaukee, the Poles on the south side, the Italians had their own community down by Henry Maier Festival Park, and the Irish also had their own community. Since other ethnic groups were divided this way, why would blacks also be separated?

As a result of this thinking, St. Philip's Lutheran Church was founded. No one had anything against blacks becoming Lutherans, there was just some question as to whether blacks would feel welcome in the all-white Lutheran churches. There were, of course, also some who did not want blacks in their churches. The general feeling seems to be, however, that blacks would be most comfortable in a church that was predominately, if not all, black.

There turned out to be some credibility to this line of thinking, but at the same time there were some blacks who did not want to be a part of an all-black church. Perhaps they did not want to be segregated. Perhaps they were put off by Lutherans who told them that they ought to go to the all-black church that we had for them. Perhaps they would have rather been a part of the Lutheran church in their neighborhood rather than go to St. Philip's. In any case, St. Philip's did have many blacks come and visit the worship services, "often frequently and permanently. Some may not have returned because St. Philip's was almost exclusively a black congregation. Others came back no doubt because it was almost exclusively a black congregation."<sup>40</sup>

Just as there are no two people alike, no one can lump all black people into one category of likes and dislikes. And although the WELS may have shown a good deal of concern for the blacks on the north side of Milwaukee in establishing a church in which blacks could feel more comfortable by worshiping with other blacks, and although the WELS may have had the best of intentions concerning blacks, it must have been downright insulting for blacks to be sent away from some churches into the all-black church that we provided for them. Others seemed to have appreciated the fact that they could worship with those of their own ethnic and cultural background.



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It was very foolish, however, for anyone in the WELS to think that blacks should be turned away from their own church and sent off to St. Philip's. How many WELS members would have entertained this idea is impossible to say, but it seems that this idea did exist in the WELS churches in inner city Milwaukee.

"White congregations may well have preferred to remain exclusively white and may well have concluded with a measure of relief that potential Lutherans among the blacks would prefer the fellowship at St. Philip's and that in fact is where they should expect to remain and where they could be expected to continue indefinitely. With one or two exceptions, that appeared to be the prevailing mindset for a considerable length of time. It also seemed to be true for a long time that black Lutherans did indeed prefer the situation at St. Philip's."<sup>41</sup>

Some attitudes were much stronger, expressing rather bluntly that blacks belonged in the all-black church we provided for them. When Pastor Paul Knickelbein (served St. Philip's: 1954-55, and St. Marcus: 1955-67) was serving at St. Marcus, he was talking with one WELS member--perhaps even a pastor--about reaching out to the black community. There were questions asked about why St. Marcus was reaching out to them. Pastor Knickelbein was told, "That's why we started St. Philip's. Let them go there."<sup>42</sup>

It also seems that those congregations which decided to relocate from the inner city or to close their doors and disband saw St. Philip's as a kind of a safety net to catch all of the black members that that particular congregation would no longer be in the inner city to serve. "Where congregations were more inclined to leave the neighborhood, it seemed at times there was both relief and gratitude that St. Philip's congregation was there to serve the black community."<sup>43</sup>

The liturgical style of the Lutheran worship service, in a number of cases, became somewhat of a deterrent for blacks to continue worshipping at the WELS churches. St. Philip's, however, had a number of instances where the liturgical style of worship was seen as more acceptable over the Baptist worship services that most of them were used to. "Blacks by the dozen who visited St. Philip's worship services in the 50's and 60's were

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appreciative of our Lutheran style of worship--dignified, orderly, and uplifting compared to what they were accustomed to in their churches."<sup>44</sup>

Christian education has always been a major concern among the members of St. Philip's. They have been operating a school since their very early days. Today, Jerusalem and St. Philip's both use the same facility, Good Shepherd Lutheran School. The school has also proven to be an effective way for members of the community to come into contact with St. Philip's.

St. Philip's has been serving the black community in Milwaukee for almost forty years now. God blessed the work that St. Philip's has been doing, increasing the initial membership of about forty souls to 290 souls in 1992.

### Zebaoth (6th and Melvina)

When Zebaoth was founded in 1917, it was the very outposts of Milwaukee. Zebaoth was in the suburbs. It began by the merging of two mission outposts, and since it was on the north edge of a city that was growing in northerly direction, it is not a surprise that Zebaoth grew to a church of more than 800 members.

After World War II, people in this area were more affluent which enabled them to move out to the suburbs. There were many men who came back from the war and were ready to settle down and start families. In many cases, these young families wanted to start fresh, with a new home all their own. However, there were no new homes going up in the neighborhood around Zebaoth, and these young families were not interested in owning homes that had been around for a while and that had been lived in by other families before them. Therefore anyone who wanted to own a new home turned to the suburbs where the new homes were going up. Pastor Arthur Tacke, who served at Zebaoth for about fifty years (1917-1967), was more concerned about people leaving the neighborhood than he was about the people moving in.

The first blacks showed up in the neighborhood around Zebaoth in the 1950's. As a matter of fact, it was the old parsonage of Zebaoth on 7th and Melvina that they moved

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into.<sup>45</sup> There was quite a bit of turmoil in the neighborhood over the fact that blacks had moved into the neighborhood. Many had concerns about the value of their houses and property decreasing in value.

Dr. Tacke does not remember if anyone viewed the blacks that had first moved into the neighborhood as prospects of Zebaoth. He does not think that Pastor Tacke did a great deal of evangelism because he was more concerned with visiting his own members who were shut-ins and hospitalized. One must also remember that in the 1950's, Pastor Tacke was getting up in years and was the only pastor serving about 700 members. This may explain why he did not do much in the way of canvassing the neighborhood.

Another matter which affected the congregation was the freeway, Interstate 43, which was constructed just a stone's throw away from the church. The freeway, which was constructed about 1960, cut in half the neighborhood that Zebaoth served. Today this would not seem like any kind of major obstacle. But Dr. Tacke pointed out that the freeway made people feel like they were cut off from the church. The lack of a walkway across the freeway at that time also forced a number of members to walk quite a bit more to get to church.

For a moment, it even appeared that the freeway might have brought Zebaoth to its end. Seventh Street, which passes right near Zebaoth, was a main street and was considered to be the route the freeway would take. Some people suggested to Pastor Tacke that Zebaoth may have to be razed so that the freeway could go through there. But the freeway passed just to the west of 7th street and the church was spared.<sup>46</sup> It seems likely, however, that the talk concerning the destruction of Zebaoth was something spoken in jest to Pastor Tacke. It is hard to say how serious of a concern this was.

To say that Zebaoth never considered leaving the central city to a certain extent is untrue. They saw the numbers moving away, and so also the support to continue the ministry there moved away. The members seriously considered taking some kind of action not to lose their members and/or their church.

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"During these years (1965-1971), consideration was given to acquiring a site for establishing a daughter congregation outside the city. The site in mind was located across from Northridge Lakes on 76th Street. After much deliberation, God led the congregation to remain on 6th and Melvina."<sup>47</sup>

"About three years ago, the congregation considered seriously the concept of establishing a second location, with the idea that the daughter congregation would soon be large enough to support mission work in the inner city from the original church. It seemed like a good idea, but it failed to arouse the needed support from the membership. For this reason, the idea of establishing a second location has been discarded."<sup>48</sup>

Zebaoth is unique in that it is the only church in the central city that continues to serve its community and has never operated a Lutheran elementary school. It has always made arrangements with other Lutheran schools in the area. At first, some of the children at Zebaoth went to Holy Ghost Lutheran school, a LC-MS school located on 6th and Concordia.<sup>49</sup> Then Zebaoth sent the children who went to Lutheran schools to Bethesda. When Bethesda moved from the central city, Zebaoth made arrangements with Siloah which still exist to this day.

Pastor Theodore Horneber, who followed Pastor Tacke, was the first pastor at Zebaoth who made a concentrated effort to reach out to the blacks who were coming into the neighborhood. Perhaps we should say that he reached out to anyone who had recently moved into the neighborhood since many of the newcomers were both black and white and lower class than the people who had left.

Currently only about 5% of its members live in the neighborhood around Zebaoth, and the members of Zebaoth are painfully aware that they are not a neighborhood church as they once were. It is also just as clear to them that their membership does not compare with the composition of the neighborhood. The findings of a self-study committee for Zebaoth make note of these facts.

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"Most of us do not live in the neighborhood near church, but drive in from around the city. This is common to many urban churches. Zebaoth's neighborhood is 97% black and has a younger population that we are not reaching or are not represented in our congregation."<sup>50</sup>

"The committee agreed that Zebaoth is not a neighborhood church, since very few of our members actually live within the neighborhood, and even fewer of our congregational leaders live within it."<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless Zebaoth is reaching out to the people of their community and is striving to be a neighborhood church once again. As of 1992 Zebaoth's membership was 190 souls.

### OTHER CHURCHES

Some other churches that were not profiled due to lack of time are Bethel (24th and Vine), Bethesda (11th and Chambers--today, Canaan Baptist Church), Ephrata (2nd and Concordia--today, Eternal Life Church of God in Christ), St. Matthew (10th and Garfield--torn down around 1960 because of the freeway going through; the current congregation, however, still exists at 84th and Melvina), Saron (29th and Hadley--today, Rehoboth Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ), and Siloah (21th and Nash--still WELS).<sup>52</sup>

The congregations that were sketched have most likely not given a good description of all that went on. There are, however, some patterns that can be seen and some themes that, to some degree or another, recur.

**Why did "White Flight" occur? What were the white people fleeing from?**

It was because of affluence. When men returned from World War II to the houses they had left, they found them in somewhat of a state of disrepair. Some of these houses had been around for years and age was taking its toll on these old structures. Other houses were just plain outdated, considering a number of modern luxuries that had come onto the scene with which these houses were not equipped. These factors, combined with the prosperity of the post-war economy, prompted people to head out for new homes in the

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suburbs. These homes were not in need of any repair and came with all the up-to-date conveniences that they might want.

It was because young families wanted to start their lives in their own homes. After the War, many young men came back ready to settle down or ready to get on with life with their new families. They had jobs and were ready to start out on their own. They did not necessarily want to live in the houses their parents did. They wanted to live in a new house, a place that they could call all their own. The only place where new houses were going up <sup>were</sup> were on the edge of town and in the suburbs. So this is where they moved.

It was because of fear and violence. When many black families moved to Milwaukee from down south, many were not very well equipped for an urban lifestyle. The poverty that many faced when they came to Milwaukee did not help them to adapt to a lifestyle that they were happy with or that benefited the community. Although there were many strong, black family units, there were also many black families in which there was no unity. The family had, for all practical purposes, broken down.

"Blacks from southern states moved to the large urban centers in the north in search of employment following WW II. Many came from broken homes and were ill-prepared for urban living. Housing restrictions, employment limitations, etc. tended toward unsettled conditions in the Black community to some degree. Whites, it seemed, were often intimidated by the proximity of what to them was racially different and socially and culturally unfamiliar. Tensions could scarcely be avoided."<sup>53</sup>

These tensions added to the fear that the white people had concerning their living in the central city. Rather than make an effort to stay and reduce these tensions, many found it much easier to avoid the problem by moving out. Their moving out created a vacuum which was filled by more black people, many of them poor. The increase of poor, black people from broken families ill-prepared for urban living led only to more disruption in the central city. It was the hope of many white people who left that they would never have to live in that kind of environment. The lower class blacks who did live there, on the other hand, had no hope at all.

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"The hopelessness of the poor is evident ... in the care of their children. They love their children, but people who have no pride in themselves don't know how to be proud of their children. The conditions that produce poverty are equally effective in destroying marriages and producing children out of wedlock. Thus hopeless parents regularly are single parents who have little time to tend to their children, especially if they are struggling to stay off welfare.

"Thus the children run the streets. They learn from other children how to survive and have fun in the streets. All too often 'survival' means being tough enough to beat up those who threaten. 'Having fun' means taking advantage of those unable to defend themselves, especially the weak and elderly. As these children grow up, some get back on track for the 'straight life,' especially if they had parents who showed them that it could be done. Some go on to bigger crimes. Some rear the next brood of children to run the streets and the cycle of crime and poverty will not be broken."<sup>54</sup>

Although a lot of the "running the streets" did not necessarily occur as soon as the black population in Milwaukee increased, it did occur over time. The running the streets was perceived as, if it was not indeed, unruliness. Many whites feared the black youth who were living in the central city. But not all whites left the central city. There were many elderly white people who did not want to leave the stately old houses that they had lived in for practically their whole married lives. These people became prime targets for black youth who ran the streets--not because they were white, but because they were easy prey. This only increased the fear and intensified the perception of the white people who thought that, as a rule, blacks were unruly and violent--the very reason given for many WELS members wanting to leave the central city.<sup>55</sup>

To say that there was no violence would not be the truth. To say that all black people are prone to violence is all the more untrue and slanders an entire ethnic group. Poverty, broken families, and having their opportunities for advancement limited by a white-dominated society does not excuse why violent incidences occurred, but it does help to explain why they happened.

In any case, any report of a violent disturbance in the black community convinced the white people all the more that blacks were unruly and violent. It was too easy to blame an

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entire race when something bad happened in their community. It is easy to see how unfair this is, but these sweeping generalizations still happen today in many respects.

One pastor's wife recalls the misconception that their family had about blacks when they came to Milwaukee as well as the amusing way that misconception was dashed to pieces. "When we moved to St. Philip's in Feb. of 1954 (from Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.), we were reading about the 'knifings' in Milwaukee. Everyone just assumed most Negroes carried knives. So when we were putting up the church tree, and it needed some trimming, my husband asked if anyone had a knife to cut off a branch. Not a one did."<sup>56</sup>

No one wants to live in a community that is steeped in violence and crime. Blacks don't want to live in that type of community anymore than anyone else does, but they are stuck there. Whites were able to get away from the violence and fear of the central city. Whether or not there was an ulterior motive for leaving the central city besides violence and crime is not for this author to say. If the motive for flight was violence and crime, this author cannot condemn that. If violence and crime were code words for "the black race," then white WELS people were fleeing from blacks that Jesus died for. They ran away from a mission field and abandoned the churches in their neighborhoods. This author cannot find an excuse for that.

It was because of racism and bigotry. In a certain sense, racism is not wrong. That one person is more comfortable with a group of people that are like him (e.g., same background, same likes and dislikes, same hopes and dreams, same ethnic heritage, etc...) than with a group of people that are different is not in itself wrong; but attitudes that stem from the discomfort of a different group can certainly be sinful.<sup>57</sup>

"Some were fearful, understandably. What people are not familiar with by experience and what appears to them to be ominously different from what they are used to, can cause some anxiety and even alarm. An expressed inclination to transfer membership and unveiled threats of one kind or another were not uncommon. Some few, it seemed, were pleased to welcome whoever happened to live in the neighborhood."<sup>58</sup>



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Whites who were uncomfortable with the blacks who were moving into their neighborhoods showed their discomfort by moving away. Whites who were not comfortable with the possibility of blacks becoming members of their churches either took steps to not let that happen (in rather subtle forms) or they left for the churches that were more likely to stay all white in the suburbs. Although there is nothing sinful about being more comfortable with one kind of person over another, one cannot help but wonder if anything righteous or God-pleasing can be found in attitudes and actions that work from, "I'm more comfortable with those from my own ethnic background," to, "I refuse to associate with those who are not like me because to be different from my kind means to be inferior; and I will not live with or share my worship facility with inferior people."

Why did "White Flight" happen? There are many answers that can be given here. Every family that moved out of the central city would have some variation as to the reasons why they moved. Whether the reasons these people had are sinful or not is not for this author to decide. That matter is between the individuals involved and their Lord.

This much should be stressed: Regardless of what the motives were for leaving the central city and pulling churches out as well, the black community was scarred and has been given every reason to believe that white people have no concern for them. When a black family moved into a neighborhood and a mass exodus of white people from that neighborhood ensued, what were the black people to conclude? They concluded the same thing anyone else would conclude--that white people refuse to live next door to black people, that white people do not like black people, that white people want nothing to do with black people. Even if half of that neighborhood had *bona fide* reasons to leave the central city neighborhood for the suburbs, the blacks who were living in the central city could only draw the same conclusion--they don't want anything to do with blacks.

One would have to think that the black community would finally say "Good riddance" to the whites who left. If whites were not going to care for blacks, then blacks were going to care just as little for the whites. Should it be a surprise, then, that blacks did not flock to

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WELS churches in the central city which were still being attended mostly by the same whites who advertised their dislike for blacks (even if not meaning to do so) by leaving the neighborhoods these churches were in? One would think that it is not.

### Did congregations have an excuse for leaving the central city?

Yes. If one is talking about the place where the congregation meets, then the congregation did have an excuse for leaving the central city--because most of their members lived nowhere near the church to which they were going. Rather than have members continue to drive clear across town, it would make much more sense to move the churches closer to the places in which they are living. After all, if the congregation did not move its place of meeting closer to where its people were living, those people could find other WELS churches much closer and transfer to them. And if one generation continued to drive back to their old church, it is highly likely that the next generation would not feel so much allegiance to that church--because it was never the neighborhood church that their parents or grandparents once knew.

This seems to be about the only viable reason why a church would leave the central city. This reason, however, does have its flaws. In the past, the neighborhood church was the only kind of church around because everyone walked just about everywhere they went. Today, everybody drives just about everywhere they go. Our society is very mobile, and the highway system and the boulevards in the city enable a person to get from one end of the city to the other in a fairly short period of time. Also, the people who may complain about having to drive so far to get into the central city to attend their church their are likely also spending the same amount of time in their cars every morning and evening going to work and back home again.

Another reason which may be offered, but some would argue does not hold much water, is that the central city of Milwaukee was teeming with Lutheran churches. As was mentioned before, if one drew a mile wide circle around Divine Charity he would encircle a dozen Lutheran churches. It is possible that the central city was super-saturated with

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Lutheran churches and that it was only a matter of time before some of them would close.<sup>59</sup> When a non-Lutheran population moved into the central city and did not fill the pews that the whites had left, one should not be surprised that the church eventually had to shut its doors. However, the argument from the other side points out that there are more people living in the central city now--and many of them unchurched--than there were back in the 40's and 50's. From this denser population, one would think that the WELS churches could find enough prospects to fill the pews of at least some of the churches that had shut down. Nevertheless, arguing these points back and forth do not change the fact that many WELS churches had left the central city as well as a mission field in the black community.

Perhaps the only other viable reason for a church to stop its ministry in the central city is that there are no longer any people walking through the doors on Sunday mornings. Finally, there has to be a point where a congregation realizes that they are not receiving the support that they need to continue to minister from that location. It is all-important for a congregation to understand at what point in time the value of their ministry in the central city is outweighed by the cost to run it. A dip in the budget, even over a period of successive years, would hardly constitute the closure of most congregations, no matter where they are. The same is true for the central city as well.

No. There is no excuse to walk away from a mission field, especially when that mission field comes to you. Blacks were pouring into the central city, and the WELS already had the churches there to serve them. Establishing St. Philip's to serve the black community was not a bad idea, but assuming that *only* St. Philip's would serve the black community disregards that we are all "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

"The segregation that had always been an offense to the Gospel was now an offense to the community. There was real hope that declining Lutheran churches would again become neighborhood churches with whites and blacks worshipping joyfully together as it should be in the kingdom of God. Earnest Christians dared to ask, 'Why spend thousands of dollars to send missionaries to the blacks in Africa while we ignore them in our own backyard?' They set their hearts to the task of sharing the gospel and the lives with the people who lived near their church."<sup>60</sup>

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Whites left the neighborhoods they were now trying to reach out to. By leaving these neighborhoods in the fashion of a "White Flight" exodus, they had advertised to the blacks who moved into the neighborhood that they wanted nothing to do with them. Now they were going to knock on the doors of the houses they had just left in hopes of showing the blacks how much they cared for them. There were mixed signals being given to the blacks. Which were they to believe--the actions of the multitudes who fled from the central city or the efforts of the few who invited them to their church? Most people would believe the former to represent the true feelings of whites, including the blacks to whom it happened.

Some WELS churches did little other than serve the people who were still driving in to attend worship services. Congregations as a whole did not do anything to maintain their status as a neighborhood church. The congregation began to lose that status when its members left the neighborhood for the suburbs, and that status was finally removed completely when the congregation did not reach out to its new neighbors. Soon the WELS churches were "white islands" in black neighborhoods. In the case of Bethel, for example, Mr. Polack says, "We existed -- serving members who maintained a loyalty to the church because that's where their spiritual history was. Little or no efforts (of outreach) were made." He recalls that the church and the neighborhood had a general respect for one another -- "kind of ignoring each other," although there were individuals who made outreach efforts.<sup>61</sup>

Another factor which aided in signing the death certificate of a number of WELS churches in the central city was the closing of Lutheran Elementary Schools, especially those which consisted of a number of black students from the neighborhood. Blacks did not want to send their children to the sub-par public schools if they had a choice. They welcomed the idea of sending their children to the parochial schools in their neighborhoods --often to WELS schools. This was another way for them to be exposed to the WELS churches and to learn about Lutherans. But a number of schools shut down for one reason or another. The message this sent to the black community was similar to the one they got

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when the whites left the central city: "We don't want to live next to you, and we don't want your children in our schools, either." Unknowingly (though perhaps not in some cases), the WELS was slamming its doors to the blacks in the central city but was at the same time scratching its head trying to figure out why blacks were not walking into its churches.

It will be interesting to see how hindsight in years down the road views congregations leaving the central city. Bethesda Lutheran Church closed its doors at 11th and Chambers in 1962. At the time of its closure, Bethesda had 964 members in its church and 106 students attending its grade school.<sup>62</sup> Considering these statistics, one must raise his eyebrows at the fact that Bethesda had pulled out of the central city. They merged with a small congregation on 94th and Capitol Drive, becoming what is today Gloria Dei-Bethesda.

Another congregation in the central city, Siloah, was facing some challenging issues at the same time Bethesda was seeking to relocate. Siloah had been using the school at Bethesda, but now that school was going to be closing. Siloah responded by building their own school and committing themselves to a ministry that would remain in the central city. Siloah still serves the central city today, continuing their commitment to ministry in the central city, although with much smaller numbers than they had in 1962.

This is the current situation with Gloria Dei-Bethesda and Siloah. People may question at this point in time the intelligence of Bethesda forfeiting a central city ministry while Siloah continues to minister to the black community. However, in the years to come, it is possible that Siloah will come on hard times, that there will not be enough members to support their ministry, and that Siloah will cease to exist altogether. The congregation of Gloria Dei-Bethesda, however, may continue to thrive at their current location, far west of the central city and away from the majority of the black population. Should the Lord permit this scenario to take place, Bethesda will be viewed as the church that made the right decision in leaving the central city while Siloah may be looked upon with skepticism for not moving out when they had the chance.<sup>63</sup>

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No pastor who left the central city had an easy time with his move out. There was concern both for his members who were moving out to the suburbs and concern for the church building, the members, and the neighborhood that remained in the central city. Anyone who challenged a pastor's zeal for mission work in the central city was often harshly rebutted by that central city pastor. One such example follows.

Sometime after Bethesda had merged with Gloria Dei on 94th and Capitol Drive and after Pastor Irwin Habeck, Bethesda's former pastor, had accepted a call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Pastor Westendorf was invited to speak at a Mission Seminar. During his presentation, Pastor Westendorf made a reference to Bethesda leaving the central city. Although he cannot recall anything accusatory against Pastor Habeck or against Bethesda in his remarks, Pastor Westendorf vividly recalls an irate Professor Habeck confronting him saying, "Bethesda did not flee from the inner city!!!" With that, Professor Habeck stormed off. Pastor Westendorf regrets that he never had a chance to resolve this confrontation with Professor Habeck who died shortly afterward.<sup>64</sup>

Missionary zeal revealed itself even in churches that appeared to exist just for the sake of the white members who continued to drive into them. For example, Bethel conducted a Vacation Bible School for the children in their neighborhood. They made contact with many families and found many children who had not been baptized. At the end of their VBS, Pastor Henry Lange took the opportunity to baptize about 100 children.<sup>65</sup> Despite this great opportunity, Bethel closed its doors and joined with Nathanael in 1976.

Every congregation which closed its doors in the central city most likely had its various reason for doing so. To be sure, each congregation had its own idea of a good excuse for shutting its doors in the central city. No pastor was jumping for joy when his congregation shut down, and it is likely that not many members were either. No matter what the reasons were, the WELS now is left with mourning the death of about nine opportunities to evangelize and minister to the black community.

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### Was "White Flight" a sin?

No. Just because a white family moved from the central city to a newer home in the less-congested suburbs, one cannot construe that this was a sin. Not every move to the suburbs was racially motivated, so to say that everyone who was involved in "White Flight" was guilty of bigotry and other sins is unfair and untrue.

Yes. A mass exodus from the central city for practically no other reason than not wanting to live next to black people is racism. Feeling uncomfortable or unfamiliar with another culture or ethnic group is not wrong, but feelings of outrage, anger, and perhaps even hate toward that culture when it moves next door to you is sinful. Many of the moves out of the central city to the suburbs were inspired by such sinful attitudes, therefore, making the moves themselves sinful. And when the whites came back to invite to church blacks whom they had avoided living with by moving to the suburbs, it must have appeared to be hypocrisy if, indeed, it was not.

In truth, the answer is based on the reason why individuals left the central city. Moving is not a sin. An attitude that says, "I don't want to live next to that person," and shows itself by moving away can hardly be considered God-pleasing. Different reasons and motives for each individual case make it impossible to issue a blanket statement concerning the sinfulness of "White Flight." Nevertheless, a great deal of damage was done concerning relations between blacks and whites which often takes a long time to smooth over.

**Are we in the WELS making excuses for our bigotry and racism when we try to give justifiable reasons for "White Flight"?**

No. There were some justifiable reasons for what had occurred. No one can pin-point everything that happened down to racism. Not everyone was a bigot; not everything was racist. The WELS is not against black people. Efforts were made to reach out to blacks, but many failed. Churches shut down as a result of that. It is no more bigotry to have to shut down a church in central city Milwaukee than in a farm community of German descendants in southwestern Wisconsin.

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Yes. When one sees the incredible number of WELS churches and WELS church members in the central city, and then compares that with how many have moved to the suburbs because they did not want to live with and worship with black people, he has to realize that bigotry was alive and well in the WELS. The WELS has always had sinners as its members, and these sinners are just as capable of bigotry as any other sin anyone can commit. Granted, no one ever stood up in a voter's meeting or at a Synod Convention and said, "Let's not have black people in our churches" (at least this author never heard of any incident like that), but the actions of a good number of people spoke these words in volumes. Setting up St. Philip's to be the "black church" in Milwaukee sent out a message that other WELS churches in Milwaukee did not want black people sitting in their pews. "Many of our black Lutherans can remember the day when they would not have been welcome in our churches."<sup>66</sup> That attitude was also prevalent in one WELS member who spoke with Pastor Paul Knickelbein. Pastor Knickelbein was serving at St. Marcus when a man asked him how and why he was doing mission work among the blacks. When Pastor Knickelbein remarked about outreach to the blacks so they would come to St. Marcus he was told, "That's why we have St. Philip's. Let them go there."<sup>67</sup>

Was there bigotry in the WELS? Yes, absolutely there was. Was the WELS filled with bigots? No, absolutely not. There were, and still are, many people who are striving to make a crosscultural ministry work. The churches that still exist in the central city today are evidence of that. And there were other examples of crosscultural efforts made in the churches that no longer serve there. However, it is sad that the WELS has to admit that there was bigotry in its churches and among its members; and this bigotry, at least in part, spelled the demise of a number of WELS churches in central city Milwaukee.

### Could "White Flight" happen again?

Yes. Society today is more mobile than ever. It is certainly not outside the realms of possibility that the neighborhood a WELS church is serving would face a major cultural and ethnic change. There is no one to say that a neighborhood which was once filled with



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all white, German descendants would not change very rapidly to a Hmong or Hispanic community. It has happened before, and it is highly unlikely that history will not repeat itself. If it does happen again, WELS churches and their members will have to make a conscious effort to go out of their way to welcome this new culture into their midst, not just opening the church doors for them and hoping they will walk in. But WELS members will have to go to them and teach them what a Lutheran is while at the same time learning what this ethnic group has to offer them.

Can "White Flight" occur again? Yes, it certainly can. As a matter of fact, in some places it is still happening. Pastor Mark Jeske noted that there is a "Black Flight" going on right now. Those who are becoming more affluent are leaving for the suburbs, too. WELS members will have to make sure that these blacks do not receive the same treatment that the previous generation received in the central city. Pastor Jeske also mentioned that the black community is growing and is following the norhtwesterly path that the whites took when they moved farther away from the central city. They are making their way up Fond du Lac Avenue.<sup>69</sup> WELS churches in line with this path will do their best to learn from the past in order to welcome into their congregations these souls that Jesus died for. They will do their best not just to welcome them, but to make them feel that the WELS church is a place where they have friends, not just people who tolerate their presence.

### What can be done to prevent "White Flight"?

In some form or another, "White Flight" is destined to happen again. Those who will be filling the vacuum left by the whites who leave will be of a different culture and ethnic background. The WELS church could very well turn into a white island in the middle of an ethnic sea. What can be done? There are two options: The one is to pack up and follow the path the members took to a different location (provided they have all moved to the same general area); the other is to stay and establish a cross-cultural ministry.

A number of things must be done in order to establish this cross-cultural ministry. The author does not claim to be an expert on this topic. There are many others who can

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expound on this point much better. The following can serve as source to whet the appetite of anyone who is interested in pursuing a cross-cultural ministry.

First and foremost, one must understand what is meant by a cross-cultural ministry. To say that the doors are open to anyone who wants to walk in is not establishing a cross-cultural ministry. Having people of different cultural backgrounds occupying the pews is not even cross-cultural ministry. Cross-cultural ministry means welcoming and absorbing a whole new culture into one's church, recognizing the diversity of backgrounds among the members, and working together to use what each culture has to offer in order to build up and advance the Kingdom of God. It means to understand that different methods and ideas are neither wrong nor inferior. For the WELS in central city Milwaukee it means to recognize that Gospel music is just as acceptable in God's sight as praise as a Bach motet. It means to understand that emotion in worship is just as good as, if not better than, the stoicism that WELS members can often offer to God in their worship. It does not have to mean adapting the other's culture as one's own, but it does mean to accept that other culture as a praise-worthy way of life. It means working side by side with members of different cultures to support the Lord's work as equals, knowing full well that Jesus hung on the cross and suffered just as long for the white person as he did for the black person.

It is important not to develop a sense of ethnocentrism about everything. Simply put, ethnocentrism is seeing differences in cultures and assuming or stating that since the other culture is different from one's own, it is inferior.

"An ethnocentric attitude is as difficult to disguise as a full-body cast. No matter how polite we may try to be, an attitude of superiority will become manifest. Ethnocentrism in Christians is more an issue of ignorance than malevolence. But ethnocentrism doesn't have to be malicious to be deadly. Consider this judgment given after church one Sunday by a long term Lutheran to a Black adult convert who had recently joined [this] congregation. 'I don't mind that gospel song we tried to sing this morning. But you know, there really was nothing much to it. The tune was catchy, but the words didn't say anything. Just the same thing over and over again. Why are those little songs so important to you people anyway? They just can't compare to our beautiful, doctrinal Lutheran hymns.'"<sup>69</sup>

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This ethnocentric attitude shows itself in many ways, and WELS members will have to go out of their way to avoid this attitude and to meet the person from another culture who may well have the same feelings toward the German descendant's way of doing things.

"Sooner or later you must realize that the black culture is essentially different from your own. Now what do you do about it? Do you let this difference become an obstacle in your personal relationships with blacks? Or do you simply recognize and respect the difference, and learn to live with it without letting it interfere? For a called ambassador of Christ, of course it must be the latter."<sup>70</sup>

WELS members must show the love of Christ in serving with people of another culture. When one reaches out from the church to the people of another culture, he is motivated by Christ's love. He is eager to have their souls saved just as his own has been. The message he preaches is the Gospel--a message which is never changed no matter what culture is being targeted. The Bible is cross-cultural; the message is universal.

The order of service that the WELS has is not universal. Those who have sat in the pews of a WELS church from as young as they can remember seem to have the idea that the liturgies of page 5 and page 15 have been inbred into all people's brains. The attitude is that chanting the "*Gloria Patri*" or "Taste and See that the Lord is Good" is about as natural as breathing or blinking one's eyes; and for life-long WELS members, they are unfortunately, often sung with just that much awareness. In the meantime, the black visitor who was canvassed sits in the pews behind the white, life-long WELS member and is lost beyond comprehension. He has most likely had a Baptist or Pentecostal background and is stunned by the silence and seeming lifelessness of the worshipers. He is in a foreign environment. The order of service is confusing for him, the hymnal is not helping, and neither are all of the people around him who know the order of service inside and out.

The WELS members who saw the visitor would be surprised to find out that they were viewed as unfriendly. They were blind to the fact that this visitor was lost. They were blind to many of the cultural differences which would have confused the visitor and

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hindered his worship. Only those blacks who were very courageous and were bound and determined to hear the Gospel despite these obstacles returned and became members.<sup>71</sup>

There have been times when WELS churches have been viewed as cold and unfriendly churches. This would probably stun the members of WELS churches. But there is a blind spot here again. While it may well be true that WELS members are friendly toward one another, it is also true that visitors sometimes get ignored--and all the more if the person is from a different culture.

This author witnessed a situation in which a black family came to visit a WELS church. They had problems following the order of service and noted that no one helped them find their way through it. After the service was over, the people were ushered into the narthex where they all talked with one another. The visiting family, however, remained seated in the pews. Not one WELS member made it a point to stop and say "Hello" to them. When the author escorted them a side door to leave, he made it a point to introduce them to one of the ushers who was responsible for closing things up. Without turning his head toward them, the usher responded to the introduction by saying, "Nice to meet you," and immediately walked through a different door to continue closing the church up. Even the author felt a little bit chilly after that greeting.

WELS members are going to have to go out of their way to welcome visitors, especially those from the black community who are foreign to Lutheran worship and that particular WELS church. To assume that a smile and a "Good morning" are going to make them feel welcome is not enough. Visitors must be *shown* that they are welcome and that they would like to be seen at the church again.

Besides going out of the way to show friendliness, WELS members will also have to go out of their way not to offend blacks in their churches. It would seem like that would be easy to do, but white WELS members are often blind to comments that hurt and cause a rift to develop in a cross-cultural situation. The following is an example of how to squelch such attitudes and statements that break down the fellowship in a cross-cultural ministry:

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"There's a little game we play that's related to our inner-city work. It's called, 'Catch the racist.' We simply try to catch each other saying things that could be offensive to blacks. And when it happens, we say, 'That's a racist statement.'

"After a few years of inner-city living, we notice the racist statements quite readily. 'Black people really do have a sense of rhythm' is a racist statement. Many do. Many don't. No Black wants to be stereotyped as a rhythmic person, even if you mean it as a compliment....

"Again when you deal directly with blacks, treat them as persons, not as blacks. Don't be a stereotypist."<sup>72</sup>

Be aware of and look out for whatever may hamper the efforts of a cross-cultural ministry. Again, WELS members will have to look hard for these things because they are sometimes blind to them. For example, when Pastor Erhard Pankow retired from his ministry at Garden Homes, he left the church and moved to another location for his retirement years. To most white WELS members, this would seem like a normal action--even a generous action as he moves completely out of the way for the next pastor to fill in. The black people in the congregation could not understand why their old pastor was moving away from them, and a number of them were hurt by it. Pastor Pankow's moving away from them was like saying to them, "I've done my time. I've lived with you during my ministry and now that I am retiring, I am out of here." Certainly Pastor Pankow did not intend to give this impression, but it was received.<sup>73</sup>

Those who serve in cross-cultural situations will do their best to serve for a good length of time. If someone barely gets his feet wet in a cross-cultural ministry and then leaves the first chance he is offered, whatever trust had been established is shattered and the minority culture has all the more reason not to trust the next called worker who comes in.

"Every pastor or missionary must first develop a sense of trust between himself and the people he is serving before he can be effective. This is even more important, more difficult and takes longer in a crosscultural situation. If our crosscultural missionaries are not staying long enough to develop trust or if ethnocentrism prevents trust, synod mission dollars would be better spent on geraniums for the front of the synod office."<sup>74</sup>

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WELS members must work hard to make the most of every opportunity, to learn from the past, and to reach out to all people of every culture for the future of the WELS in cross-cultural ministry.

"The inner city turnover which confronted our churches was so unique, so massive in scope, so unexpected, so far reaching in its implications, so far beyond past experiences, so many new problems demanded solutions for which we were quite unprepared and for which there were few if any historical precedents in our midst, that our churches had much to learn the hard way. And yet, by God's grace, many have learned and have learned well."<sup>75</sup>

It can be argued how much the WELS really has learned about cross-cultural ministry. If the author came across sounding like an expert on the topic, he has done a poor job representing his knowledge. But regardless of who is knocking on someone's door, it is the love of Christ that drives that person to knock. And the love of Christ will lead that person not to care about what culture he is talking to. And regardless of who it is that answers the door, it is the Gospel message that will change his heart and it is only the Gospel message that can change it. In the ministry of the Gospel, culture cannot matter. Sin is the fatal disease that all people share; the Gospel is the life-giving cure of that disease. There is no specific ethnic or cultural slant to that truth. Yet there may be cultural and ethnic diversity in the churches in which this message is preached. Such is the case in central city Milwaukee.

"Sooner or later you must realize that the black culture is essentially different from your own. Now what do you do about it? Do you let this difference become an obstacle in your personal relationships with blacks? Or do you simply recognize and respect the difference, and learn to live with it without letting it interfere? For a called ambassador of Christ, of course it must be the latter."<sup>76</sup>

It is the prayer of every Christian that the Gospel will be brought to all the world. It is the mission of every WELS church to bring that Gospel ministry to the members of its community. It is the hope of this author that somehow this paper will be of benefit to those who strive to make a cross-cultural ministry work. It is hoped that cultural diversity will be viewed not as obstacles, but as alternative ways to praise the Lord, that blacks and

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whites can worship together just as the Greeks and Jews of Paul's day did in Rome, and that WELS members of all cultures truly work together as "one in Christ Jesus."

May the God who has called us to go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation lead us to carry out the Great Commission with all diligence and to accept all who hear the Word of God and keep it.

*SOLI DEO GLORIA*

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- 1 Interview with Pastor Mark Jeske, February 1, 1994.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 Interview with Pastor E. Allen Sorum, February 10, 1994.  
Pastor Sorum mentioned that a number of black people he talked to vividly remember such billboards advertising jobs in Milwaukee. They say that is why they came up here to begin with. Pastor Sorum also reported that the mayors who served Milwaukee at that time deny that there is any truth to this.
- 4 Westendorf, "'Amazing Grace' ... in the Inner City."
- 5 Westendorf, "WELS in the Inner City."
- 6 *op. cit.*
- 7 Interview with Prof. John Jeske, February 1, 1994.
- 8 Interview with Prof. John Jeske, February 1, 1994.
- 9 Source's name withheld, available upon request.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Sorum, "Strong-armed into Soul Winning?" p 3.
- 12 *ibid.*, pp 3-4.
- 13 Questionnaire completed by Mr. Duane Polack, February 1994.
- 14 Sorum, "Strong-armed into Soul Winning?", p 4.
- 15 *ibid.*, p 6.
- 16 *ibid.*, p 9.
- 17 Questionnaire completed by Duane Polack, February 1994.
- 18 Questionnaire completed by Grace Stiemke, the widow of Pastor Richard Stiemke, January 1994.
- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 Rupprecht, p 3.
- 24 Interview with St. John's members, February 20, 1994.
- 25 Rupprecht, p 10.
- 26 Interview with St. John's members, February 20, 1994.
- 27 Rupprecht, p 11.
- 28 *ibid.*, p 12.
- 29 Interview with St. John's members, February 20, 1994.
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 *ibid.*
- 32 Rupprecht, pp 16-17.
- 33 From what has been reported, it appears that the members of St. John's do not deserve the title "Bigot" anymore than any other WELS churches that have served the central city.
- 34 Interview with St. John's members, February 20, 1994.
- 35 Rupprecht, p 12.
- 36 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Normal Engel, January, 1994.
- 37 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Richard Seeger, January 1994.
- 38 *ibid.*



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39 Interview with Pastor Mark Jeske, February 1, 1994.

40 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Milton Burk, January 1994.

41 *ibid.*

42 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Paul and Mrs. Emily Knickelbein, January 1994.

43 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Milton Burk, January 1994.

44 *ibid.*

45 Interview with Doctor Tacke, son of Pastor Arthur Tacke, January 1994.

46 *ibid.*

Dr. Tacke suggested that the reason the freeway route moved to the west of Zebaoth was because the city of Milwaukee did not want to alienate the Lutheran community in Milwaukee by destroying this church. This does not seem like a realistic fear though, since they did not have any problems razing St. Philip's church on 10th and Garfield to put the freeway through. Dr. Tacke also suggested that the city of Milwaukee would not have wanted to get the Catholics angry by tearing down Messmer High School.

47 "Into the Year 2,000," p 3.

48 Letter to a candidate written by Pastor Rolfe Westendorf, Vacancy Pastor at Zebaoth, May 17, 1973.

49 *ibid.*

It is unclear how many children from Zebaoth went to Holy Ghost school. Dr. Tacke has vivid memories of walking the six blocks to Holy Ghost school and says that there was never any concern or fear for his safety. He graduated from there in 1935. Holy Ghost closed the doors to its school in 1984. At that time, there were only a few children attending. All of them were black, and apparently none were members.

50 "Into the Year 2,000," p 5.

51 *ibid.*, p 11.

52 Siloah is not being covered in this paper because a classmate is doing a church history on them. Pastor Westendorf from Siloah, however, has proven to be an extremely valuable resource for this paper concerning White Flight and for cross-cultural ministry in general.

53 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Milton Burk, February 1994.

54 Westendorf, "Amazing Grace ... in the Inner City."

55 This reason was listed on virtually every questionnaire that was returned to me as the reason why white people left the central city. Although other reasons were also offered, fear and violence were always among the causes for "White Flight."

56 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Paul and Emily Knickelbein, January 1994.

57 Interview with Pastor Rolfe Westendorf, February 14, 1994.

Pastor Westendorf shared an example of being more comfortable with one who has a similar background even though he had little or nothing in common with that person. As a graduate from MLS, he arrived at Northwestern College along with another MLS classmate. They were not best of friends when they attended MLS together, but when they came to Northwestern they became best friends. Pastor Westendorf recalls that the reason they became such good friends was not because they had so much in common, but rather because almost all of the Northwestern freshmen had gone to Northwestern Prep together and had established their friendships and cliques already. The MLS graduates were the odd-balls in the group, the minority. And since they were the minority, they banded together. In the same way, a black person can have more in common with a white person than with his black neighbor; but since the skin color of the black person draws a distinction between himself and the white person, he may well feel more comfortable with another black person than with that white person--even if he has little or nothing in common with that other black person.

58 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Milton Burk, February 1994.

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- 59 Divine Charity, for example, felt that they had lost their drawing power when the churches in the central city changed their services from German to English.
- 60 Westendorf, "Amazing Grace ... in the Inner City."
- 61 Questionnaire completed by Mr. Duane Polack, February 1994.
- 62 WELS Statistical Report for 1962.
- 63 Interview with Pastor Rolfe Westendorf, February 14, 1994.
- 64 Interview with Pastor Rolfe Westendorf, February 14, 1994.
- 65 Source withheld, available upon request.
- 66 Westendorf, "The Inner-City Call.", p 5.
- 67 Questionnaire completed by Pastor Paul and Emily Knickelbein, January 1994.
- 68 Interview with Pastor Mark Jeske, February 1, 1994.
- 69 Sorum, "A Primer...", p 4.
- 70 Westendorf, "The Inner-City Call.", p 4.
- 71 Interview with Dr. Tacke, January 1994. Dr. Tacke expressed his admiration especially for the first blacks who became members of Zebaoth. They were the first to break the color barrier and had to overcome some great obstacles.
- 72 Westendorf, "The Inner-City Call," p 11.
- 73 Interview with Pastor E. Allen Sorum, February 10, 1994.
- 74 Sorum, "A Primer...", p 5.
- 75 Source withheld, available upon request.
- 76 Westendorf, "The Inner-City Call.", p 4.

White Flight

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WELS and LCMS Churches in Central City Milwaukee, 1993.  
 (A congregation followed by an asterisk (\*) denotes that it also operated a day school.)



WELS

1. Atonement \* (42nd and Ruby)
2. Garden Homes \* (24th and Roosevelt)
3. Jerusalem \* (Holton and Chambers)++
4. St. John (8th and Vliet)
5. St. Marcus \* (Palmer and Garfield)
6. St. Philip \* (1st and Chambers)++
7. Siloah \* (21st and Nash)
8. Zebaoth (6th and Melvina)

LCMS

1. Bethany (38th and Lloyd)
12. Bethlehem \* (24th and McKinley)
- ~~43. Christ Memorial \* (Teutonia and Thurston)~~
14. Emmaus \* (23rd and Hadley)
15. Gospel \* (16th and Capitol)
16. Holy Ghost (6th and Concordia)
17. Hope (35th and Highland)
18. Mission of Christ (9th and Center)
19. Walther Memorial (40th and Auer)

++ In the Spring on 1994, St. Philip's sold the worship facility at 1st and Chambers and moved into the worship facility of Jerusalem at Holton and Chambers. They have remained two completely autonomous congregations, independent of one another. They have been sharing Beautiful Savior Lutheran School, which is on the property at Holton and Chambers, for some time, but when St. Philip's moved in to share the church with Jerusalem, Jerusalem signed the school completely over to St. Philip's. They still share the school, but St. Philip's is now the owner of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Elementary School.