

SENIOR CHURCH HISTORY

HETEROGENEOUS IDEAL

EDUCATION OF MINORITY STUDENTS
FOR MINISTRY IN THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

Scott C. Mund

Church History

Prof. J. Korthals

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Introduction

Almost 100 years ago, Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary was opened for the purpose of training Lutheran pastors for the Synodical Conference. In the sixty years of its existence, Immanuel produced several dozen pastors. It was a small though steady number of graduates who came through Immanuel; because the number was so small, the cost of educating each student was quite high—and so the existence of the institution was constantly in jeopardy. When it closed in 1961, the Synodical Conference lost a unique institution, and for the most part, the kind of pastors it produced. Immanuel Lutheran College was the only segregated black¹ seminary in the Synodical Conference.

At the time of its closure, the leaders of the Synodical Conference, particularly the Missouri Synod, claimed that the other educational institutions of the Conference were ready for integration. Indeed, before the creation of Immanuel, a handful of black men had graduated from Concordia Seminary in Springfield.

The Wisconsin Synod was at that time leaving the Synodical Conference. It had less experience with training members of minority groups than the Missouri Synod had. Dr. Martin Luther College had trained only a couple of black teachers by the 1960s. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary saw one black student, but he discontinued his studies, convinced that a black man could not receive a call in the Wisconsin Synod. He was proved wrong in later years when two students did graduate from WLS and did receive calls to mostly-white parishes.

Today, almost thirty years after the closing of the segregated Immanuel Lutheran College, our schools are continuing to make an effort to integrate people of minority backgrounds into our worker training system. They are seizing opportunities not merely to tolerate minorities, but to welcome them and help them succeed. This means being willing to change our attitudes, before we can evaluate our approaches to the recruitment and retention of minority students.

¹ Terminology can be a thorny issue, and we should be sensitive to what phrases we use to describe others. Currently “African-American” seems to be the designation of choice, reflecting on the dignity of the ancestral roots, while also acknowledging present nationality. At other times in our nation’s history, different words have been used, equally as valid and respectful, which for one reason or another have fallen out of favor. These words include “Negro,” “black,” and “colored.” For the sake of including those people of color who are not American citizens, but who attended schools in this country—I most often use the term “black.” When referring to historical organizations and designations from a certain period, I will use the word “Negro” or even “colored.” As such designation may change in the future, the reader is asked not to view any particular designation I use as an endorsement of that word.

Apologia pro opere

In an address to the graduating class of King's College in 1944,² C.S. Lewis lamented the fact that in a sinful world, we have a tendency to think of people in terms of "us" and "them." We exalt ourselves by excluding others from our group. It is a sad testimony to the power of the sinful human nature as well as its universality, that everyone naturally thinks in these terms. Even if a person believes that he does not, he does, for he recognizes that others—"they"—consider people in groups rather than as individuals. One may argue that there is nothing wrong with grouping individuals, and dealing with the group. One may even argue that stereotypes have a useful purpose, to some degree. At the same time, it must be recognized that stereotypes and generalities can be most destructive.

Original sin means that we are born with the poison of selfishness already coursing through our veins and filling our hearts. Yet in a sense it is true that "we are not born with prejudices, but only with the potentialities for developing them."³ Children are not born with a feeling of *racial* prejudices, a fact readily verified by visiting a city preschool or day-care facility. Attitudes are acquired from the family and the community, and are thus self-perpetuating.

Throughout history, stereotypes and hatred have gone hand-in-hand. Perhaps stereotyping is responsible for the greatest number of murders, if one considers the terrible effects of genocide and seemingly random acts of violence. Yet the Lord told us also that whoever even hates his brother is a murderer. Anyone who hates a person because of the group to which he belongs, therefore, may as well have killed him, in the eyes of God. It does not matter whether we put others into a group defined by our criteria (their personal likes or dislikes, the food they eat, the clothes they wear) or whether God placed them into a group (their height, the color of their hair or skin).

Much more often than we would like to admit, our natural tendency to stereotype others is destructive and hurtful. Before we even meet them, others are at a disadvantage because they fall into a group which we have labeled undesirable in some respect. We do not even think about it when we place

² Lewis, Clive Staples. "The Inner Ring" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.

³ Pope, Lison. *Kingdom Beyond Caste*. New York: Friendship Press, 1957, page 42.

people into categories, and yet we are surprised when they act in ways that contradict our presuppositions.

Lutheranism, better than many theologies, understands the problems inherent in stereotyping people. The Scriptures teach us the extent of our depravity since the fall of our first parents Adam and Eve. God permits people to spiral downward in baseness as a punishment for their sin. He even permits stereotyping to serve this purpose, as must have been clearly evident shortly after the stinging judgment at Babel. Differences in language make it particularly difficult to overcome someone's prejudices over against another group.

All this is not to say that dealing with people in groups rather than individuals does not serve a useful purpose. Old Testament Israel was to be constantly aware of who *they* were and who *others* were. To neglect the differences between them and the other nations was to reject God's command and water-down their faith. Outsiders were not to be accepted as spiritual brethren unless they joined themselves to Israel.

The Lord Jesus, during his earthly ministry, not only fulfilled the ceremonial regulations of God's Old Testament law, but he showed us how we are to rightly treat people according to their "group." First, he showed us that we are all sinners equally deserving of God's wrath. He showed individuals and groups who were Israelites that they had not kept God's decrees, despite the advantages they had as God's chosen people. Second, he welcomed non-Israelites as warmly (if not more so) as he did the Jews—as they came to believe his gospel of forgiveness. Jesus showed no compunction for working primarily among his people, but he just as readily brought his gospel to those Gentiles and Samaritans with whom he came in contact. The synthesis of these two observations is this: Jesus dealt with individuals as individuals, offering them what their faith needed, "afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted." Nevertheless, the Lord dealt with individuals as members of a group when it was to the advantage of his gospel to do so (Lk. 7:1-9; Mk. 7:24-30).

Along with the New Covenant went a blurring of the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Paul could still enumerate the advantages of being an Israelite, and the church naturally grew in Jewish communities first. The Jewish community had the advantage of knowing the Old Testament. We do not

need to wonder whether the early church was only for Jews, or only for white people. The events of Pentecost and Philip's rendezvous with an Ethiopian eunuch (who was in all probability a black man) make it clear that the Holy Spirit desires to work among people of many different ethnic backgrounds.

One of the greatest difficulties in approaching a subject that deals with people in respect to color, culture, or language, is the tension that exists between the Old Adam and the New Man. The Old Adam sets up barriers make others look inferior, or at least unworthy of our very best efforts at working together. The Old Adam is lazy and demands that others conform to our speech and way of thinking before we consider them brothers and sisters. The New Man on the other hand, yearns to call every Christian "brother" or "sister," to reach out with the gospel to every man, woman and child with the same zeal which the Lord showed in bringing us and our ancestors to faith. As the Lord did, so also we recognize that segmented groups exist in our world. The world which does not know Christ is adept at erecting barriers between these groups; but the church which does know Christ rejoices in the ethnic diversity of its members (Is. 56:6-8).

A question is legitimately raised as to whether such a topic I have chosen should be broached at all. In fact it has been, numerous times. As long as our society is segmented, students will want to know if or how the church has attempted to transcend the barriers to our commitment to the Great Commission. Are we treating people of the various ethnic groups equitably? That is not the same as asking, "Do we have the same standards for everyone who comes through our worker training system?" but it includes the honest evaluation of those standards. It includes an honest evaluation of whether we are expending our resources and efforts for recruiting in a manner that does not give preference (to say it negatively) to any particular group. It includes the question, "Are we making it clear that everyone is not only permitted but welcome in our schools, our churches, our lives?"

Stereotypes by their very definition are based on generalities. If we are to overcome stereotypes, we need to start with generalities—but certainly not end there. The affirmative action programs prevalent in our country today fail in that regard. They seek to remedy discrimination by dealing with people in

generalities. As a result, individuals in a group which is perceived to be disadvantaged are given preferential treatment, regardless of whether that individual has ever suffered from discrimination. It is this writer's strong opinion that such programs create more resentment than affinity, and perpetuate negative stereotypes rather than tear them down. The only way to remedy stereotypes is to deal with individuals as such, not as members of an arbitrary group.

This topic, then, deals with the first step: evaluating how the WELS is seeking to improve its service to a multi-cultural world. It is not a doctrinal evaluation; for the synod never seems to have made a doctrinal distinction which gives preference to one type of person any more than another as far as the law or gospel are concerned. It is a practical paper, as we seek to bring our thoughts, words, and practice into line with the universal gospel. It is doctrinal insofar as our need to recognize our shortcomings in the past and present, for we are people of limited vision and understanding. We cannot plead ignorance before the throne of God's judgment. Until our practice is exactly what our Lord would have it be (and we may never know exactly what that is, this side of heaven), we have to plead for his forgiveness for falling short of perfection. Rather than being defensive or too confident that we do not err in this area, let us trust that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ's worthy sacrifice, and then strive to bring our attitudes in line with his.

I. Minority training in the past: segregation

Immanuel Lutheran College, a segregated worker-training institution

Shortly after the formation of the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1871, members of the most orthodox Lutheran church bodies in America recognized a great need to bring the gospel to the “Black Belt,” regions in the South populated by freed slaves. After the Civil War, some traditionally “white churches”— including Episcopalian, Southern Lutheran, and Presbyterian denominations—were slow in embracing the African American citizen as a social equal. Other denominations were quick to fill the spiritual void felt by freed slaves. Although these provided an outlet for intense feelings of spirituality common among the former slaves, they provided little by way of proper law/gospel nourishment. Describing the clergy which ministered to blacks in the South, Booker T. Washington wrote:

“Three-fourths of the Baptist ministers and two-thirds of the Methodists are unfit, either mentally, or morally, or both, to preach the gospel to anyone or to lead anyone. The preaching of the colored ministry is emotional in the highest degree, and the minister considers himself successful in proportion as he is able to set the people in all parts of the congregations to groaning, uttering wild screams, and jumping, and finally going into a trance. A large proportion of the church members are just as ignorant of true Christianity as taught by Christ as many people in Africa, or Japan and just as much in need of missionary effort as those in foreign lands.”⁴

Eager to share the gospel with people who longed to fill a spiritual void in their lives, the members of the Synodical Conference could not pass up an opportunity to serve right in their own land. This feeling of urgency was reflected in *The Missionary Lutheran* of October, 1936: “The Negro constitutes the last frontier for the Lutheran Church in this country.”

Early on, the Conference recognized that one of the best ways to support the Negro mission was to train black missionaries for the work. This is not to say that white men were not willing to work among the blacks; the majority of black congregations continued to be led by white pastors. These pastors, as well as the other members of the Synodical Conference, recognized that black pastors would have numerous advantages over their white counterparts. Therefore, the Conference resolved “that indigent, good, and gifted [African-American] boys who want to devote themselves to mission-work should be

⁴ Drewes, Christopher. *Half a Century of Lutheranism Among Our Colored People*. CPH: St. Louis, 1927. page 58.

supported out of the mission treasury and *for the present* [emphasis mine] be trained at one of the institutions of the synods belonging to the synodical conference.”⁵

At first, the worker training system in the Conference was integrated. The first generation of Lutheran immigrants had no direct experience with segregation, and theologically there was no reason for it. The seminaries of the Synodical Conference officially had no restrictions regarding color of those it enrolled. However, it was understood, once the Conference began its Negro mission work in earnest, that blacks who desired to be pastors would attend the institution at Springfield. The first was Nathanael Burkhalter, who enrolled in 1882. As would happen later with the first black man to enroll at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mr. Burkhalter did not graduate. It took another ten years for the first black graduate to come out of Concordia at Springfield—one John McDavid.⁶ In following years, several more blacks were trained in the schools of the Synodical Conference, including Evan Reid, who graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College in 1903.⁷ By 1900, there were 13 pastors, 9 teachers in the Negro Mission division of the Synodical Conference.⁸

Integration did not appear to be the best solution. The white missionaries in the South believed that more blacks could be recruited for the ministry if the synodical training school were located closer to their homes in the South. In the years since the founding of the Missouri Synod’s worker-training institutions, it became apparent that they were not well-suited for the training of blacks, partly because of their Northern European orientation. The schools were all located in locations distant from the so-called Black Belt. The seminary at Springfield was a long distance for many blacks, at a time when travel was slow and expensive. The schools were also distant culturally from the black communities. It was a given that black undergraduates would have to be culturally assimilated to function in such an environment; even that did not guarantee their acceptance in the communities where the schools were located. The worker-training system of the Synodical Conference had yielded only a small number of African American pastors over a quarter-century. Segregation appeared to be the better answer.

⁵ Drewes, 83.

⁶ Drewes, 84.

⁷ Workintine, Paul. “Immanuel Lutheran College: Faithful Effort in a Fated Cause.” Senior Church History paper, April 10, 1986, page 2.

To appreciate the philosophy of education of the times, one should understand the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court handed down its famous ruling which provided the legal basis for segregation, allowing for “separate but equal” facilities, particularly in education. Both sociology and psychology were in their infant stages of development as sciences, and professionals in these fields believed that people of different races were inherently different from one another mentally, in capability and in the learning process. Though many used dubious data to promote preconceived ideas about racial inferiority, others used the same data to promote what they thought would make a better learning environment for Americans of different ethnic backgrounds. [We hope that in the case of segregating the seminaries, the latter is the case.]

The first suggestion for a Negro seminary came from pastor J.F. Doescher in 1878. He recommended that Florida would be an ideal spot for a Negro seminary. Not much came from his suggestion at the time, but at the 1902 convention, the Synodical Conference was debating whether or not to open a “full-fledged college and seminary” for black pastors and teachers. The Conference decided to open two preparatory schools, and gave the mission board control over the implementation of this.

The first institution was built in New Orleans. In 1903, Luther College opened as the first black college in the Conference. That same year, the Immanuel Conference of the Negro mission petitioned the board of missions to establish a school for pastors, teachers, and laypeople of black communities.⁹

Immanuel Lutheran College opened in Greensboro, North Carolina. White missionary Nils Bakke accepted the charge to open it. The curriculum made few modifications to the curriculum at the other schools; students still studied German, English, arithmetic, catechism, Bible reading and exposition, among other classes. The school quickly grew from 5 students in 1903 to 32 students in 1904, in which year it was opened to women, a move considered progressive at a time when few institutions admitted both men and women. Bakke was concerned about the temptations inherent in a co-educational system, but he was convinced of the moral integrity of most of his female students.

⁸ *Proceedings of the Conventions of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference* (PSC) 1902, page 63.

⁹ Dickinson, Richard. *Roses and Thorns*. CPH: St. Louis, 1977. Page 160

Immanuel first functioned as a Lutheran seminary after the first class graduated from the college in 1906. At that time, it added a practical theological course for ministry in the Negro Mission. Now the institution had three departments. A senior high school featured four years of study. A normal school (for training teachers) added one year of college to those four years. Finally, a theological seminary added three years to the four high school years. This system is not directly comparable with ours, but more like the *Gymnasium* of Germany. Pre-ministerial students studied alongside students desiring to be teachers, with the exception of courses in Greek.¹⁰ Classes included pastoral theology, dogmatics, isagogics and exegesis, church history, homiletics, symbolics, catechetics, Greek New Testament (for pastors), comparative theology, German, and logic. Such an arrangement proved to be advantageous also for the teachers, who often were called upon to lead worship in churches which were vacant for one reason or another.¹¹

For reasons that were not made clear to the Seminarians at Immanuel, teachers placed an emphasis on translating German and Latin. Many hours were spent by students translating, but many had difficulty understanding what they were reading.¹² It was a skill not exercised much after graduation.

Problems at Immanuel

Besides the lack of confidence for black students to learn Hebrew, which was not uncommon in other "practical" seminaries, there were other, serious problems faced by Immanuel.

1. Recruitment.
2. Financial support.
3. Instructors.
4. Focus.

1. The Immanuel Conference had requested a school for the purpose of training young men for the ministry. Unfortunately, neither the Immanuel Conference nor any other conference in the Negro Mission ever sent very many men who wanted to be pastors. Even fewer African-Americans came from the North: only six out of eighty-five candidates. Seminarian Jonathan Kuske correctly noted that the

¹⁰ Hebrew was not studied at Immanuel, an unfortunate concession to the perceived capabilities of students from the Negro Mission.

¹¹ Kuske, Jonathan. "Immanuel Lutheran College: A Potential Gone Untapped." Senior Church History paper, May 7, 1988. Page 11.

Negro Mission's older congregations of the South had proportionately more Christian day schools which acted as feeder schools for Immanuel. Yet the mass migration of blacks to the north began already in the 1920s. It would seem that even after Negro Missions became common in cities like Detroit, Chicago and Milwaukee, they did not send many men to Immanuel to become pastors. It is likely that few parents felt they could afford to send their children away to school.

Those who came to Immanuel were not wealthy, though. Rather, they showed extreme dedication (which we have a hard time appreciating today) and were willing to work hard in order to attend the school. Such is the motivation the Holy Spirit sometimes grants would-be ministers of his church. The most effective recruitment came from pastors and teachers in the congregations of the Negro Missions, according to Pastor Henry Grigsby, speaking from personal experience. They showed how much they enjoyed working for their Lord, which had a profound effect on a boy.¹³

2. Money will always be an issue for students; costs of education are high, and the ones benefiting from the services of a college or seminary should be expected to pay for it. On the other hand, few students can afford to pay the true cost of their education—for an institution to be feasible, it usually must have outside funding, particularly when its target students are not wealthy. Raising money for plant maintenance, staff salaries, and student aid is not an easy task, but the Synodical Conference really did make a commitment to Immanuel when it authorized its construction. When the Mission Board increased financial assistance to individual students, as it did in 1919, enrollment likewise increased greatly.¹⁴

Money was especially scarce during the years of the Great Depression. During several of those years, tuition cost about \$60, room and board about \$100. The Mission Board was willing to pay the cost of the latter, if a student could come up with the tuition. Yet even this generous assistance was not able to keep enrollment from declining due to financial hardship. Enrollment did, however, increase as the nation pulled out of its economic slump.

¹² Kuske, 25

¹³ Workintine, 22.

Though large amounts of money were spent on Immanuel, the Synodical Conference could be faulted for not taking enough interest in the school. The Negro Mission Board oversaw the operation and financing of the school, but only rarely did members of the board visit the school. Because of this neglect, conditions at Immanuel became unacceptable before they were remedied.¹⁵

3. In 1919, there was only one black instructor at Immanuel, which may have seemed odd at an all-black institution. Richard Dickinson harshly denounces the Synodical Conference for having a “lily white” administration (168-169). And yet,

[Pastor Grigsby] says that the racial makeup of the faculty and administration never made a difference in the years that he was at Greensboro. He stated that time and time again the faculty would emphasize that they were all part of God's family, and the faculty treated them as family.¹⁶

A high rate of turnover was noted by the students and others. Teaching at Immanuel was a demanding and stressful job, understaffed as it often was. To make matters worse, professors often needed to find additional employment, as salaries were inadequate for men with a family. In the years 1903 to 1925, slightly less than a quarter century, the school saw nineteen full-time professors—four at any given time. New professors need time to acquire the skills necessary to teach on the college or seminary level, and the high turnover rate did nothing for the students' faith in their school, much less their ability to learn under such circumstances.

4. The major impetus for opening Immanuel was its potential to train pastors to serve the Negro Mission. Since teachers often had responsibilities similar to those of pastors, it worked well to train the two tracks together as much as practical. As has been noted, however, Immanuel was not only for training pastors and teachers, but laypeople as well. In 1919, additional courses such as gardening and mechanics were added to the curriculum, to broaden Immanuel's appeal. Subsequently, enrollment increased dramatically. Part of the rationale for this was logistics: the more students enrolled at Immanuel, the lower the cost of education per student. Another reason was the paucity of opportunities

¹⁴ Kuske, 27.

¹⁵ Kuske, 41.

for Lutheran black students who desired a higher education. The inevitable problem with admitting students who had no desire to become a pastor or teacher was loss of focus. Immanuel soon came to rely on non-ministerial students for its existence, as students for the public ministries accounted for an ever-decreasing percentage of total student population.

In 1944, The Synodical Conference endorsed a fateful decision made years earlier to open Immanuel to members of other denominations. Proponents of the idea cited accreditation advantages and opportunities for evangelism. Greater enrollment would also lower the cost of educating each individual student.¹⁷ While these arguments are valid, the opening of Immanuel changed its atmosphere significantly. Suddenly, it had to compete with other black colleges. Already 1940, less than half the students were Lutheran—an odd and undesirable situation for a Lutheran college and seminary.¹⁸ The influx of non-Lutheran students even affected the moral climate of the institution, to the point where the life of one professor was threatened in his classroom.¹⁹

Another fateful decision which affected Immanuel's future was made not by the Synodical Conference, but the U.S. Supreme Court. The 1954 decision of *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* meant that "separate but equal" was no longer a valid social policy, since separation based on race was inherently unequal. This certainly was the case with graduates from the segregated schools of the Synodical Conference. Graduates from Immanuel were only considered for Negro Mission churches, whereas graduates from the Concordia system were eligible for placement in any Conference congregation. Regardless of ability, the black pastors coming out of segregated seminaries were considered at best in a different category, at worst inferior, compared to white pastors.

The Synodical Conference, therefore, resolved that Immanuel was intended for "all students without racial considerations." Not until 1958 did the first white student begin at the seminary. Yet this same policy of integration worked towards Immanuel's undoing. Now that the institution lost its special status as the seminary for "colored" pastors, it was subject to the same criteria to justify its existence as

¹⁶ Workintine, 22.

¹⁷ PSC 1944, 72.

¹⁸ At the Synodical Conference convention in 1960, this was cited as one reason for discontinuing the school (PSC 1960, 137f.).

the other schools in the Synodical Conference. Suddenly, the small classes at the seminary, coupled with the extremely high cost of educating each student (compared to other seminaries in the system²⁰), made budget-conscious administrators wonder why Immanuel needed to exist at all. The Missouri Synod, long the leader of the Conference and the greatest supporter of the Negro Mission, presented a resolution to the Conference to close the seminary at Immanuel. By this time, the other seminaries in the Synodical Conference were integrated (formally, at least). Transportation was less an issue than it had been in decades past. It seemed that there was no reason the students at Immanuel could not transfer to these other institutions.²¹

Yet the resolution did not pass at the convention. Delegates noted that almost all of the black pastors in the Negro Missions had graduated from Immanuel, the distance was still significant for many, and the seminary did not add much to the cost of the college.²² Two years later, in 1958, another motion was made to close Immanuel's seminary and leave the college open as a preparatory school. The Synodical Conference was less and less willing to support segregation of its ministerial students, and so the resolution passed the Conference convention.²³ Whether integration was promoted because of a genuine concern about racial harmony or because of financial considerations, cannot be said for certain.

Though the death blow had already been dealt to the seminary, it took another two years before the Synodical Conference heard the report from a special commission which investigated the colleges of the Conference and its "Colored Missions."

The commission took the conference task for not supporting Immanuel. They found Immanuel to be poorly equipped, inadequately staffed, the curriculum was nonfunctional, administration was poorly defined, the 1200 Lutherans in the area was too small a base to support Immanuel, the practice of segregated schools was not good, there were not enough graduates from Immanuel and too many of the students were non-Lutheran. The commission recommended that Immanuel be closed no later than 1961; all properties be sold; the library be sent to Alabama Lutheran Academy; the professors be retired; and that the synodical Conference schools offer remedial training for all students wanted to transfer.²⁴

¹⁹ Werre, Alvin. Taped Interview by Jonathan Kuske: "Immanuel Lutheran College." Dakota, Minnesota; April 8, 1988.

²⁰ It cost \$5800 for each black student who graduated from the seminary at Greensboro, as opposed to \$171 for a student at Concordia, St. Louis—according to Kuske, 29.

²¹ Workintine, 19.

²² PSC 1956, 118-119.

²³ PSC 1958, 104.

²⁴ Workintine, 20-21.

Even the Mission Board had to agree, and offered explanations as to why Immanuel did not succeed—a justification of what it felt was its failure to support the Negro Missions. The repeated efforts since 1944 to close the school hurt morale among prospects, students, and faculty. The high turnover of the staff hurt stability. Lack of interest shown by the members of the Conference to promote the Negro Missions hurt the entire program. Not surprisingly, the Mission Board had objected to people comparing Immanuel to other schools. It was a unique institution, serving a function the other schools could not. Nevertheless, the Board agreed that closing it would be the best decision.²⁵

Despite its problems, Immanuel had enjoyed a fine reputation. Booker T. Washington spoke highly of the school.²⁶ By 1925, Immanuel had provided sixteen out of twenty-three pastors in the Negro Mission. The Mission Board invested large amounts of money every year into the school, improving facilities and adding more members to the faculty. In the 1920s, an additional year was added at the seminary for a vicar year. At the same time, other black institutions were also improving throughout the South. Pastors who had graduated from Immanuel considered their education top-notch. Said 1931 graduate Henry Grigsby, “They (the professors) gave us a theory and at the same time they provided nails to hang it on. One of the things that they really pushed was that you learn something in the morning and then get out at night and practice what you learn.”²⁷

The closing of Immanuel Lutheran Seminary may have actually helped the re-integration of the other seminaries in the Concordia system, by pushing the envelope. Although not officially segregated, Concordia Seminary at St. Louis was practically closed to blacks only thirty-five years earlier. Rev. Grigsby relates how this was so in an interview given in 1988:

When we left Luther College (Selma, Alabama, 1928), three of us were supposed to have gone to St. Louis. We would have been the first blacks attending Concordia. A contributor in Texas heard about it. This person was a heavy contributor in the synod. He contributed \$20,000 a year. He wouldn't have it. Superintendent Smith said we couldn't afford to lose his contribution. “That means you can't go to St. Louis.” That was a just a week before we were supposed to leave Alabama. They scrambled around to find where we could go. They checked Springfield. They

²⁵ PSC 1960, 72 and 124.

²⁶ PSC 1912, 37.

²⁷ Kuske, 25.

checked Seward. They were both “full.” They checked Immanuel (and found) they could squeeze and make room.²⁸

Once Immanuel was closed, the difficulties involved with integration became quite apparent. Black students were seen as inferior by professors and other students alike. The first black students brought home stories that discouraged others from attending those schools. One former professor of Immanuel lamented, “I felt that if we closed the seminary, we would cease to train black ministers. This has proved true. We have not trained a sufficient number of black pastors to replace those who have died.”²⁹

Wisconsin's experience with integration

Though much smaller than the Missouri Synod, and drawing its membership heavily from rural congregations, the Wisconsin Synod had a rather different experience with integration. Leon W. Todd, Jr., was the first black man to attend Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, during the years 1965-1967. He did not finish—apparently convinced that a black man would not receive a call to a WELS congregation. (Today Mr. Todd is a prominent liberal political activist in Milwaukee.) The first black man to graduate from the seminary was Raymond Kimbrough.

Though one must not make a rule out of one case, the story of Ruth Smith is an interesting contrast between some Missouri Synod schools and Dr. Martin Luther College in the first half of this century. Ruth Smith was born in 1917 of a white father and a mixed mother, which at least until the 1960s was considered “colored” by many white people. She wanted to attend Moody Bible Institute, but her Wisconsin Synod pastor recommended Concordia, River Forest (a Missouri Synod institution) instead. Once enrolled there, in September, 1941, Dr. Arthur Klinck, the president of the college, found out that she was colored, and asked her to leave. Ruth’s pastor was shocked to hear of the expulsion, and recommended that she attend DMLC. The president of DMLC made special arrangements to have her attend, for classes had already started.

Ruth’s roommates in New Ulm did not mind that Ruth was partly colored, in fact, the pigment of her skin caused no problems whatsoever. Even when Ruth’s racial background became common knowledge, no negative reactions resulted. No one recalled any racial slurs ever being made about

²⁸ Kuske, 42.

²⁹ Buls, Harold. Taped Interview by Richard Norris: “The Black Mission.” Ft. Wayne; March 23, 1983.

Ruth. In fact, when Ruth's unfortunate experience at Concordia, River Forest, became known, the collective response was one of disbelief.

All was not well with the Wisconsin Synod, however. When Ruth Smith graduated in 1944, she was not assigned, despite a severe shortage of teachers in the schools (it was wartime, after all). There is no way to prove that Ruth did not receive a call because she was colored, though that seems the most likely explanation, for the faculty of DMLC had no reservations about her teaching ability or having her serve in one of the Christian day schools of the Wisconsin Synod. Six weeks after graduation, however, Immanuel Albrecht, one of members of the Missionary Board of the Lutheran Synodical Conference, asked Ruth to serve in one of the "colored missions" in Cleveland. She accepted, but seven months later asked to be released due to an internal struggle in the congregation.

Ruth's name went back on the call list. It was soon noticed by Rev. Gerhard Schaefer of Trinity in Neenah, Wisconsin. Against the advice of District President Behm, Pastor Schaefer recommended that the congregation call Ms. Smith, saying "I don't care if she's as black as the ace of spades. We need a teacher." Years later, former President Behm apologized to Ruth for his lack of confidence in her. Ruth served with an enviable record for many decades, and her students loved and trusted her.³⁰

³⁰ Hintz, Stephen. "The Odyssey of Ruth Smith." WELS Historical Institute Journal, Spring, 1989, pages 3-15.

II. Our current system: integration?

Multiculturalism in the WELS

Even if one could remove the desire to reach out to every nation created by the gospel, one would still see a need for outreach to other ethnic groups in our own country. Pastor Fred Toppe, in his essays “Our Kind of People” and “Our Kind of Church,” made a careful analysis of the religious and cultural demographics of our country. The following are some observations he made (and this writer’s notes on his observations): By the year 2000, only 40% of Christians will be of European background. Yet fewer than 10% of Lutherans in the world are not from a Northern European ancestry. While the percentage of non-whites in this country grows, the percentage of Lutherans in this country is decreasing. That suggests that the Lutheran church is not growing in non-white communities. The Wisconsin Synod is archtypical of Lutheranism in general—only 1% of our membership in 1981 had a non-European background. (Toppe, 1)

The reason for this has more to do with culture than theology. While no one can dictate to the Holy Spirit how He must work, for the sake of argument we will assume that the Holy Spirit does not work on the group level, but the individual level. (We have no way to probe the hidden things of God apart from what he has revealed.) History may lead us to say that the Holy Spirit blessed the Germans in the sixteenth century, or white Americans in the twentieth, but it would be arrogance on our part to say that God will continue to work among any particular group. Therefore, many of our congregations have come to the conclusion that God desires them to target people of other ethnicities in evangelism efforts.

Sad to say, it often took the imminent collapse of a congregation which ignored neighborhoods changing around it, before those who remained saw the desirability of bringing in people of another culture or color. When survival is the motivation for evangelism, rather than the genuine response to the gospel being the motivation, can we be surprised when the evangelism efforts have not changed the demographics of our congregations much? Alan Sorum’s work, *Mission and Ministries Across Cultures in North America*³¹ is a valuable tool in improving not only a congregation’s efforts at cross-cultural outreach, but presenting the Scriptural mandate to bring the ministry of the gospel to people in our

midst, of every color. Needless to say, this paper is but a brief treatment of the topic, while Rev. Sorum's is much more comprehensive.

Multiculturalism is a relatively new concept in our circles. Let us distinguish between cross-culturalism and multiculturalism: Cross-culturalism is when a missionary is immersed in a culture foreign to him and does his best to function in that culture. A person's cross-cultural aptitude is dependent on his exposure to another culture, his education, his personality and love for others; it is an implicit gift of the Spirit. Multiculturalism is when a pastor synthesizes the best of many cultures into one, a new culture—a "melting pot." Actually, the more accurate picture is that of a "stew pot."

As foreign or non-white cultures are planted and take root in America, they are preferring to maintain some of the distinctiveness of their culture even as carrots and meat chunks maintain their distinctiveness in the stew pot. At the same time, these other cultures boil down a bit in the process to spice and flavor the overall taste of our unique American stew.³²

It would be a shame to lose everything that makes a culture unique, even in bringing those people into the Lutheran church. But as each part retains its distinctiveness in the body, so it is in the church of Christ.

A person's aptitude for multiculturalism is dependent on the same things as for cross-culturalism, but multiculturalism is more difficult. Not only the minister must adapt, but his whole congregation needs to. The minister will not be effective at communicating a multicultural mindset to his people, unless he is convinced in his own mind that other cultures have things to offer that are as valuable as his own, if not more so. The same is true on the school level, where professors and teachers must be convinced that African history is as important as European, as Chinese, as American Indian. The difficulty with multiculturalism is compromise; something must be given up in order to another thing to take its place.

To be sure, the Wisconsin Synod has been involved in cross-cultural work from the beginning, when it sent missionaries in 1893 to the Apache Indian Reservation. Generally, we are thinking of cross-cultural work when we think of foreign missions. Multicultural work is not new to the WELS either; it began when congregations wrestled over making accommodations to those who spoke English

³¹ Milwaukee: Multicultural Mission Committee of the Board for Home Missions, 1996.

rather than German. It took a number of generations and two world wars to overcome that hurdle—and it involved compromise.

What do multiculturalism and cross-cultural work have to do with the training of minorities in the Wisconsin Synod? An understanding of both is vitally important to a discussion of the topic.

First of all, the question must be asked anew, “Why do we want to make a special effort to recruit and train pastors who belong to a minority ethnic group?” It is a valid question without an easy answer. On the one hand, it seems obvious that a person from any given community would be the best one to serve as a minister in that community. Many of the hurdles an outsider must overcome are not issues with one from that community. Pastor Sorum explains, “The pastor from an Anglo culture will not and cannot grasp the unique questions, problems, weaknesses, and sins confronting people from another culture *as well as someone who is from that other culture*” [emphasis mine].³³ Likewise, “The urban pastor will serve families in an urban, multicultural context for years before he can begin to understand and to appreciate these differences” (ibid). Overcoming such cultural obstacles is a challenge that takes great effort, says Sorum, but it is highly rewarding spiritually (ibid, 22). While the church would not want to deprive anyone of the opportunity to serve in such a setting, it must ask whether it is not better stewardship to train people from a community to serve in that community. That was the thinking of the Synodical Conference regarding Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary.

On the other hand, some pastors in inner-city congregations question whether it is particularly beneficial that minorities be sent back to their own communities. In Milwaukee, both a white pastor and a black one have wondered if it is. Rev. Raymond Kimbrough admitted that it took him a long time to settle into his pastorate in the inner-city; it was as “foreign” to him as it would be to a pastor who grew up in the suburbs. Kimbrough noted that he grew up in middle-class professional neighborhood, rather than a low-income area. It would be wrong to judge Ray Kimbrough on simply the color of his skin and the knowledge that he grew up in Milwaukee. He is an individual, just like any other pastor.

³² Sorum, 148.

³³ “Bringing the Gospel to the Cities of North America.” WLQ, 95:20.

Another inner-city Milwaukee pastor, Rev. Rolfe Westendorf, cites the advantages a white pastor has in the inner-city. For good or bad, many parents look for a school which has a healthy mixture of white and black students. In the late 20th century, minority-dominated schools tend to be the result of “white flight” and are under-funded. Pastor Westendorf has earned the respect of his members and the community, though he readily admits that the issue of race is always “right below the surface.” When racial tensions in the community are high, he is perhaps a liability to the congregation. When tensions are low, he is an asset and living proof of the Lutheran church’s commitment to work among other cultures.

Multiculturalism is perhaps the more important question. A relatively small number of congregations and pastors will be asked to serve in a purely cross-cultural situation. At this time in our nation’s and the world’s history, nearly every congregation will have some opportunity for multicultural outreach and growth. Our educational systems are becoming more sensitive to it, promoting such things as “Black History Month” and portraying minorities more in graphic images. Even interracial marriages are occurring among our prospects, our members, and our pastors.³⁴ The Church Growth Movement teaches that ethnic groups should be kept apart to worship in their own way. That may happen because of language barriers or a congregation’s unwillingness to open up to newcomers.³⁵ Professor John Brug responds, “Christianity is also uni-cultural. It breaks down barriers that separate peoples and unites them in one church.”³⁶ One culture’s willingness to join another in fellowship around the Means of Grace comes from the commonality of the gospel: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This naturally raises the question of how much we are willing to compromise to promote multiculturalism. Are our white congregations ready to see black, yellow, or red faces in their pews? Are they ready to exchange some of their German chorales for American gospel tunes? Are the white

³⁴ To the best of my knowledge, the author’s is the second marriage between a black and a white, among Wisconsin Lutheran Seminarians & pastors.

³⁵ Jindra, Michael. “Multiculturalism and the WELS.” WELS Faculty Conference, June 7, 1990.

³⁶ “Sharing the Gospel Across Cultures.” *Northwestern Lutheran*, October 1993.

congregations ready to have black pastors preach from their pulpits? Some congregations certainly are, where Pastors Ray Kimbrough and Snowden Sims preach—and where, Lord willing, Brady Coleman and Aaron Robinson will one day preach. Other congregations, sad to say, are not ready. Until the day when

If every church in America invited any sincere Christian to join in its worship, without any barrier of race or color, it is unlikely that church attendance would change greatly for many years. But the attitudes of many people toward the churches and of the churches toward themselves would change profoundly.

Kingdom Beyond Caste, p. 50

Americans (or at least Wisconsin Synod Lutherans) judge a person “by the content of his character, rather than the color of his skin,” we leave it to the Lord to decide which is which, through the call he issues by his Holy Spirit. May congregations recognize that the call they extend comes from Him, and so treat their pastor, whatever his color.

Our prep school system and colleges

Today, although the overwhelming sentiment among pastors and professors seems to be a desire to see more minority students for ministry, there is no special treatment of such students. The faculties at our college and seminary recognize that all students are precious, regardless of their color. Students who have special academic needs are provided for, particularly if they come from a nontraditional WELS school background.

MLC and Northwestern College have not been burdened with a mandate for “quotas,” as have many state-run institutions. That does not mean that the schools are uninterested in a diversity among the student population. Northwestern Prep has enjoyed some small measure of diversity in part because of its location not far from Milwaukee. Aaron Robinson, a second-year student at the Seminary, says his mother sent him to Prep because he would receive a better education there than he would in Milwaukee. Also, he was influenced by the recruitment efforts of Paul Bertolus, who took a sincere interest in Aaron as an individual. The desire to attend a prep school should be distinguished from the desire to become a pastor. The gospel message is the primary motivation for the latter. Apart from the gospel, the most powerful influence in Aaron’s decision was the positive example of his pastors and teachers. May we never underestimate the impact that the testimony of our lives has on our young people.

Since many potential recruits come from an urban neighborhood, with limited economic resources, the question of financial aid comes up. Until about ten years ago, there was a scholarship fund identified as the "Minority Scholarship Fund" for men preparing for the pastoral ministry, administered by the Commission on Higher Education in Milwaukee. It was merged into the general grants-in-aid fund, for a number of reasons. The most logical reason was that it was not needed: the formula for awarding grants was comparable for all students, and so the fund for minority students had been inactive for many years. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the minority students were reluctant to accept aid so targeted. Either way, it was the intention of the schools that no academically qualified minority student should be turned away because of financial concerns. This continues to be the case.³⁷

While Martin Luther College and Luther Preparatory School are striving to be "color blind" in most respects, at the same time, they are moving away from the monoculturalism that characterized them in the past. This means more than striving to eliminate prejudice, but seeing a "need to instill a willingness to understand and value the culture of others."³⁸ This evolution has taken many forms: curriculum restructuring, sensitivity to personal problems, and recognizing potential in students of other cultures.

For many years now, our ministerial colleges have offered courses such as *Introduction to Minority Cultures* now available at Martin Luther College. Teachers need to be sensitive to the cultures of the students in their classrooms, and pastors dare not enter a field completely ignorant of the things that will hinder or facilitate their message. Among the pastor-track graduates of 1996 and 1997, over seventy-five percent took the three-credit course. The 1997 synodical convention directed MLC make such a course mandatory within two years. In addition, the college is actively seeking ways for faculty and students to work among people of a different culture. The task is daunting, because of New Ulm's lack of ethnic diversity. One such avenue that has worked is Prof. Paul Bases' Spanish Immersion Program,

³⁷ E-mail from Jerald Plitzuweit, Vice President for Studies in Pastoral Ministry at Martin Luther College, March 26, 1998.

³⁸ Plitzuweit, Jerald. "Vice President's Viewpoint." *From the Hill: A View of Martin Luther College*. Fall/Winter 1997. Vol. 3 No. 1 Page 3.

which involves four weeks of study in Mexico.³⁹ Perhaps in the future, the college will tap into the ethnic opportunities abundant in the Twin Cities region.

Such efforts have been successful on the prep school level, with *Project Timothy*, where high school students work for two weeks canvassing and teaching VBS on the Caribbean Islands of Antigua and St. Lucia. Admittedly, this is a rather short period of time, but it gives Anglo American students a feel for what it is like to live and work as a minority. Past participants as well as administrators speak of the program with glowing praise.⁴⁰

On the seminary level, students have long had opportunities to work among other cultures. Mequon's proximity to Milwaukee means that a number of seniors may serve in inner-city or otherwise diverse congregations. Other students find employment with Northside or Southside Ministry, which involves physical and spiritual assistance primarily to African-Americans and Hispanics, respectively.

Sensitivity to a minority student's personal problems is impossible unless the common problems of his culture are known—which makes this obstacle difficult to overcome. Our teachers and professors can attend seminars and read books on the subject, but without direct, regular contact with other cultures, they can sympathize with their struggles, but not empathize with them. The best solution may be not to expect that the faculty at Martin Luther College will ever be able to completely understand the challenge of teaching a student of another culture, though they ought to strive toward that goal. A more practical solution in the short and long term may be to bring the education to the student who would function poorly in our current schools.

We just don't grow up in the inner-city situation. We see the kids at New Ulm, well taken care of, and we expect that the kids should be able to perform like everybody else. But the truth is, when there is a home situation like this, that it is difficult for them to be put on the same par and concentrate and not be distracted by these sort of issues. As much as our faculty tries to be emphatic, the vast majority have not had any experience with this kind of life style or exposure to it. They just can't comprehend the problems that these [African-American, inner city] young men have had.⁴¹

³⁹ Plitzuweit, Jerald. "Vice President's Viewpoint," 3-4.

⁴⁰ Interview with John Lawrenz, February 18, 1998.

⁴¹ Interview with Glen Thompson, March 25, 1998.

The Multicultural Preseminary Program

In 1977, the Wisconsin Synod was experimenting with a nontraditional system of education for inner-city residents in Milwaukee. Rev. Rolfe Westendorf, with the help of seminarian Glen Thompson and others, attempted to help second-career students in Milwaukee congregations prepare for entrance to Northwestern College. Thompson recalls teaching only one student at St. Phillip's, and noted that the program lacked clear direction. The fact that it required a knowledge of Latin and German, languages also required in the traditional prep system, meant that the program wasn't going to make too many accommodations to the students' background and position in life. After many years of disuse, the program was disbanded.⁴²

The rarity of ethnic minority pastors continued (and is still continuing). Inner-city pastors felt frustrated because their congregations were not willing to send their young men to become ministers, regardless of their color. For them it was a matter of stewardship, a sanctified response to the gospel—rather than a desire to see diversity among our clergy.⁴³ Some wanted the synod to make a special effort toward the recruitment of minority students from urban congregations. Second-career men were seen as the most likely candidates for the ministry.

If we don't make special effort, we're not going to get very many. First of all, the system is set up to accommodate white people coming from Christian days schools and area Lutheran high schools, and a larger percentage of our minority candidates (or 'people who should be candidates who are minority people') are not going to be the 16, 17, 18 year-olds. Just because we do not have of large numbers of minority congregations, we tend to get more people who are already adults, or at least in their early adulthood—what we would call second career men. That is going to happen for a long time. There's going to be an inordinate proportion of students there.⁴⁴

Several pastors saw a potential source of ministers for the inner-city congregations: the congregations themselves. Great barriers had prevented the black leadership in these churches from pursuing what the men had the ability and the desire to do, that is, to become shepherds of God's people. In the late 1980s, the time had again come to seriously consider an alternative to the four-year college, four-year seminary program. Pastors who had worked cross-culturally in the African-American community believed it would be beneficial to minimize the length of time that their people were out of

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Interview with Rolfe Westendorf, April 6, 1998.

their own culture and under the influence of another culture. Some feared that once men had gone “through the system,” they would not want to return to the inner city.

An alternative educational system received serious attention since 1988, when the synod appointed a task force to decide how multicultural mission work could better be carried out. District mission boards reported a plethora of opportunities but lacked guidance in how to take advantage of them. Two years later, the task force made recommendations and was turned into a permanent committee, the Multicultural Mission Committee. The committee found itself repeatedly making the observation, “Unless we get some minority pastors, we’re going to keep spinning our wheels.”⁴⁵

In 1994, the committee requested that another task force be appointed to study the training of multicultural people and minorities. This new task force was made up of representatives of the Board for Home Missions, the Board for World Missions, the Board of Worker Training, and the presidents of Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. After meeting for about eighteen months, the task force recommended that the synod create the Multicultural Preseminary Program (MPP). The MPP would allow a student to receive instruction in his own home city, bypassing the four years of college. Courses would be offered via “distance learning,” with the cooperation of the student’s own pastor.

To implement this program, the synod called Professor Thompson to work full-time on the campus of MLC, where he was authorized to commission professors to help him create a distance learning curriculum.

A task force report on training cross-cultural ministers envisions two levels of training ethnic ministers within their own ethnic communities for church work. Both emphasize biblical studies. Level I provides training for a variety of services in a congregational ministry in an ethnic setting and is prerequisite for Level II, which provides the added training necessary for entrance at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and eventual service as pastor in the student’s own cultural setting. Level II is a variation of the long-standing seminary certification program, formerly known also as the “Bethany program.” The curriculum is being developed by the task force with Prof. Glen Thompson of Michigan Lutheran Seminary providing coordination and leadership.⁴⁶

The first level of the program could really be called “Leadership Training.” It is a series of ten main courses. Members of the MPP send students to the local pastor, and encourage the pastor to take his lay

⁴⁴ Ibid. Thompson.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Book of Reports and Memorials*, 1995, page 7.

leaders through the program to train them to be better lay leaders. As they go through the program, it is hoped that the pastor will identify any of those men who have the gifts and interest to become full-time workers in the church. When they finish that level, the pastor can recommend any of them to be accepted into the second level. The second level is really the pre-seminary level. When students are accepted into that level, they begin studying Greek, and then eventually Hebrew. They learn about the Smalkald articles, the creeds, and all the religion courses and biblical language courses that one would normally learn at MLC. The MPP will provide remedial English as necessary to prepare the students so that they can succeed at Mequon on when they eventually get there.⁴⁷

The MPP is not only intended for America's inner cities. The flexible nature of the program is well-suited for mission fields that do not have a seminary.⁴⁸ Right now over half of the MPP students are in the Caribbean or on the Apache Indian Reservation. Both of those world fields have adopted the program and integrated it into their own worker training system. Unfortunately, there is only a small number of inner-city African-American people in the program. There are a few Hispanics, and a number of Native Americans.

Not everybody is in favor of an alternative system. Rev. Kimbrough, who did come through the traditional college system, is one of the MPP's most ardent critics.⁴⁹ An alternative system which makes concessions to another culture, not requiring certain minorities to obtain a four-year degree at the synod's college, will create a new class of pastor who is seen as inferior. The MPP, he believes, will perpetuate and intensify the stereotypes that exist. Even though the MPP may prepare a student sufficiently to study at WLS, the perception will remain that his education did not achieve the same standard as that of the other students. This will be intensified because of the high visibility of minority

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ This writer believes, and Prof. Thompson concurs, that the new World Mission Collection could be an invaluable resource for multilingual studies.

⁴⁹ Regarding Level Two. Kimbrough believes all congregations would do well to implement Level One of the program.

students, whereas students of the Bethany Program (which allowed students to forego Latin and German) readily blended in with the mainstream students.⁵⁰

Proponents of the program acknowledge the dangers of creating a “second-class pastor,” but they are confident that the program will succeed because it makes the same academic demands of students, in order for them to study theology at the Seminary. Candidates for this program may not be able to leave their communities because of their family obligations, and something would be lost if they left their culture for eight years. At the bottom line is year after year of hard statistics—minority students are underrepresented among graduates.

We have a very strong tradition of wanting to mainstream of everybody. There is some strong feeling that if we do set up a separate program, we are somehow showing favoritism, and that there is some sort of affirmative action, and that this is somehow wrong... The fact is, we have a very low percentage of those who make it through. I know that there has been quite a number of black students at the college during the past two decades. There are only two who have made it all the way through to the ministry. That would leave perhaps a 75 percent drop out rate since entering college. If you took a prep schools, I am sure that there, too, the percentage of blacks is much lower than that.⁵¹

What about placement?

If the rationale for the MPP revolves around the desire to leave a student in his own culture as long as possible, does it stand to reason that the candidate will receive an assignment to a congregation whose members are of that culture? Yes and no. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has never wavered in its intention of preparing men who are ready to receive any call to which the synod assigns them.⁵² To begin training pastors who are only qualified to serve in one segment of the pastoral ministry would indeed create a “lower class” of pastors, something to which all parties are sensitive.⁵³ Furthermore, the view that “black pastors are for black pulpits, and white pastors are for white pulpits,” is an erring opinion of the Church Growth Movement, which avoids the challenges of an integrated church rather than working to overcome racial stereotypes.

⁵⁰ Interview with Raymond Kimbrough, April 2, 1998.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview with John Brenner, March 24, 1998.

⁵³ Such was the training of black pastors in the Synodical Conference until the closure of Immanuel Lutheran College.

On the other hand, the purpose of the MPP is to provide pastors who *can* serve well in their own culture. Rev. Westendorf, Prof. Thompson, Rev. Sorum, and others agree that the graduate of the MPP and WLS ought to be placed according to his individual gifts and a congregation's need. We trust that the Holy Spirit works through the call process, and so provides workers for the church. However, it is entirely likely and hoped for by some, that the candidates will be assigned to an area in which they will function naturally—namely, their own culture, be it Hispanic, West Indian, American Indian, or Urban American.

Analysis of the Multicultural Pre-seminary Program

Scripture does not prescribe the “system” a person must go through to become a pastor. This is not to imply that the primary one we have used is without value. It serves the majority of our congregations well, and will no doubt continue to do so for years to come. The alternative system recognizes that some congregations and students have special needs. It maintains the same high standard of preparation for the doctrinal aspects of the pastoral ministry, but allows life experience to substitute for some of the formal education of the traditional system.

At a time when pastors are in short supply and the church has many opportunities for growth, the Wisconsin Synod does rightly to pursue all avenues to recruit and train people of varied backgrounds for the ministry. If they ultimately are placed in their hometown or across the country, the church will benefit. Either a congregation will have a pastor who immediately is empathetic with its particular problems and strengths, or a congregation will have a pastor who can share the richness of his differing experience and background.

Conclusion

The Lutheran Church has wrestled with racial issues as long as it has been in this country. Our forefathers made an important decision when they decided to work among the blacks in the South, and likewise when they recognized that African-American pastors would be a great gift of God to his church. In a society which did not practice integration, the establishment of Immanuel Lutheran College was an important way to train black pastors.

Once society was ready to become integrated on an institutional level, Immanuel's days were numbered. Sadly, there were problems in assimilating black students into the existing schools. Today, there remain barriers to complete integration, barriers which multicultural education seeks to remove. Yet another question remains: Do we want to assimilate members of other cultures? The Multicultural Pre-seminary program is an attempt, among other things, to allow a person to remain in his community as long as possible. We do not know if the program will be successful in terms of numbers, for it is too new. We do know that if our efforts are God-pleasing, done with the right motivation, and properly carried out, then the MPP is worth pursuing as an alternative program to the traditional four-year college.

Finally, none of the Synod's attempts to recruit and train minorities are justified unless the members, from the president down to the individuals in the congregation, are willing to call one another brothers and sisters in the faith—regardless of ethnicity. We cannot eliminate prejudice from the world. We cannot even eliminate it from ourselves, but the gospel can overcome it. May that gospel also raise ministers from all nations, to serve our God and his people.

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