

A THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS
WITH SPECIAL APPLICATION TO NORTH AMERICAN CITIES

E. Allen Sorum

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PREFACE

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. (Jonah 1:1-3)

Has God commanded us, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, to purposefully, aggressively pick up our prophet's mantle and go into the modern day Ninevehs of the North American continent? If he has, where and what is Scripture's theological basis for this command? If there is a basis for such a command, what has kept us in the past from adhering to this command more closely? What might keep us from obeying this command now and in the future? If God wants us to go into the cities and the inner cities of North America, what's going to prevent us from running away? What will compel us to obey?

The purpose of this writing is to answer all of the above questions. May God grant us answers that bring glory to him and much comfort to sinners everywhere, including sinners in the city. To God alone be the glory.

1. Introduction

The science of missiology is both "the study of the activity of the Triune God throughout the world in behalf of the salvation of mankind" as well as "the study of the activity of the Church of Jesus Christ in carrying out its Lord's commission to disciple all nations" (Wendland 1982, 167). Our church body's tradition has not made missiology a distinctly separate focus of study in theology in order "to underscore the principle that this first commission of the Lord to his Church (Matthew 28:16-20) be a part of *all* its theological teaching" (Wendland 1982, 168).

In the pages that follow, we do want to focus on the activity of our Triune God throughout the world in behalf of the salvation of mankind and then make special applications to God's interest in the salvation of that portion of mankind that lives in North American cities. This particular focus is necessary for two reasons.

First, we should study missiology and apply it to our North American cities because most of North America's population has chosen to live in highly urbanized areas. By the year 2000, the United Nations predicts that 80.8 % of North America's population will live in urban areas of 20,000 or more (Palen 1987, 4). This radical reversal of hometown environment has happened faster than our continent's governments have been able to manage. Not surprisingly, therefore, this breakneck growth rate of urban population centers has happened faster than our own church body--faster than any North American church body--has been able to manage comfortably.

The second reason we need to be studying missiology and applying to our North American cities is because the urbanization of our continent and the world is not just past history. It continues unabated. It is already past the time to begin to wrestle with the uncomfortable implications of doing and being church in the city. But this issue is about more than just the raw numbers of urban dwellers. The issue before us presents an urgent opportunity to reach the lost. The majority of people living in and moving into cities are either un-Christian or anti-Christian.

As cities grow, the percentage of urban Christians decreases. In 1900, argues David Barrett, Christians numbered 68.8 percent of urban dwellers. In 1980, they numbered only 46.3 percent. By 2000, that figure will drop again to 44.5 percent (Barrett 1989:21). According to Barrett's 1986 perspective, "the churches are losing the cities at the rate of 80,900 new non-Christian urban dwellers every day, or one every second" (Barrett 1986:22) (Conn 1993, 322).

North American evangelism efforts must address a surging wave of immigrants who come to our borders with no knowledge of Christianity. Moreover, there are the folks who have lived within our borders for generations but have turned their back on historic Christianity. Church attendance in Seattle, Washington averages less than 3% on Sunday mornings according to an article in the Seattle Times. Islam explodes in the

cities. Mormonism grows exponentially in urban areas. Because people are still moving to the cities and because our church and the Christian church is still "losing" the cities, that is to say, because the activity of the Church of Jesus Christ in carrying out its Lord's commission to make disciples of all nations *in cities* is not sufficiently active, we need to focus carefully on what God has done to save the world and apply earnestly and immediately what we learn to North American cities!

2. World-Wide Mission: The Work of the Triune God as Plowman

Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom (Isaiah 28:23-29).

The now-sainted Dr. Paul Peters, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1939 to 1966, wrote a mission festival sermon based on the above Scripture passage that had the following theme and parts:

Mission is the Work of God

1. God is Plowman
2. God is Sower
3. God is Thresher

I have adopted Dr. Peters' sermon outline as the outline for this study of the activity of the Triune God throughout the world in behalf of the salvation of mankind. Dr. Peters mentioned his handling of Isaiah 28:23-39 in an article he wrote for the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly back in October of 1968 with the title, "World-Wide Mission: The Work of the Triune God." The specific goal of this writing is to apply the Bible's teaching on God's world-wide mission activity and concern to cities in North America.

The plow in Isaiah 28:24 is the holy, righteous law of God. The soil in which God plows with his law is the heart of all mankind. God begins plowing in man's heart from man's earliest days because all of mankind is born with the law of God imprinted on their hearts: "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts" (Romans 2:14-15).

Mankind has this ability to grow accustomed to the pain caused in his heart by the plowing of the law which is imprinted on his heart: "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the *hardening of their hearts*. Having lost *all sensitivity*, they have given

themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Ephesians 4:18-19). God therefore made a deeper, more painful furrow by revealing his law in clear and frightening detail to and through Moses. How deep God plowed in these human hearts as he spoke his law on Mt. Sinai! The thunder, lightening, trumpets, and smoke from the mountain so terrified the Israelites that they pleaded, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" (Exodus 20:19).

The preaching of God's holy law continues to plow painfully and deeply into all of mankind's heart today, wherever and whenever it is preached. Because of the preaching of God's law, mankind cannot escape what God demands: "You know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law" (Romans 2:18). This instruction in God's revealed law plows through indifference and ignorance. Jeremiah adds more images to the work of the law in mankind's heart by describing God's law as a burning fire and a hammer that breaks a man's heart into pieces (23:29). The writer to the Hebrews shows us how deeply the plow of God's law cuts into mankind: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (4:12-13).

The soil that our Triune God wants to plow is every human heart for every human has sinned: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10-12, 23). All of mankind has sinned and will sin because all mankind is born with a sinful heart that they have received from their parents at the moment of conception: "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5).

This inherited sin or original sin means that all mankind is born spiritually dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) and therefore completely unable to arrive at, understand or even desire to know God's spiritual truths and ways: "The mind of sinful man is death. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:6-7).

The final furrow that God's razor sharp law cuts in the depraved human heart is this: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Here is the real horror and pain that the human heart experiences when it comes into contact with the holy, righteous law of God! God harrows the soil in mankind's heart by insisting on the fact that all mankind deserves to be eternally cursed, because "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Galatians 3:10).

3. World-Wide Mission: The Work of the Triune God as Sower

God as Plowman shows us a holy and righteous God, who hates sin and will therefore condemn the sinner to eternal death. This is the horrible price for disobedience to God's law. God as Sower shows us a merciful God who himself undertook the rescue of the sinner from death through his one and only Son: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

God, like the farmer, does not just plow. The purpose of plowing is to prepare the soil for the sowing. The law would plow every human heart so that every human heart might recognize its need for a Savior. Isaiah compares preaching the gospel to sowing seed. The gospel is sown in the field of a plowed heart and a leveled soul:

When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way (28:25-26).

Isaiah's picture is of a farmer carefully planting just the right seed in just the right soil. The hard working farmer who knows his seed and soil will enjoy with God's blessing a rich harvest. This gives us a beautiful, though admittedly rural, outline to follow as we trace God's determination to plant the seed of his gospel in the soil of every human heart. First we'll see that God is a hard working Plowman and Sower who immediately began to work in the human field that he created and loved. Secondly, we'll note that God sent his own Son, the Master Sower, to proclaim and to accomplish the gospel for all of mankind.

God is a hard working Plowman and Sower, for he immediately made all of mankind his field

God as the Creator of man is and remains the Lord of all mankind. As such He is always near to His creatures and in constant relationship to them, whether by way of judgment or salvation (Peters 1968, 238).

We see early in Scripture and throughout Scripture that Dr. Peter's observation is accurate. All of mankind, though created in the image of God, had already fallen into sin and away from God before the end of the third chapter of Genesis. God in Genesis 3:9 begins his work as Plowman when he asks Adam, "Where are you?" He breaks up the soil of Eve's heart when he asks her, "What is this you have done?" (3:13). God harrows most horribly when he says, "Dust you are and to dust you will return" (3:19).

God plowed all of mankind's heart with his law in order to prepare the hearts of all of mankind for the sowing of the gospel. God's first universal sowing of his gospel is recorded in these words, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Isaiah had said that God's plowing and sowing in mankind's heart would result in mankind being "instructed" in the right way (28:26). In this first universal preaching of the gospel, God instructed Eve to trust in the Lord and not in Satan. God taught Eve that Satan did not in fact have her best interests in mind in spite of Satan's allegation to the contrary. In truth, Satan was mankind's greatest enemy, a "roaring lion" seeking to devour every immortal soul (1 Peter 5:8).

God's gospel would provide this same important instruction to all of Eve's offspring. Here, Eve's offspring are the future generations of true believers who have been taught by God's gospel that Satan and his offspring, that is the unbelievers within Satan's congregation of the dead, are arranged in full battle armor to wage war against God and his people. God establishes and teaches his way--the right way--by the gospel. Therefore, believers can recognize Satan and his agenda as deadly and abhorrent.

One of Eve's Seed, however, would provide all of mankind rescue from death and from the return to dust. This one Seed is the promised Savior who would rescue mankind by crushing Satan's head by suffering and dying on the cross. Jesus' suffering all of mankind's hell is foretold and promised with, "You, Satan, will strike his (Jesus') heel." Eagerly, powerfully, and perfectly God carries out his work of plowing and sowing in all of mankind. Adam demonstrated that the gospel God planted in his heart took root by naming his wife Eve, "because she would become the mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20). Adam proved his faith by giving his wife a name that speaks of her as the mother, not only of the human race but also mother of the Seed who would save the human race. Adam believed that his wife was the mother of all by virtue of her place in world-wide reproductive history and the mother of all those who would enjoy rebirth and renewal through the faith that saved the world's first parents!

Eve demonstrates her faith in God's gospel promises in chapter four of Genesis by the name she gave her first son: "With the help of the Lord I have *brought forth* (the Hebrew for this phrase sounds like Cain), a man" (verse 1). Eve believed that this man or a descendant of this man would be the Seed who would crush Satan's head and rescue all of mankind.

Before chapter twelve of Genesis, Scripture describes two more periods in world history in which mankind chose Satan over the Savior. God plowed all of mankind *under* except for Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives with the world-wide flood (Genesis 7:21). Before this horrible event, God was doing the work of plowing and sowing through his servant, Noah. Noah "walked with God" (6:9). This means that Noah was a believer in the promised Seed and that he nurtured that faith with ongoing attention to the gospel. As God's witness, Noah, the "preacher of righteousness" also proclaimed that gospel to the wicked world of mankind (2 Peter 2:5). Noah preached law and gospel but it was God who was doing the plowing and the sowing. The field was still the whole world and all of mankind. All of mankind who rejected the gospel seed was plowed under by the law's judgment of water. God was working hard. His intent and desire was

to save all of mankind. His gospel seed was powerful and perfect. Mankind's heart, however, was hard as stone.

Again mankind as a whole hardened their hearts against God in the time of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). God's plow cut deep when he confused the language of all mankind and scattered humanity to form the nations of all mankind. In the next chapter, we meet Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. From this point on, the focus of the Old Testament Scriptures is on this one particular nation. God had not given up on the other nations. The focus on the Israelites, rather, is to show that God would provide the Seed that would save all mankind through this one particular chosen nation among mankind.

God called Abraham out of his homeland to a new land to become the father of a great nation and to become a blessing to every other nation: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). Abraham would provide this blessing by providing the human ancestry for Jesus Christ, the Seed who would save all the world. But this Seed was of the woman. God the Father would provide the conception within that woman so that the child she bore was of God and of the woman, but the Savior of all the world.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God working hard to plow the soil of every human heart and to sow gospel seed among all peoples in the world. To this end, God raised up Israel not only to provide the human ancestry of the world's Savior, but also to participate in his sowing of the gospel. He raised up Israel to be a witness to the nations. God states this as fact in Isaiah 43:10, "You are my witnesses," and again in Isaiah 44:8, "You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?" God illustrates this fact by leading Joseph to Egypt, by sending Jonah to Nineveh, by giving Daniel to Babylon, by drawing the nations to Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:41-43) and the queen of Sheba to Solomon's capital city, by giving Naaman a captive Jewish servant girl, by giving Isaiah many visions of foreign nations gathering around the banner of the Messiah, by giving worshippers in Jerusalem's temple a psalm that is a prayer for world-wide conversion through Israel: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations" (67:1-2). God's plot of land in which he wants to plow and plant was always and remains today the hearts of all mankind.

God sent his own Son, the Master Sower, to proclaim and to accomplish the gospel for all of mankind

All of the Old Testament believers to whom we have referred had faith in a Savior for all nations in the world that had not yet come to the world. They placed their faith in an atoning sacrifice that was yet to happen. They looked for this Savior on earth and prayed daily for the coming of this Savior to earth. But they saw him, this Seed of Eve who would save all the world, only through the eyes of faith. Those human eyes that first beheld Eve's Seed, the ultimate Sower, the fulfillment of the gospel promises, belonged to a later generation.

How would this later generation of God's people recognize the universal Savior? Jesus himself provided the answer to this question in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. John the Baptist had been imprisoned. He had received reports that Jesus appeared to be more intent on showing mercy than on a fire and brimstone ministry of sifting out chaff. Perhaps impatient or in doubt, John the Baptist sent messengers to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:19). Note Jesus' answer, a paraphrase of portions of chapters 35 and 61 of Isaiah:

Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard; The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me (Luke 7:22-23).

Jesus identified himself as the promised Messiah by asserting that what he was doing was in perfect accord with what the Old Testament prophecies said the promised Messiah would do. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be the divine Sower of the gospel seed by preaching the good news! The miracles of mercy Jesus performed affirmed his deity, and therefore his authority to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to mankind through the gospel he proclaimed.

We will examine briefly some of these Old Testament prophecies that showed God's people how to identify the world's Savior when he appeared. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, spoke through Isaiah's pen some 750 years before God's Son took on human flesh through the virgin birth: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (61:1). The Old Testament believers were told to look for a preacher, that is, a gospel-seed-sowing Messiah.

In the context of this same chapter of Isaiah, the Old Testament believers were further told that this sower Messiah had made the whole world and all of mankind the field for his sowing: "For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before *all nations* (verse 11).

Jews were told that the Savior's gospel preaching would take root in the hearts of non-Jews. Jesus' gospel would grow in the hearts of the gentiles. This prophesied growth would produce another result prophesied in this chapter, that alien people from all nations would be allowed to serve as priests in the Messiah's kingdom: "Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God" (verses 5-6). We know for a fact that Jesus is indeed the Preacher/Sower promised in this chapter to all nations, for Jesus read this portion of Isaiah's prophecy in a Jewish synagogue, rolled up the scroll and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Jesus' mission was to preach, to sow the powerful seed of his gospel. Jesus told his Jewish followers this: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). Jesus told also the gentile, Pontius Pilate, that this was his mission: "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). Jesus stated that his soil, his

target was the whole world: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). This fire is the preaching of the gospel that will result in a separation of the chaff from the wheat. Ylvisaker's comment on this verse is helpful:

The preaching of the Word is, as we know, a critical and separating force. When the testimony concerning Christ is heard, humanity is set in the greatest commotion, and it is this Jesus has in mind (Ylvisaker 1932, 475).

Jesus' focus during his earthly ministry was sowing his gospel seed in the hearts of his countrymen. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," Jesus said to the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:24). Jesus did grant, however, this woman's request. In spite of this focus in his earthly ministry, Jesus clearly stated his target group was the whole world: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) and "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16) and "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world" (John 17:6).

We also find Jesus sowing the seed of his gospel in the Samaritan woman's heart and not only in her heart but in the hearts of all her Samaritan countrymen that came out to hear the Messiah at her bidding (John 4:4-42). Clearly Jesus told these Samaritans that his goal was to preach to all the world, for they remarked, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (John 4:43). Was it an accident that Jesus preached to these who were not the lost sheep of Israel? To be sure not, for this account of Jesus' sowing among non-Jews begins with the amazing statement, "Now he (Jesus) *had* to go through Samaria" (John 4:4). Jesus had to go through Samaria because there were non-Jews in urgent need of receiving refreshment from the water of the gospel that becomes in mankind "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

Why did Jesus preach the good news? Jesus' preaching just as our preaching about Jesus results in the salvation of the lost. Jesus sowed gospel seed in the hearts of mankind in order to save mankind. After dinner with Zacchaeus, the tax collector, Jesus announced, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9-10). Zacchaeus became a son of Abraham, not by virtue of ethnic ancestry but by virtue of his being granted the same faith in the Messiah that Abraham was granted. Paul reveals who the true sons of Abraham are in Romans: "And he [Abraham] is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (4:12).

Jew or gentile, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, male or female, anyone who believes in Jesus is a true son or daughter of Abraham. Ancestral physical ties to Abraham's line do not evoke preferential affection from Jesus: "If you [unbelieving Jews] were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did" (John 8:39). It is the true and spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham from every tribe, nation and tongue who will enjoy salvation as a result of the gospel seed that Jesus planted in the soil of their hearts.

Jesus proved himself to be the Messiah/Sower promised in the Old Testament Scriptures by his preaching. He further proved himself to be the Messiah/Sower of all mankind by his self-sacrifice for all the world. The Old Testament believers were told to look for the Messiah and that they could identify the Messiah who would be encircled by a band of evil men: "They have pierced my hands and my feet. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" (Psalm 22:16,18).

Jesus' mission was to accomplish a universal rescue from death, hell and the grave. Jesus accomplished this universal rescue by enduring the punishment of every human in the world. The Old Testament believers were given a brutally clear picture of the Messiah who would both preach the gospel and accomplish the salvation held out to all the world in that gospel by means of his self-sacrifice. Isaiah, chapter fifty-three, reads like a newspaper account of the crucifixion even though it was written about 750 years before the event. By studying this prophecy, God's future generation, that generation to whom the Christ would be revealed in the flesh, would know how to identify the Christ:

- The divine Sower and Fulfiller of the gospel would grow up like a "tender shoot" and possess "no beauty or majesty to attract us to him" (verse 2). In fact, he would be "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering" (verse 3). That is to say, the generation in which the Messiah would be revealed could recognize the divine Messiah by his simple, unadorned humanity and humility.
- This generation could recognize the Savior by the way he "took up our infirmities" in order to then be "stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted" as a result of our infirmities (verse 4).
- This generation could recognize the Messiah by this, that, "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities" (verse 5). They were to watch for him upon whom the Lord laid "the iniquity of us all" (verse 6).
- This generation could indeed recognize the Author of salvation who in mercy was willing to endure the imputation of the world's guilt and punishment and yet, "did not open his mouth" (verse 7).
- This generation could recognize God's Servant and the gospel's Sower who "was assigned a grave with the wicked [the two thieves], and with the rich [Joseph of Arimathea's tomb] in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (verse 9).
- How could this generation to which God chose to reveal his Son not recognize him, because, "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life" (verse 11). This is to say that the Savior would die but would rise again from death. This sign could not be ignored or missed!

Faith in this righteous Savior would "justify many" (verse 11). Because this Sower and Fulfiller of the gospel "bore the sin of many" the many would enjoy "intercession" (verse 12). Who are the many whom the Messiah would justify and on whose behalf he would provide intercession? The many is the whole wide world of all mankind! The many is the all nations of all mankind. This fact is borne out in the invitation that Isaiah extends on behalf of this world-wide Savior: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters" (55:1). "Give ear and come to me [all you who are thirsty]; hear me, that your soul may live" (55:3). The Messiah would be "a witness to the [non-Jewish] peoples" (55:4) and [gentile] nations that did not know him would

hasten to him (55:5). Just as the Savior's intent was to preach to all nations, so also he would sacrifice himself for the justification of all nations in order to give them "mercy" and "pardon" from the Lord (55:7).

Isaiah promised that God would send his Servant who would preach and accomplish the gospel and indicated by prophecy how the Servant would do this. It is left to the New Testament Apostles to explain by the Spirit's guidance the significance and full meaning of all the Old Testament prophecies regarding the person and mission of Jesus Christ, "the mystery hidden for long ages past but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that *all nations* might believe and obey him" (Romans 16:25-26).

The person and mission of Christ is revealed in concrete terms provided by New Testament preachers--including especially Christ himself. Regarding the person of Christ, Christ himself tells the Samaritan woman who longed for the Messiah to come and explain all things, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:26). Proclaiming himself to be the divine Sower promised in our passage from Isaiah 28:25, Jesus declares, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world" (Matthew 13:37-38). Paul says regarding Christ, "Who according to flesh was born a descendant of David, but according to spirit--a spirit of holiness--was declared by His resurrection from the dead to be the powerful Son of God" (Romans 1:3-4, GWN). The New Testament declares Jesus to be true God and true man, the "one mediator between God and man" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Jesus accomplished mediation between God and man by perfectly obeying all of the law of God in mankind's stead because mankind could not possibly do this. Jesus insisted on being baptized by John, not because Jesus needed the washing away of sins but rather in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (John 3:15). Jesus explained that his mission was to fulfill all righteousness perfectly and completely, dotting every "i" and crossing every "t":

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18).

Christ was placed under the law in the same way all of mankind was so that he could fulfill that law for us, in our place: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). In another place, Paul describes Jesus' mission to obey perfectly all of God's law for all of mankind in this way: "The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18) and, "Through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

Jesus obeyed all of the law for all of mankind. Mankind could not yet escape the condemning furrows of God's law plow, however, until the curse for mankind's disobedience was removed. To remove from all of mankind the curse of disobedience was also the mission of Jesus Christ. This Jesus accomplished by suffering the horrible consequences of the law, by enduring the curse of the law for all mankind on Calvary's

cross. Jesus took the world's guilt upon himself and on that cross suffered mankind's punishment thereby paying the ransom price demanded by God to free mankind from death. This is, Jesus himself states, why he came to earth: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Apostle Paul wrote, "Because we are convinced that one died for all" (2 Corinthians 5:14), and God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32) and "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

What is most remarkable is that Jesus suffered all of mankind's hell and gave up his life that all mankind might have life freely, of his own volition, out of love for all mankind! Jesus assures us, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:18). Paul comments on this remarkable mercy and summarizes the mission of the one who showed the world such mercy in this way: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The result of God taking on human flesh to come to earth to live a perfect life and to suffer a world's punishment was nothing less than the complete redemption, justification, forgiveness, reconciliation and atonement of every sinner in all the world to God:

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

Jesus accomplished the gospel by obeying the law for all of mankind and by going to the cross to endure the curse for the sin of all mankind. Having accomplished this, his mission, Jesus then rose again from the dead. The purpose of Jesus' resurrection, the purpose of every aspect of Jesus' exaltation was again for the sake and benefit of the whole world. In rising from the dead, Jesus proved that he was God: "Who according to flesh was born a descendant of David, but according to spirit--a spirit of holiness--was declared by His resurrection from the dead to be the powerful Son of God" (Romans 1:3-4, GWN). In rising from the dead, Jesus proved that he had accomplished mankind's redemption from the law's curse: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25). In his rising from the dead, Jesus proved that all those who trusted in him would rise also: "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to God's right hand to function as supreme ruler of all the universe, controlling all things in the universe to guarantee the continued sowing of the gospel throughout the world, the harvest of all the elect from the world and the complete victory of his holy church over the world.

4. World-Wide Mission: The Work of the Triune God as Thresher

God as Plowman shows us a holy and righteous God, who hates sin and will therefore condemn the sinner to eternal death, the horrible price for disobedience to God's law. God as Sower shows us a merciful God who himself undertook the rescue of the sinner from death through his one and only Son: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). God as Thresher, as the one who separates grain from chaff, shows us a faithful, merciful God who harvests sinners and brings them safely into the storehouse of heaven: "As rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

God, like the farmer, does not just plow. Nor is the farmer's work complete after sowing seed in the plowed fields. God, like the farmer, does not leave the crops he sowed in the field when they are ripe. God nurtures the tender plant of faith with the same gospel that planted the seed of faith and looks forward to harvesting the believer ultimately into his eternal glory in heaven. God will thresh or separate the believers from the unbelievers upon their death or Jesus' return, whichever comes first for any individual on this earth. When God brings his believers into his heavenly storehouse, then shall the saying be true, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:17). God as Thresher is a symbol drawn from our passage in Isaiah:

Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cummin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom (Isaiah 28:27-29).

The magnificently wonderful and wise God takes it upon himself to plow with the law, sow with the gospel, and finally to separate ever so carefully the grain from the chaff. God doesn't thresh forever but, at the proper time, brings the grain of believers into his heavenly glory and disposes of the chaff of unbelievers into the dark and eternally burning inferno of hell. God does the separating. All this comes from the Lord Almighty. He alone may and can do this, for the Lord alone is wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.

All three persons of the Trinity function in their unity as Plowman, though Scripture characterizes the Father as the primary Plowman. All three persons of the Trinity function in their unity as Sower, though Scripture characterizes the Son as primary Sower. All three persons of the Trinity function in their unity as Thresher, though Scripture characterizes the Spirit as primary Thresher. By virtue of the Spirit's

activity in the Old Testament church, he preserved a remnant in Israel from the rebellious chaff so that the Savior's human ancestry could be preserved.

As a result of this activity of the Spirit, God kept his promise to Eve, "He [Eve's Seed] will crush your [Satan's] head" (Genesis 3:15) and to Abraham, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3), and to King David, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Even in Israel's darkest, most disobedient days when no righteous king or priest prevailed, the Spirit was actively supporting and separating this remnant from the idolatrous masses. To Elijah, who feared that he alone had survived the contamination of Ahab and Jezebel in Israel, God promised, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18).

God's chosen nation was clearly the first nation to experience the Spirit's work of "calling, gathering, enlightening, sanctifying, keeping and forgiving" as Luther describes it in his explanation of the third article of the Apostle's Creed. The gentile nations, however, would also enjoy being among those whom the Spirit would thresh out to eternal salvation. The prophets prophesied that this would happen: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples" (Isaiah 49:22) and "I will pour out my Spirit on all people" Joel 2:28). Daniel saw that this would happen: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven...He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him" (7:13-14). Jesus himself assured his disciples that all of mankind would experience the threshing activity of the Spirit: "I will send him [the Spirit] to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt" (John 16:7-8).

Finally, it happened! "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11) all heard the gospel preached to them in their native tongues after they had run to see what all the commotion was in the room where Jesus' disciples were hiding. In that room, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on each of them in tongues of fire, filling them with a new boldness and enabling them to speak in new languages (Acts 2:1-4).

Peter wasn't always Jesus' best student, but Peter knew that this event was the fulfillment of all of God's promises to pour out his Spirit upon all men. Peter said so (Acts 2:16). He then acted according to what he believed by doing some of his own plowing with the law and sowing with the gospel. The Spirit proved that Peter's assessment of this Pentecost was correct by threshing out for salvation a wonderful harvest of human grains: "Those who accepted his [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their [the disciples'] number that day" (Acts 2:41).

In this one event, we see the Spirit's role as Thresher in God's mission to save the whole world:

- The Spirit unites "Jews and Gentiles in the fellowship of the Spirit, and restoring the unity of mankind, lost by an act of divine judgment at Babel, by means of one language, 'the language of Canaan' (Isaiah 19:18), the Gospel language of the Kingdom of God" (Peters, p. 251).
- The Spirit, sent by Jesus and the Father, brought "glory" (John 16:14) to Jesus.

- The Spirit shows that he is "the missionary of the Gospel" (Peters, p. 251).
- The Spirit "exerts" his power (Peters, p. 251) in the law by convicting hearers of their sin and then exerts his power in the gospel by bringing hearers to faith in Jesus.
- The Spirit showed that his task is not only "testifying to Jesus as the exalted Saviour" (Peters, p. 252) but also to teach Peter to preach "not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Corinthians 2:13).
- It is the Spirit, finally, that sent the first generation of Jesus' church to preach the gospel to all nations (Acts 13:4) and who also sends every subsequent generation of the church to preach this gospel to all nations "until the end of time" (Matthew 28:20, GWN).

When we speak of the salvation of all the world, the redemption of every sinner, the justification of ungodly mankind, we must confess with the prophet Isaiah, "All this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom" (28:29). To God alone be the glory. In his mercy, however, God condescends to use his church, all those who trust in his name, to participate in his world-wide mission activity.

How does the church participate in God's world-wide mission? Paul answers this question for us in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In these verses, the Apostle Paul celebrates the gospel that Jesus Christ accomplished for the world, without any help from the world, in order to justify the world. All on his own but for the world's benefit, Jesus Christ became sin for the world on the cross and then endured all of the world's punishment for that sin. The gospel declares that all the world, every single wicked sinner ever born of a woman, and that includes every person born of a woman except Christ, for all have sinned, has been freely and fully justified before God through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

This is the heart and soul of the gospel. This is the doctrine we call objective justification, that every single sinner born on earth has been freely and fully justified before God by Christ whether that sinner believes it or knows it or values it or not! This is what God has done to prove his missionary intent and zeal for the world. Having saved all the world by sending the one and only Son to accomplish the gospel, God now calls

his church to tell the world. Christians participate in God's world-wide mission to save mankind from sin by simply proclaiming this message to the world: "God reconciled the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sin against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). For how can the world know that it has been reconciled to God and how can any individual sinner know that he no longer has any of his sins counted against him because of Christ, if that world and that individual sinner is not told! The church participates in God's world-wide mission to save the world by telling the world that God has already saved it in Christ.

This is the ministry that God gave to his church. God made the church his ambassadors. Jesus Christ commissioned the church to, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus commanded the church to, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Jesus even provided a program to implement this command when he said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Thus mission outreach is a natural corollary which God commanded in connection with objective justification because without it his reconciliation of the world to himself would have remained an unused gift and thus of no real benefit to sinners. And mission outreach is a natural corollary for all who by faith learn what a wonderful, eternal treasure it is which God has prepared not only for us but for all men (Kuske 1980, 20).

Why will God's church be his ambassadors, carrying out Christ's Great Commission and thereby participating in God's world-wide mission activity? Paul provides three reasons in our passage from 2 Corinthians:

- "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all" (verse 14). Moved by the love that Jesus has for us, a love that we can be absolutely sure is directed to each of us individually because this love was directed to the world as a whole, we want to be Jesus' ambassadors. It is the unconditional certainty of our own salvation that makes us willing ambassadors to the world to tell them about the certainty of their salvation!
- "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view" (verse 16). The unbelieving world regards, judges, and marginalizes individuals because of race, gender, age, social status, weakness, mental or physical handicap, and on and on. The world values only those individuals that can contribute to the advancement of the world's satanic agenda of gaining power, wealth, and influence. The church regards, judges or evaluates no person on this basis. Rather, the church sees every individual as one whom the Lord Jesus loved so much, that he went to the cross to become sin for that individual so that individual might receive the righteousness of God! The church looks at people in the same manner that Jesus looks at people. We see a precious and immortal soul that has already been reconciled to God in Christ.
- "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (verse 17). Finally, the church is motivated to go ahead and be an ambassador for Christ because every member of God's church has been changed inside, so that "those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (verse 15).

My life I give into my Savior's service; it is his will alone that I find pleasure in doing. And what do I hear him bidding me do? "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," he says. He speaks and I march to his word. No sacrifice is too great, no hurdle too difficult, no human being too despicable to turn me aside from doing his will (Kuske 1980, 22).

We who have been convicted and converted by the Spirit's power through baptism or through the testimony of one of Christ's ambassadors are now ourselves ambassadors. We have been given a message to proclaim. It is not our message. It's is the message of the universal, objective justification of every sinner through the life and sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. We dare not change this message. We are ambassadors, not editors. Nor are we mere reporters of a message, but rather enthused and determined adherents of this message. When we share it with the world, we do it with the enthusiasm that Paul manifested: "We *implore* you" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

This [imploing] is not the action of one who does not care whether his message gets across or not. This is not just a peremptory fulfillment of duty, but this is the act of one who is vitally concerned about the message which he is conveying as an ambassador. He acts as an ambassador who wants the blessing which he is bringing from his Lord to be received by all who hear. This kind of presentation which begs and implores the hearer to listen is the direct result of the effect which this message first had on the ambassador's own heart. He knows it is the greatest treasure which men can ever receive, and he knows his Lord has provided it free of cost for all men. He knows that without this blessing man is doomed to an eternity of frightful pain and suffering, and he knows that all who accept it by faith are assured of an eternity of bliss and joy which go beyond man's understanding. An ambassador who carries such a message will be so wrapped up in what he has to say that he will not let the words fall lightly from his lips but will speak every word from the heart (Kuske 1980, 24).

The efficacy of our preaching is not our passion. The Holy Spirit that is testifying to Christ in the gospel that we preach is the efficacy of our preaching. Yet, as has been stated so well by others, the world will recognize that we have been transformed by this gospel which we preach because of our passion for it and because of our willingness to take it everywhere and anywhere in the world, regardless of the cost to us.

To speak of a "missionary church" is really a tautology. The church as such is a mission and would lose its identity if it did not carry on mission work (Peters 1968, 235).

How very true! At the same time, however, we recognize the truth in this statement as well:

Only as we grow more and more conscious of mission as God's work, do we gain the necessary missionary impulse, of which we are always much in need (Peters 1968, 235).

Clearly, inarguably, Scripture shows us a God who earnestly seeks to save the entire universe. God places all mankind under the judgment of the law but God also wants all mankind to hear the gospel and to believe his gospel so that all might be saved. In today's world, most of mankind lives in or is moving toward the cities of the world. This has been and continues to be the trend. Clearly, inarguably, Scripture shows us a God that wants his Christians to carry out the Great Commission in cities. Many of the "all nations" now live in our North American cities. More and more nations continue to move into our cities. Let us Christians in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod now consider to what degree we have applied this universal missiology to our North American cities. To what degree have we applied *ourselves* to our continent's cities? Would it not be in the best interest of the multitudes who live in our continent's cities to admit that, as a church body, we ought aggressively to apply Scripture's universal missiology and ourselves to North American cities?

If the reader grants that we ought aggressively to apply Scripture's world-wide missiology to cities, especially to North American cities, then the reader must also grant that we have to address some challenges that have, up to this point, prevented us from aggressively applying God's world-wide missionary concern and ourselves to these cities. Let us, therefore, identify some of these challenges and discuss ways of meeting these challenges so that we might truly, immediately and aggressively set our sights on the city. When we focus in carefully on cities, seeing God's love for the people of cities, then Prof. Kuske's comment cited above will challenge us to endure anything to be Christ's ambassadors in cities.

5. The Challenges Facing Christ's Urban Ambassadors

Challenge #1: *We must openly acknowledge God's commitment to the city.*

A couple of summers back, my fishing partner and I were hiking through a beautiful stand of cedar trees on our way to a remote Wisconsin stream. The warm sun and gentle breeze provided an aroma as pleasant as the scenery. "Now this is God's country," my buddy exclaimed. For some reason, I felt the need to evaluate and, much to my friend's dismay, comment on his statement. To be sure, God loves the deep woods that he lovingly created for our enjoyment. But why is this plot of land especially God's country? For the most part, this countryside is inhabited by deer, wild turkeys, and, lucky for us, lots of trout that cannot distinguish a #12 Adams dry fly pattern from a real mayfly. Jesus didn't shed his blood to redeem wild life. He didn't die to reconcile trees to God. Since Jesus did redeem and reconcile mankind to God, wouldn't it be more appropriate to speak of Milwaukee's inner city, where we both were serving congregations, as "God's country" because the inner city has almost as many precious souls buzzing around as this countryside had mosquitoes? Doesn't God look upon a city full of the first-fruits of his creation with infinitely more tenderness and affection than even the most beautiful picnic site?

Let us be careful not to impose our own preference for the quiet, desolate countryside on the Word of our God! Nowhere does Scripture state a such a preference. Nowhere does Scripture even hint at a prejudicial disposition for people who have the moral character to choose a rural environment over an urban one. God in Scripture has in fact clearly stated his deep concern for city dwellers.

God, for example, supported Abraham's concern for Sodom and Gomorrah and promised, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it" (Genesis 18:32). True, there were not ten righteous people to be found in Sodom and Gomorrah. The city was destroyed. Was this fiery act of judgment not also, however, both an encouragement to Abraham to continue his public worship as a testimony to gentile cities as well as a warning to every inhabitant in the land to turn away from the wickedness that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? God plows with the law in order to prepare the soil of mankind's heart for the sowing of his gospel!

Not all of God's efforts to save a city met with such dismal results. God called--and re-called--an unwilling Jonah to take a message of repentance to the great city of Nineveh. After Jonah finally preached that message, he sat on the side of a hill to mourn the power of God's Word that brought this city to its knees and to God. God's specific question to Jonah implies that all of God's ambassadors ought to share God's concerns: "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city" (4:11). What makes a city great in the eyes of God? Is it not primarily the sheer numbers of citizens who face eternal damnation unless they hear God's invitation to enjoy the gift of salvation and believe it? Isn't the power of God's Word amazing? One

does not need to be a willing urban ambassador in order to be an extremely powerful urban ambassador when he is equipped with the sword of God's law and gospel. There is hope!

What is more, Scripture describes cities as a blessing from God. Psalm 107 offers praise to the God who rescued his people from hunger, thirst, and wandering in the desert wastelands. God demonstrates his mercy by providing these desert wanderers with a "city of habitation" (verses 4, 7, 36) as the solution to their troubles. Both Moses and Joshua told their flock to be thankful for the blessings of the flourishing cities that God gave them that "you did not build" (Joshua 24:13).

We can also see God's concern for cities simply by keeping track of the places Jesus, the Apostles, and Paul traveled in their ministry of plowing with the law, sowing the gospel, and reaping a church of believers by the Spirit. They retreated to the wilderness to refresh themselves but they returned to the cities to proclaim Christ.

God's mission to plow, sow, and thresh is a world-wide mission. It always was a world-wide mission and always shall be a world-wide mission. The city is a part of the whole world. We must consider the city in our mission plans because the city increasingly holds the largest percentage of the world's population. God's commitment to the cities of every era, in every part of the world, inhabited by every nation, tribe, and tongue must be acknowledged in Jesus' command, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The universality of the command requires us to go to the city and preach the good news to the city; also to the inner city.

The greatest comfort and assurance we can give to the individual sinner is the fact that Jesus Christ reconciled the whole world to God, redeeming the whole world with his blood. Since that individual sinner is most certainly part of this redeemed world, then that individual sinner is most certainly redeemed by Christ and washed by his blood. This same logic applies to our discussion of the city and the inner city. God proved his commitment to the whole world and demonstrated his love for the whole world by sending Jesus Christ into the world to save all sinners. God's commitment to the whole most certainly underscores his commitment to any part of the whole, even the city. So also, Jesus Christ commissioned his church and commanded his church to go into the whole world and preach to all creation. This requires us as a church body, when we are setting aside resources and drawing up strategic outreach plans, to consider every part of the world that makes up the whole of the world, including the city; also the inner city.

This is our mission. Jesus commands us and has commissioned us to go into the whole world. Jesus does not command us to do what he himself did not already do. Jesus says to the Father about us, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). We dare not forget who has sent us into the world. It is Jesus Christ the Lord. Jesus is the Lord because he overpowered Satan on the cross to redeem the world and demonstrated that he had redeemed the world by rising again from the dead. Jesus Christ the Lord, who in everything has "supremacy" (Colossians 1:18), now sits at the Father's right hand ruling the universe. Because Jesus is the Lord and because Jesus is our Lord, we will obey him and go into the whole world over which he is Lord. In this age, it appears that the nations of the whole world are only minutes from our doors. Many of our congregations can preach the gospel to the nations by doing neighborhood evangelism as well as by supporting our world mission efforts! Because

Jesus is Lord, we can trust him to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given" (Matthew 28:18) to bless us as we represent him in the city, even the inner city.

How can Jesus expect this of us? May we not with a clear conscience insist that there are some parts of the world, even if it is only minutes away by freeway, that we needn't feel compelled to plow, sow, and thresh in? St. Paul's urgent fervor for world-wide mission and urban mission provides the only possible answer to our question:

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Romans 10:11-15)

Challenge #2: *We need to learn how to do mission work in urban environments.*

Why does the WELS have a limited presence in North American cities in spite of the fact that we have been proclaiming Christ as a church body for over almost 150 years? The writer of our synod's first published history gives us a reasonable answer to this question: "It is a characteristic of the early development of Synod that the congregations at new locations were not gathered by ministers but that the people themselves banded together in order to procure preachers and teachers" (Koehler 1981, 64). Who were these people and where were they banding together? These people were German immigrants who had moved into Wisconsin to carve farms out of the undeveloped frontier. Our church body has deep rural roots. Our early rural heritage is borne out in the fact that one third of our congregations still today are located in what may be called farming communities.

Our church body engaged in an aggressive effort to start new churches from the mid-sixties into the eighties. These new churches were by and large started in growing suburbs. Our synod's Board for Home Missions reports that "easily 90%" of these new churches were started in the suburbs. Why did our church planting emphasis shift to the suburbs? As German immigrants directed growth in rural communities, so our people moving to the suburbs determined our growth in the suburbs. This is a generalization of course. Our Board for Home Missions did start churches in growing suburbs where we did not have core groups of WELS members calling for congregations to serve them. In the early years of our mission expansion, however, we typically started new churches in those suburbs where our people had banded together and had requested services.

We may argue, therefore, that we don't know how to do mission work in the city. An emphasis on urban mission has not been part of our history. We therefore lack experience and knowledge. The disciples, when called upon to carry out Jesus' mission to Judea, Samaria and the world, no doubt wondered whether they knew how to do mission work at all. The book of Acts, however, records their efforts and reveals their enthusiasm to learn mission work by doing mission work! They forged ahead in spite of their lack of experience and knowledge. They worked through issues familiar to urban residents today like poverty (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32), prejudiced police forces (Acts 4:1-31, 16:16-40), cultural friction (Acts 10:28-29, 15:19-21), and food distribution injustices (Acts 6:1-7). The Apostles made their way through an intimidating unknown because they had been sent into the world to make disciples.

In prayer to his heavenly Father, Jesus said, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). The Apostles went into the world willingly, though probably lacking many skills related to organizing churches, because their Lord had sent them. Jesus, the Savior who walked with them, taught them, obeyed the law for them, suffered hell for them, died for them, and rose again to prove his redemption of them had sent them into the world. What the Apostles lacked in knowledge and experience and organizational skills, they made up for in gratitude and determination. Their Savior sent them. They went. When their mission work became dangerous or

extremely difficult, Jesus was there to assist, guide and encourage them. Jesus promised that he would be there for them at the same time he sent them: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus sent his Apostles into the world. His Apostles, therefore, went into the cities and rural populations of the world. They evangelized their fellow Jews. They crossed mountain passes and seas to evangelize gentiles whose culture they didn't begin to understand. What they lacked in experience and knowledge, they made up for in gratitude to their Savior and determination to carry out the mission of their Savior.

What was their mission? Just as Jesus had come to plow with the law and to sow the gospel and to thresh out a faithful church by the Spirit, so also the Apostles went out to plow, to sow, and to thresh by the Spirit. The Apostles went out to seek out the lost, to announce the near kingdom of God, to proclaim reconciliation with the Father through the Christ of God. This is what the Father had sent Jesus to do. This is what Jesus sent out his Apostles to do. Again we point out that what the Apostles lacked in knowledge and experience, they made up for in gratitude and determination.

Jesus did not commission only one generation of disciples to go into the world. Jesus commissioned every generation of disciples to go into the world. He sends us now as the Father sent Jesus. Our target is still the world. Our task is still to plow with the law and to sow the gospel and to thresh out a church by the Spirit for Jesus. Because our concept of a world-wide mission is so narrow, we might ask, "Must we go into the *whole* world?" Because we are timid, we might ask, "Must we cross the dangerous urban passes between mountains of towering building and sail through uncharted seas of urban blight and poverty?" Because we are lazy, we might ask, "Must we undertake this urban ministry even though we don't know how to do it and sure don't feel comfortable doing it?" The answer to all these very human questions is one divine commission: "Go!" We will go because it is our Savior who sends us. The Savior who lived for us and died for us and rose again to prove that we have been reconciled to God does indeed send us into all the world. So we will go into all the world. What we lack now in knowledge and experience, we will make up for in gratitude and determination.

What we really must know we already know! We know how to plow with God's law. We know how to sow the gospel of free forgiveness through Christ. We know that the Spirit will thresh out a church by the power of the gospel, the only power unto salvation for all who believe! What we don't know, we can quickly learn.

What we do need to learn is how to study the culture of those whose culture is so different from ours. We need to learn how to communicate across cultures so that we can plow precisely with the law. We need to learn to communicate across cultures so that when we sow the gospel, we can be sure, as far as is possible with us, that our preaching is being understood in the way God intends it to be understood. We can be confident that the Spirit will bless our preaching of law and gospel with a threshing out of believers.

We need to learn how to rely on these new converts from different cultures to guide us in our efforts to establish congregations in their midst. There is much we can learn from books on different cultures and much we can learn from books on cross-cultural communication. These books, however, cannot provide what we really need to learn that would help us raise up self-sufficient congregations that fit in an urban area that we have not lived in and among people groups we were not raised with. We need to learn how to learn from those who alone can teach us how to serve in these areas.

In a council meeting with the leaders of Garden Homes, I expressed frustration with the fact that we were losing many adult converts to the streets. I stressed that I did not know what more we could do and that I didn't understand exactly what the problem was. I indicated that I needed help and guidance, let alone support, from the black men whom God raised up to lead Garden Homes. After this meeting, one of our black councilmen thanked me for admitting that I didn't know everything, but in fact needed him to teach me and to work with me so that our church could make it in our urban environment. I don't like to admit my limitations any more than most preachers. I have learned, however, that asking my black leaders for instruction not only gets the job done, it also gains their appreciation and respect. We must learn how to learn from those who alone can teach us.

I am not suggesting that the challenge before us is merely a challenge to study cultural anthropology and cross-cultural communication theory. Really, the challenge before us is to apply our great Reformation heritage and our Lutheran body of doctrine to our commitment to reach North American cities for Christ and to establish congregations in these cities. In order to do this, to learn how to do this, we need to recommit ourselves to what we have already committed to, namely:

- Preaching sin and grace. A primary emphasis at our seminary has always been to train the students to be good preachers. What makes preaching good? Good preaching is that which is true according to Scripture and that which is applied properly to the needs, hurts, sins, and questions of the hearers! Just as our young seminarians attend classes on homiletics so that they can learn to preach to their own, so also, urban and cross-cultural missionaries need training in cultural anthropology and communication theory so they can learn how to bring the truths of the gospel to people from different cultures. Some missionaries might do well to get formal training in a classroom situation. Most, however, could get this training through personal reading along with a mentoring program with a missionary who has experience and background in cross-cultural work.
- The doctrine of the universal priesthood. The task of the pastors and teachers that Jesus sends out is "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12). As Lutherans of the Reformation heritage, we do not intend to make foreigners objects of our ministry but partners in Jesus' ministry, which is to reach the lost and to nurture believers. As we learn to be partners with those who have lived their lives in an urban context and who have been raised in a different culture, we will only continue to be true to our confessional Lutheran heritage.
- "Of Ecclesiastical Usages," Article XV (paragraph 1) of the Augsburg Confession, states that traditions that are "profitable unto tranquillity and good order" ought to be observed. On the other hand, any traditions that are "opposed to the Gospel" must be rejected. Paul taught this truth to Peter when Peter forgot the vision God had given him in Acts 10. Peter succumbed to the pressures of the Judaizers and, though he lived and ate like a gentile, he forced gentiles to eat and live like Jews (Galatians 2:11-21). Because our traditions are rooted in our culture, we must be willing to be flexible about which of our traditions regarding worship styles, organizing congregations, and fellowship gatherings we will impose upon those from another culture. Rather, we must remember the spirit and intent of St. Paul: "I have become

all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). Again, the urban missionary's best resources for guidance in these Christian freedom issues are the people--his partners--in the area and from the ethnic groups he is serving.

Challenge #3: *We need to overcome widely held stereotypes about the city.*

A fellow WELS Christian works in a shop in my neighborhood where I do regular business. Years ago, he used to live in and attend church within blocks of this store. Now he lives and worships in a distant northern suburb but still works on this tough, rundown street on Milwaukee's north side. Invariably, when I come in and business is slow, this gentleman wants to know whether I have had any calls to serve another congregation. He can't understand why "the synod has held me back" in the inner city congregation that I have been serving for over a decade.

When basketball teams and their fans from outlying areas come to our inner city gym for a game, I can see their fear of our neighborhood on their faces. I have seen moms and dads herd their children in close formation from their cars to our gym and back again. The parents' heads turn left and right and left and right watching for any possible threats as they hurry to their cars. On at least one occasion, a visiting team rented a bus to bring their team and fans to our gym in an effort to protect cars and human life from attack.

The fear people who do not live in the city exhibit toward people who do live in the city is real and in many cases very intense. I feel sympathy both for the people who have this fear as well as for the people who are the unintentional and undeserving objects of this fear. I am in this last category referring to the Christians in our congregation and to the neighbors who live around our congregation. A friend of mine who lives in a quiet little town in the cornfields between Milwaukee and Madison illustrated the harm done to the many good people who are members of our church and live around our church when he said, "I would love to come and visit your church but I would be scared to death to get out of my car!"

I am occasionally invited to preach for sister WELS congregations to talk about the multi-cultural nature of the ministry at Garden Homes Lutheran Church. I enjoy these opportunities to tell my WELS brothers and sisters about the joys and excitement of working in the city of Milwaukee. I speak in positive, upbeat terms about what God is doing for us and through us. The vast majority of people in these outlying congregations express sincere appreciation and sensitivity after I've told them about us. Yet, it seems that there is always one curious church member who has to wonder aloud, in words I dare not put into print, how I can serve in an environment of drugs, crime and minority welfare single mothers.

I share these stories to illustrate aspects of widely held stereotypes against people who live in the city. The first thing people need to do--especially Christian people--is to learn to distinguish between stereotypes and media-generated fears toward city fold in general that are both judgmental and groundless. There are valid fears and legitimate concerns. There are some neighborhoods that we would do well to enter only with a trusted and street-wise guide or not at all. In general, however, suburbanites would find many city dwellers, especially inner city dwellers, committed to their neighborhoods, concerned neighbors, law abiding citizens and community minded. Suburbanites would

also learn that the few who do "mess up the 'hood" are afflicting the many who are doing their best to "dress up the 'hood."

Secondly, we in the WELS need to ask ourselves to what degree we tend to equate the suburbs as the Promised Land and the city as the great wilderness? If we tend to think of living in the city proper as wandering through the wilderness, would we not also, as the Israelites, look forward to escaping the hardships of the wilderness so we could begin to enjoy the milk and honey of the Promised Land? Why might we equate living in the city proper as wandering in the wilderness? Isn't it because we think of the suburbs as the just reward for a hard working, successful person and we think of the city as a place for people who just haven't made it yet? Don't answer too quickly now.

I have heard parents describe their plans to build a new house in the suburbs after their last child graduates from the Lutheran area high school in our city. These families have wandered through life in the city. They see the Promised Land on the horizon. They only have to wait a few more years and then they can join the rest of the wilderness escapees in the suburbs.

My brother in the local shop assumes that I want to be successful. He wants me to be successful. But he won't consider me successful and I can't consider myself successful until I receive and then accept a call to serve a congregation in the suburbs. Let me state the painfully obvious. People are free to live where they please. Pastors will serve where they feel called to serve. One context is not better or superior than another context. I am not suggesting that anyone who is living in the suburbs is less spiritual than another Christian who lives in the city. I will suggest that we judge carefully our motivation for preferring the suburbs over the city. This is a theological, spiritual issue and must be approached as such.

How does a Christian define success? Let's improve that question. How should a Christian define success? Clearly, our criteria for success ought not to be materialistic. Our criteria for success ought not to include image, what others think of us based on externals. Our criteria for success ought not to include whatever our broader society suggests as marks of success. A Christian criteria for success looks like this:

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Christians who live in the city and pastors who have been or will be called to serve in the city ought not to care about what other people think and how other people, even fellow Christians, define success. Christians "care very little" about what anyone thinks of them except for what God thinks of them. Do we feel the responsibility, the opportunity, the commission, and the call to work and live and witness in the city? Based on God's universal commitment to reach the whole wide world, including the cities of the

world, some Christians will. Some Christians should! Success, then, is doing what God has given us to do, as far as we can determine, and to proclaim his Word, plow with his law and sow the gospel, right where we are or where we think God is calling us.

It has been my great privilege to know so many dedicated Christian laity and clergy who feel this deep commitment to work and live and worship and witness in the city. They are not bothered by man's criteria for measuring success. They are working to understand and live up to God's criteria for success. Success for them is to be a light in their city neighborhood for Jesus Christ, living and serving as witnesses to all around that Jesus is Savior and Lord. Success also includes Christian fruits of faith that result in a neighborhood being a safer, friendlier place to live. All of us, wherever we live, must be careful about how we define and then communicate criteria for success. Where we live has nothing to do with success. How we live has everything to do with success.

Another aspect of widely held stereotypes about who lives in the city is that regarding crime. People, especially white people who don't live in the city, are afraid of the city because it appears so dangerous. Fellow WELS Christians who come to visit Garden Homes from outlying areas get their images of the city from the television news. This is unfortunate. Yes, one does take precautions for personal safety in the city just as people who live in the suburbs take precautions. Yes, there are some neighborhoods in the city that anybody, including those who live there, would consider threatening. In general, however, you put an anti-theft device on your car, you put steel storm doors on your home and a little extra lighting around the yard, and you be observant as you get in and out of your car. People who live in our neighborhood are very proud of it. We have a number of active block watches and community groups. We enjoy an unusually high percentage of owner occupied homes. Our church grounds and the yards around our church are well kept. Take a few precautions and come and enjoy our neighborhood! This is also a theological, spiritual issue. Having taken all the appropriate precautions, should we not then trust God who says:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day. If you make the Most High your dwelling--even the Lord, who is my refuge--then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways (Psalm 91:1-2, 5, 9-11).

The city has an interesting impact on a Christian. I can certainly say that the city has had an interesting impact on me. Living in the city where there is a possibility for personal injury makes you do more than take appropriate precautions. Living in the city challenges you to take God's promises for real. You have to ask yourself whether you really believe God's promise that he is in the heavens guiding and directing all things for the benefit of his people. You have to ask yourself whether you really believe that God intends to keep his promises to guard and defend us from all evil as we claim that he will do when we confess Luther's meaning to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed.

The city gives Christians the opportunity and the occasion to depend on God daily and completely. The lesson of the wilderness is to learn how to depend on God

completely, for everything. In the wilderness, God "tests our hearts" to see if we will obey him when times are tough and to draw us into "every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). These wilderness tests come to all of God's children, regardless of the neighborhood they live in. When we have learned this lesson of the wilderness, namely, to depend on God and to always give due credit to God, then we are ready to enter the real Promised Land. And I am not referring to the suburbs! With God as our strength and refuge, we can work and live and serve and do ministry in the city or our God is a liar.

Another aspect of urban stereotypes that we need to address is the notion that most folks in the city are poor, on welfare, and a minority. This unkind mixture of classism and racism is most assuredly a theological, spiritual issue. To the degree that people in the city are poor and from minority groups, this would in no way affect our commitment to the city. God's commitment to mission work is a universal commitment. Our commission to do mission work in the city is a universal commission. If indeed it were true that we were not making a commitment to evangelizing the city due to the fact that there are many poor minorities there, the Holy Spirit would direct us immediately to a portion of Scripture we have already discussed:

Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God. (2 Corinthians 5:14-18).

WELS Christians, along with Paul, will condemn racism and classism. We will also work hard to make sure that racism and classism do not dictate mission policy and distribution of limited mission dollars. Racism and classism are such ugly and obvious sins that we needn't take more time and space than is required to condemn these sins.

The danger of stereotypes about who lives in the city is not merely or perhaps primarily racism and classism. First of all, it is just patently untrue that everybody in the city is poor and a minority. The city hosts a wildly extreme and diverse population. To think otherwise, to ignorantly hang on to a stereotype that suggests otherwise, poses a serious danger:

It can close our eyes not only to the needs of shanty towns but also to the other groups that fill the city. And the same insensitivity that keeps us from planning churches for the slums impedes our vision for reaching the elite, the working class, the soldier, and the politician. All disappear in a monoclass generalization that sees only the poor. The world church builds its own ghetto for middle-income converts. (Conn 1987, 192)

The danger is that we lose sight of this simple but fundamental fact, that God made the whole wide world the target of his free love in Christ and that he has commissioned us to be bearers of that message of love in Christ to the whole wide world.

We may not close our eyes prejudicially to any group living in any area. We may not prejudicially justify insensitivity to the eternal and spiritual needs of any group living in any area. To do so is an affront to the God of universal grace, who in his magnificent mercy included us in that grace.

We must work in the city, even in the inner city not only because God has commanded us to do so. We must work in the city to open up our own eyes to God's grace to us. As we include ourselves in the class of poor sinners, outsiders due to our unrighteousness, a caste of wicked, impure, and immoral degenerates, we then begin to understand and appreciate how marvelous God's grace is to us and for us. Then we will truly understand what Paul was talking about when he said, "Christ's love compels us...So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view" (2 Corinthians 5:14, 16).

When we reach this important stage in our own spiritual maturity, we will willingly endure whatever trials, struggles, and sacrifices are required to undertake a commitment to doing mission work in the city. Our goal will then be to figure out how many different groups we can reach and how many neighborhoods we can serve and how socioeconomically and culturally diverse a church body we can build for Christ. This is success.

Challenge #4: *We must see that our Lutheran heritage of Christian education is also the evangelistic solution to one of the city's biggest problems.*

Arguably the greatest concern facing families who live in America's cities today is the education of their children. Public education in general is a major topic of discussion in America. When the media reports on public education in our major urban centers, words like "crisis" are often in the headlines. The bold headlines of the November 22, 1994 issue of the Milwaukee Sentinel proclaims, "Dropout rate down in MPS [Milwaukee Public Schools]." The article relates that the dropout rate dropped from 17.4% in the 1992-'93 school year to 15.4% in the 1993-'94 school year. The dropout rate among minorities in Milwaukee has traditionally been twice that 1993-'94 figure. This is small consolation. An inter-office communication to a Milwaukee County children's court judge given to me by a probation officer reported that "approximately 42% of the students in urban schools skip out during the day." The familiar litany of concerns facing the urban school system includes: lack of discipline in the classroom, personal danger to the students while in school, drugs, weapons, busing, over-crowding, negative peer pressure, humanistic agendas on the part of educators, burnt-out educators, poor student performance levels, run-down facilities, and on and on. The greatest insult or irony is that public education is so very expensive. Nonetheless, public school systems are crying out for more money but can't get it. A very bad situation, it appears, may deteriorate even more. This dismal situation represents a major problem for families, children, businesses, and basic quality of life issues in every major urban center in America. This situation at the same time represents a wonderful opportunity for evangelistic outreach in the city.

Who better could capitalize on this fantastic evangelistic opportunity than a confessional church body like ours with a strong heritage in educational excellence! What some might describe as the American city's greatest need is what we do best. Christian education represents the best hope for the city. By bringing our educational heritage into the city, we can with God's blessing reap a huge harvest for Christ's kingdom. The need is obvious. That we may use this societal need as a platform for proclaiming Christ through our Lutheran educational system is appropriate. God's missionary commitment is world-wide. The city must be recognized as the heart of God's world-wide missionary commitment for the simple reason of population intensity.

After over a decade in the city as a pastor of a church that has a Christian preschool and elementary school ministry, I believe that God's missionary commitment to the city part of his world is extremely well served through this school ministry. Yet, we need to do some ground work before we dare try to establish new churches with Christian schools as a primary mission strategy. We would have to re-evaluate the role of our institutions and our professional educators so that they could adapt to and flourish in and respond to the needs of the city. We would also have to re-evaluate the way we tend to pay for Christian education before we take our expensive heritage into the city.

Our Lutheran educational mission is to nurture the children of Lutheran families in the Word of God. Therefore, an intense study of God's Word is an integral aspect of

curriculum. What is more, every subject from social studies to science is taught from the perspective of that Word. Our students learn to evaluate history and scientific theory from a divine perspective. This approach to education has protected our children from the deceit of humanism while in school and provides a foundation to recognize humanism or other satanic philosophies that would test them in life or in future educational endeavors. Above all, our students are challenged and encouraged to do their very best in school in order to develop their God-given abilities so that they can give glory to God in whatever vocation or path they choose to pursue. Our heritage assumes that God is glorified with only our best efforts as educators and as students.

The success of our institutions and the strength of our heritage in terms of nurturing the children of Lutheran congregations has been established and demonstrated over centuries. Lutheran educational institutions because they are Christian institutions, addressed and even governed by Christ's Great Commission, must also succeed in evangelizing the lost. Arguably, social conditions in previous generations did not require this evangelistic emphasis from our educational philosophy. The opportunity was always there but social conditions did not force us to recognize or to respond to the opportunity. Social conditions have changed. Our schools as tools of Jesus Christ and promulgators of God's Word must respond to the new evangelistic opportunities that changing social conditions have provided. This is especially true in the cities of America for reasons already cited.

Our Christian schools have a rare and wonderful opportunity to solve both the eternal dilemma as well as some pressing current problems confronting urban families. What parent doesn't want excellence in education for their child? Our schools represent that excellence. So what if unchurched families come to our schools for excellence in education? They will soon discover that our real agenda is making disciples by preaching Christ and teaching all that Christ taught. As one member of Garden Homes likes to say, "I came to Garden Homes for the wrong reason [for private education for my child] but I stayed for the right reason." For this reason, our schools need to become adept at using the Christian school as a missionary arm of the church. Indeed, many already are.

This means that the Christian school in the city must be designed from the floor up to be evangelistic. The goal of the school will be to reach the child for Christ. School teachers and administrators in an urban context dare not assume that the children who come to class are Christians or baptized or know anything at all about the Bible. The goal of the school will be to reach also the parents of that child. Policies need to be in place that will enroll parents and guardians of children in adult instruction classes at the same time as the children of these parents and guardians are enrolled in the school. In this adult instruction, parents will learn the basic doctrines and values that their children will learn in the classroom. The parents will also learn that the role of the school, as is true for the individual Christian, is to reach the lost. Parents will learn that they not only have benefited from this philosophy but that they may also now participate in the privilege and joy of carrying on this philosophy.

The Christian school also enjoys a natural opportunity to train the family in carrying out Christian discipline, family roles, home devotions, and the like. Christian schools in the city should become Christian family centers for educating, counseling, and equipping whole families for family life, evangelistic witness, and community involvement. With this commitment to evangelistic fervor as well as the commitment to

nurture in the Word of God and excellence in academic preparation, we will provide a powerful response to the most urgent needs and problems of every American city.

Institutions are made up of individuals. Before the Christian school as an institution composed of boards, parents, students, teachers, and pastoral staff can see its mission as an evangelistic arm of the church, the individuals who comprise this institution must see themselves as evangelists for Jesus Christ. Yes, they are educators and nurturers. They are not, however, merely educators and nurturers. They are every bit evangelists as well.

At Garden Homes Lutheran School, the first connection that many students have with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the only connection in some cases, is the teacher in the classroom. At the beginning of each school year, each teacher visits the homes of all the students in his or her classroom to find out what the social and spiritual background is of every student. Each classroom ends up reviewing basic Christian doctrines not only because repetition is the mother of all learning but also because there is inevitably one student or more that hasn't heard this basic information. Every teacher in every urban Christian school classroom is an evangelist and must therefore see himself or herself in this way and must be trained to function in this way.

Every teacher in every urban Christian school classroom will also have many opportunities to provide ministry that we have not traditionally assigned to our classroom teachers. At Garden Homes, the teachers are usually the first to recognize family dysfunction. They are usually the first to find out if mom has a problem with substance abuse or if there is friction between parents or if a child's parent has adopted an immoral lifestyle. There are also times when a parent will ask a Christian teacher for direction or support in times of trouble and temptation. Single female mothers who see their child's female teacher daily and have a good relationship with this teacher may be more comfortable discussing their concerns with their child's teacher than with the pastor. Traditional assumptions about the role of a teacher in an urban Christian classroom must be challenged. Teachers must be equipped for these situations, be prepared for these situations, and learn how to identify and respond to these situations.

There is too much unbelief and hurt and sin in our nation's urban centers to relegate evangelism and counseling to the pastor alone. True, every community in the world has too much hurt and sin to relegate evangelism and counseling to the pastor alone. Moreover, there is absolutely nothing in the Bible that suggests that any church ought to relegate evangelism and counseling to the pastor alone! But especially in the city, far too many people will simply slip through the cracks for want of an appropriate Christian response at the appropriate opportunity if the pastor is the only evangelist and Christian counselor.

In many cases, the teacher will need to know how to direct a person to the pastor or to professional Christian counseling. In other cases, the teacher will be able to provide that appropriate Christian response at just the right opportunity. The urban Christian school teacher's place is on the front lines of spiritual warfare in the city. They are in the trenches where the fighting is furious. They must be equipped for the spiritual battle for souls and eager for the opportunity to swing the Spirit's sword in this battle for souls.

For all these reasons, the pastor in this situation must be sure that he is ready to assist and encourage the Christian school teachers in this front-line ministry. At Garden Homes Lutheran Church, we have learned that it is critically important for the pastor and

all the teachers to meet together every few weeks to discuss issues regarding the children and their families. These meetings give us the opportunity to come up with strategies to deal with the problems and challenges that arise in the lives of our people. We discuss when it's appropriate for the teacher to handle the situation and when it's appropriate to pass the situation on to the pastor or to the Christian professional counseling centers in our area. These meetings also give us the chance to share our own struggles and triumphs. It is critical for the strength and unity of a church and school ministry for the pastor(s) and teachers to support each other and to pray for each other on a regular basis. It gets very lonely for a teacher who lacks this support. It gets more than lonely, actually. After being pressed all day by students, after being challenged all afternoon by parents, the last thing a teacher needs is to be ignored or to be second guessed or oppressed by his or her pastor.

This re-evaluating of institutional and professional roles will pose challenges, none of which are insurmountable, for a confessional church body with our history of and commitment to the doctrine and ultimate purpose of ministry. A more difficult challenge will probably come when we try to re-evaluate the way we have traditionally paid for the ministry that a Christian school provides. We have generally assumed that the parents of the Christian school children will cover all the school's expenses, in concert with the other members of the local congregation, through the regular Sunday morning envelopes. Since the school is an integral part of the church's ministry, the school will be supported by the gifts that flow into that joint ministry. This model works to some degree when there are several hundred members supporting a school and when these members are spiritually mature in their attitude toward giving and when for the most part they are employed and when that employment provides income sufficient to support family needs. Once again we note, especially in the city, that the situation has changed to such a degree that this model would rarely be appropriate.

People who are attracted to and converted by the school's gospel ministry will need careful instruction in the teachings of biblical stewardship. They probably will need time to grow into that kind of biblical stewardship. Convincing new Christians to worship regularly is challenge enough. Leading them to give regularly and proportionately has been for Garden Homes a time-consuming and difficult task. Also in the city, there is a high incidence of unemployment and underemployment and households headed by single females with modest incomes. In situations where there is an existing church and school ministry with some history, we often find a membership that is declining and struggling financially. The big question is, then, how do we pay for Christian education?

What about the possibility of going into a new field where there is no existing congregation? How could we even think about establishing a Christian school where there is no congregation, where there is a high incidence of unemployment and underemployment, where the folks that are reached will likely have no background in the faith and so struggle at first with sacrificial giving, where most families will be headed by a single female, and where there is no understanding or appreciation of the heritage of the Lutheran church and its educational system! How do you pay for it?

Let's begin with what we know. First, we know that our system of Christian education is expensive. The 1995 proposed bare-bones budget for Garden Homes Lutheran preschool for three year olds, the preschool for four year olds, and the

elementary school for kindergarten through grade eight will total about \$275,000 assuming that expenses will remain close to the previous year's and assuming that none of the staff receives any kind of raise. If a most aggressive projection of 120 students is realized, simple arithmetic indicates that it will cost our church and school family \$2292 to educate each child. In view of the fact that we receive no federal, state, or local tax support, and that our people must come up with this amount themselves, we see that our system of Christian education is expensive. Maybe our congregation's members can meet this budget, in spite of the fact that like most other urban congregations, we have a high incidence of unemployment, underemployment, single parent families, and recent converts who may struggle with the challenge of sacrificial giving.

We know, secondly, that our system is worth every penny of the \$2292 per child because our children enjoy daily studies in God's Word, they study every other subject in the light of God's Word, they receive an excellent education, their classrooms are safe, discipline in the classroom is maintained, and they all but in rare exceptions go on to graduate from high school and most go on to college or tech school. In addition to the nurture our school provides our children, our preschool and elementary school result in anywhere from ten to twenty adult confirmations every year. Our church's ten year statistics show that we are assimilating and hanging on to an average of 55% of these precious souls who join our church as adult confirmands through the school. Year after year, we see our Lutheran educational system provide the opportunity for many to come to faith in Jesus Christ. Our system is expensive, but worth it. One might argue whether our system is expensive since it costs the Milwaukee Public School system almost \$6,000 to educate each child in the elementary system. Again, since we are paying for it on our own, we consider our Lutheran education system expensive. But it's worth it.

Thirdly, we believe at this time that our church and school family cannot afford the \$2292 per child, even though we all agree that it's worth it. In poorer sections of our city, we know that the \$2292 might as well be \$22,292. People in these communities cannot come up with \$2292 and their churches lack the economic and numerical strength to subsidize their cost. In view of these facts, shall we discontinue the school system or should we willingly and openly consider alternative means to pay for our system? Again, we are faced not with merely a social question. This question too is a profoundly theological question. Really, the question is not whether we should discontinue our system or find another way to pay for it. The question is, do we value our own Lutheran heritage enough and do we see clearly enough just how well our Lutheran educational heritage can be used to reach urban families for Christ so that we will do the work of figuring out how to pay for it?

I do not intend to suggest that it would be sinful for us to not have a Christian school system. I do suggest that the reasons we offer to discontinue our school system or to not struggle to find ways to pay for our school system in an urban context may be sinful. If we are not willing to do the work and to suffer the stress of experimenting and to do research that is new to us, if we are content to just discontinue a system because the old ways of paying for it don't work anymore, then our problem is not a social one. It is most definitely a theological one. God's missionary commitment is a world-wide commitment. The cities in our nation and in North America are certainly the focus--by virtue of numbers alone-- of this world which God wants evangelized. Our schools provide a unique and relevant strategy to accomplish this evangelism. The question, I

believe, is how much do we value these souls in the city and what are we willing to do in order to reach these souls in the city? If we are committed to reach these souls, and if we agree that an excellent alternative to failing public school systems is already something we can offer, then we will accept the challenge to find new ways to pay for our Lutheran schools that we maintain or set up in the city.

So, how do you pay for it? We start by figuring out in each situation just how much the family of the student can provide toward funding the school ministry. This requires us to charge some form of tuition. We are also required to teach the principles of Christian stewardship to people who are new to faith and, often, new to the principles of any kind of money management and credit responsibility. This is the chief reason why we must charge tuition on the basis of ability to pay and also teach the principles of Christian stewardship. People need time to grow. The school needs funds to function. People must accept the responsibility to run the school to the degree that they can legitimately provide the funds to make it function.

That group of people who most urgently need to learn the principles of Christian stewardship of time, talent, and treasure are people with limited financial resources. We will teach stewardship, however, not primarily to provide our schools with sufficient cash flow but so that our families may enjoy the blessings of being faithful stewards. God doesn't call us to operate a school. God calls us to be faithful stewards. One blessing of this faithful stewardship will be churches and schools that can maintain their ministries. There will likely remain, in spite of generally good stewardship, a lack of sufficient resources to operate an expensive Christian Lutheran educational system. This is true for reasons already cited: unemployment, underemployment, single female head of households, smaller church memberships, spiritual immaturity, and the like. We're back to the question, how do we pay for Christian education in the city?

In my years at Garden Homes Lutheran Church, I have met many successful businessmen who care deeply about what is happening to people in the city in general and to their brothers and sisters in Christ who live in the city in particular. Our church has on many occasions received special gifts from people like this. We didn't ask for them. We just received them. What might we be able to do if we asked successful WELS businessmen who have this active social conscience and this concern for city Christians to help our churches maintain Christian education in the city? What if we would ask a group of them to put up the start-up resources required to establish a church and school in the heart of one of our nation's cities? What might happen? I personally believe that we would receive whatever funds we might set out to raise.

I believe that we have men and women who are looking for such causes. This should not cause concern for other Christian agencies who are also trying to raise funds in this manner. Our experience suggests that giving people more special projects to support doesn't merely redirect limited resources but actually results in new resources.

WELS urban churches with schools usually have a history that goes back one hundred years or more. As the city moved in around some of our churches, the traditional membership base declined. As a result, churches like this, churches like Garden Homes, struggle. Yet, there are all around Garden Homes a number of businesses that have remained in the neighborhood and continue to serve and support the neighborhood just as the church. Might there not be a partnership in the making between the local church and the local businesses?

The concern is that partnerships with local businesses and factories might cause us to compromise our theological positions and our Lutheran educational heritage. In the first place, we can invite businesses into a partnership as long as they commit to a hands off policy regarding what is taught in our schools and how we teach. If a company should try to impose some kind of curriculum or policy that we couldn't abide, then we would obviously have to do without their support. In my limited discussions with such individuals, however, the last thing on their mind is to influence what or how we teach! I believe most business leaders would find our concerns almost amusing. They desperately want educators to do the job of educating so that business leaders can find and hire employees that can read, communicate and do basic math. When we show them our "product," they would announce enthusiastically, "This is what we have been looking for!" I believe they would support what we are already doing rather than attempt to undermine what we are doing. A Christian employee with Christian values and a Christian work ethic is the best possible employee for a business that wants to succeed under current economic conditions.

I have also found that the businesses in our area care deeply about the quality of life offered in our area. This is where their employees work, park their cars, and take walks over the lunch hour. Clients and customers must come into our neighborhood in order to do business with the businesses in our area. One cannot imagine the impact on our neighborhood if our church and school should have to close down due to lack of resources. Our area businesses benefit greatly from our commitment to our common neighborhood. We could help each other in many ways that would only advance our respective agendas. Churches and schools can establish partnership policies that would guarantee that our Great Commission agenda would in no wise be compromised.

Another idea that we might try to help us pay for our Lutheran educational system in the city is not a new idea at all. In fact, our church body has already implemented this idea with great success. The Milwaukee Federation of Churches has two resale stores in Milwaukee that gross over \$135,000 a year. These resale shops charge very little for the items they sell. Yet, at the same time they provide a good value to their customers, they are still able to raise significant funds to support area Christian agencies. An individual congregation or a federation of inner city congregations in Milwaukee could draw upon the experience and expertise of the Federation, establish a resale shop, and provide the same value to customers and enjoy a similar financial return to support their school or schools.

The buildings that house the resale shops could provide opportunities for more than fund raising. If school parents cannot afford the tuition charged by our schools, the resale shops could give them a place to "work off" some portion of their tuition. These resale shops could be used also for a place to teach English as Second Language courses. Area businessmen could help set up and even teach remedial courses or pre-employment courses for area residents who wish to apply for jobs in the neighborhood. Networks could be set up and communicated in the resale shop to help bring potential employees together with area businesses. Many successful models for this kind of community involvement exist already within our circles and not too far out of our circles. It's not a question of whether we could do it. The question is do we want to do it. Are we willing to experiment, to try new ideas, to re-deploy old ideas in order to bring the nurture and outreach ministry of a Christian church and school a reality?

The synod could also sponsor a new church and school in an urban context. In November of 1994, I received a letter from my seminary classmate, John Hartwig, who is exploring opportunities for establishing a mission in Thailand. He and his family have been over there for a year, researching possible sites for a new mission. The Hartwig family was willing to serve God by doing this work. Our synod was willing to cover the expenses for this important work. Our synod will soon, God willing, be sending a team to Thailand to work this mission. Both our world and home mission boards promote the team concept of establishing cross-cultural missions. Can we not assume that God would give us a team of teachers and pastors who would work together in establishing a church and school in cities in America? Teachers on this team would be trained to do ethnographic research, cross-cultural evangelism, leadership training, and family counseling. All the teachers would understand that their objective is not only to start a school to reach children but to start a church and school ministry to reach families.

The members of the team would have to determine how much tuition the parents of the children could afford. They would have to be able to figure out what kind of school, facilities, faculty, and curriculum could best work in that community. These team members would be trained in using people from that community to help them determine direction, emphasis, methods, and the like so that the school and church would look "at home" in this community. As with all other home missions, a plan for synodical support and when to discontinue synodical support would be necessary. So many of our home missions struggle for numbers for so long. All of our home and world missions are expensive projects. An urban mission project using a Christian school to get it up and running could be legitimately expected to produce the kinds of results that we don't often see in our home mission field. The failure of urban education in America is arguably our synod's best chance to succeed in the city. Yes, it's expensive. Yes, it's a gamble. Yes, we would have to rethink the way we run schools and start missions. We would discover, I believe, that where the risks are greatest, so are the rewards.

Ultimately, what we need are a few individuals who are willing to try something like this. God would give us such brave, creative, dedicated servants. We would need a church body who would stand behind this team until they figured out how to start a mission in the city. We would need a church body who wouldn't second guess a carefully developed methodology for the city even when that methodology seems odd or unnecessary to colleagues who serve in a rural or suburban context. The city is our challenge. The city is where the largest numbers of souls are and certainly where the highest percentage of lost souls are. We need to figure out how to establish churches and how to maintain churches in an urban context. God calls us into the whole wide world. Cities are the centers of this whole wide world. We must go there and learn how to succeed there. We must.

Challenge #5: *We need evangelistic-minded pastors who will bring their faith and their families into the city.*

Because our church body's efforts to start new churches has historically not focused on the city proper, and because our church body currently lacks the confidence and knowledge to plant mission congregations aggressively in the city, and also because of some widely held middle-class stereotypes against the city, it may be a while before we see a grassroots synodical commitment and vision for reaching the city for Christ. Because we are convinced that God's missionary concern is a world-wide commitment, and because the city is not only a part of this world but the fastest growing and most densely populated part of this world, we must work toward a grassroots synodical commitment and vision to reach the city as well as the strategies necessary to implement the vision.

Though stirring up such a grassroots commitment will be a challenge, the greater challenge belongs to those pastors and teachers who will be called to serve North America's cities. For all the reasons previously mentioned, we have relatively few pastors and teachers now serving within the boundaries of a major city and fewer still who were or are sufficiently prepared for this experience. Do not most of our pastors and teachers assume that they will serve in the same kind of rural or suburban and largely monocultural context from which they came? I have made several presentations to future pastors and teachers about the rewards and challenges of urban mission work. The comments and discussion that follow these presentations indicate that the students generally viewed urban ministry in much the same way as overseas ministry. Urban work sounds to them mysterious, a little frightening, and foreign. The idea that they might serve in an urban context strikes them somewhere between novel and highly unlikely.

And yet, in spite of their assumptions and their fears, some of our young men and women who have grown up in rural or suburban homes will be called to serve in the city. The city needs their witness, their heart for the lost, and their lives to serve as models of Christian righteousness, servanthood, and family life. When such persons enter the city to begin their preaching or teaching ministry, they will face all the usual struggles of the first years of ministry. If they are experienced workers, they will face the usual struggles of trying to adapt to serving new people in a new place. Because, however, they are new to the city, they will face the additional challenge of adapting to the city's social realities.

This social or environmental challenge is much more unsettling for many of us than the challenges we face as new workers or workers sent to serve a new flock. The challenge that this unfamiliar urban social setting poses to pastors and teachers from a traditional WELS background is unsettling because it hits us where we are most sensitive. This challenge hits us hard in regard to:

- our *heart*: Am I up to the challenge of serving in the city? Can I handle the pressures? Can I handle the struggle of learning how to do urban mission work? Can I handle the stereotypes of some that may now touch me as an urban worker?

- our *vocation*: What is my function in the city as a called worker? I have seen pastors and teachers serve in a rural and suburban context. I know what they do and what's expected of them, and how they are therefore evaluated. I have no idea how my attitudes and assumptions and agendas will need to change regarding ministry in the city because I have never seen or received ministry in the city.
- our *family*: Will my family be safe and happy living in the city? Dare I ask my spouse to venture into the risky proposition of evangelizing a city and raising a family in the city?

Am I up to the challenge of serving in the city?

I was not given the opportunity to choose whether or not to serve in Milwaukee's inner city. I didn't get the chance to wrestle with my faith and my God and my stereotypes and my fears. I was sent into the city on the day divine calls were distributed to my class of seminary seniors. In the first year of my ministry at Garden Homes, I asked myself countless times whether I was up to the challenges of serving in the city. I learned and I here assert that once God gets a pastor or teacher into the city, he begins immediately and aggressively to nurture that servant so that that servant can face the city's challenges with confidence--and much prayer!

I am not suggesting that a pastor or teacher needs a super faith or a superior faith to serve in the city. I will suggest that a called worker does need to search the Scriptures for specific hope and trust and confidence in certain divine promises and assurance that he or she may not have had to rely on while serving or living in northern Wisconsin. Someone else will assert that a worker called to serve in a rural or suburban context can expect God to nurture them in such a way to prepare them for the challenges of serving God's people there. I have no doubt that this is true. I do not know what special lessons God wants to teach workers who serve in a rural or suburban community. I believe that I do know some of the special lessons God wants urban workers to endure so that they might enjoy a bold confidence and optimism and sense of security while serving in the city.

The first lesson God will have an urban worker learn, I believe, is humility. Moses provides a biblical definition of humility in Deuteronomy 8:2-5:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

Moses was speaking to people who had just spent forty years in the wilderness. His message is just as compelling for people just moving into the city. God will send tests to find out what is on our hearts. God's tests will uncover our true attitude toward his commands. He will send trials that will drive us into the Bible. He will preserve us and provide for us during these trials and while we are "wandering" in the city. In so doing, God teaches us to depend on him and not on ourselves, our strength, our intellect or our cultural or socioeconomic assumptions about what life and ministry ought to be about. This is a biblical understanding of the concept of humility. This humility, this total dependence on God, is the first faith lesson for an urban worker.

It is difficult to choose a few personal situations to illustrate this point because God has given me so many to draw upon. Suffice it to say that over the years that I have served Garden Homes Lutheran Church, God has allowed me and my family to taste several different flavors of urban crime. Once, God allowed me to receive a healthy dose of crime and, on the very same day, a call to serve a congregation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota!

Some of the obvious lessons I have learned are as follows: The people I served were very interested in my reactions to these challenges. They were truly sympathetic toward me and concerned about me. Yet, they needed to know whether I would suddenly lose my commitment to Garden Homes and to the city. They needed to know whether I would become bitter and hateful toward all minorities and categorize all minorities because I had been victimized by a minority. They needed to know whether I would serve Garden Homes with continued optimism and confidence or would I succumb to self-pity. They needed to know whether I could handle the same kinds of tests many of them have handled. They needed to know whether I could stand up to Satan's efforts to attack our gospel ministry at Garden Homes Church and School. They really wanted to know whether I really wanted to serve Garden Homes. And all that they wanted to know, I really wanted to know for myself.

Tests such as these are necessary so that what so easily comes out of our mouths also is a deeply held conviction of our hearts. I do believe that God is in complete control of all the universe. I believe that God does protect me and my family and every Christian from all harm and danger. I believe that when God allows harm into my life, he is disciplining me as a son so that in the end it might go well with me as Moses promises in Deuteronomy 8:16. These kinds of tests drive the urban worker to Scripture with a whole new hunger for strength and answers. Our approach to Scripture will not be a professional obligation but a personal lifeline to hope and meaning, strength and wisdom, peace and security. The city will soon show us why we really wanted to become a pastor or a teacher in the first place. The city will give us the opportunity to learn soon whether we really believe in God's providence and depend on God.

I have learned--as far as humanly possible--to accept these tests for two reasons. First of all, I'm reminded of what the writer to the Hebrews said:

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord

disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."
Endure hardships as discipline; God is treating you as sons (12:4-7)

As I read through the listing of the heroes of faith in Hebrews' eleventh chapter and as I consider what these heroes endured to proclaim the gospel, I cannot think of anything that I have endured as an urban mission worker that comes close to their trials.

Secondly, I accept whatever short-term and relatively light tests that may come my way as an urban pastor because so much is well with me now as a result of previous tests. The tests that I have experienced in the city have taught me things that I'm not so sure I could have learned elsewhere. For example, I know that the faith God has given me will keep me steadfast in the face of death, for I've looked down the wrong end of a .32 semi-automatic. I know that the faith of each of my family members will be nurtured as mine has been nurtured so that we are all together still glad to serve in our city and are not afraid--usually--of living in the city. Our children have a faith and spirituality that is mature beyond their years because their faith has been tested. They have had to wrestle with their God and seek answers from their God as they have been disciplined and tested and taught humility by God through tests that I think are unique to an inner city environment. Of all the reasons that I am grateful for the opportunity to represent God in the city, this is chief of all: I know for a fact that God is in the heavens, that he is with me always, and that everything that happens is for my good and that he will rescue me from every evil attack and my wife and children learn these lessons along with me and independently.

This is not at all unlike the missionary families that I have heard who describe as a great blessing their life in a foreign country in unfamiliar and sometimes dangerous settings. Urban teachers and pastors and church members share many correlations with foreign workers. There are pastors and seminarians who dream of being a foreign missionary one day. With access to right information, with exposure to the realities and joys and challenges of urban ministry, I am sure there will be pastors and teachers and seminarians who would dream of representing God in the city!

So closely related to this humility before God is a trust in God to be with us as we carry out his Great Commission in the city. Jesus invites us to trust him to be with us as we go out to make disciples. A critical aspect of the Great Commission is Jesus' promise at the end, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

One winter evening, I stopped by to see a woman who had visited three consecutive Sunday services at our church. She lived in a tough neighborhood in a tough apartment complex and wanted me to visit well after dark. I was a bit uneasy as soon as I got out of my car. When I opened the door to her apartment complex, a young woman was sitting on the steps picking up the contents of her purse and cussing out some vanished assailant for trying to steal her purse. This woman's small daughter was at her side. At the top of these same steps, I met a man who was apparently looking for the thief. He was angry. I was tense. I did get to the apartment I was searching for and was met at the door by the woman I had come to visit. As we talked about heaven and how Jesus had provided her with free and unconditional access to that heaven, we heard fighting and intense cursing in the apartments around us.

It seemed odd to be talking about peace and paradise to a person who lives every day in the midst of such turmoil. Yet, the offer and hope of such peace was deeply appreciated by this woman. She did not hold membership in any church. She had moved a number of times from one city to the next and from one apartment to the next as a result of a difficult divorce. In the meantime, she had ended every evening by gathering her two children around the Bible to read to them out of Scripture. She could not verbalize or express just how Jesus had saved her. She was, nonetheless, positive that Jesus had saved her. She accepted my invitation to attend our adult instruction course with great excitement and expressed her eagerness to complete this course so she could join our "friendly" church. I was so uplifted! Then, she opened the door so I could go. I didn't, but I wanted to say, "Martha, if I don't make it to my car, would you call somebody?"

I chuckle at the tension I experienced then and have experienced in similar situations regularly. But when I am in the midst of that kind of tension, I review--no, I cling to-- "Surely I am with you." I take all the precautions I can take. I am usually surprised at the kindness I receive by people who are hanging out in situations like this. In fact, as I left this apartment, the large man I met at the top of the stairs on the way in said, "Good night, Pastor!" on my way out. He overheard Martha say, "Thanks for stopping by, Pastor Sorum." Many of our church's guests live in very tough neighborhoods and in very tough apartment buildings. When they visit us, I or our congregation's evangelists visit them. We have not boycotted any neighborhood in Milwaukee. We have never been assaulted or badgered. We have never refused to visit anyone who visited us. But we have been tense on occasion.

I am not suggesting that inner city pastors and teachers be foolhardy. Jesus does "suggest," however, that we deal with our tensions and get into these homes and apartments to make disciples. He has invited the urban and inner city missionary to count on his presence. This is what we say to our foreign missionary families, isn't it? If they are expected to believe and trust Jesus' promise, and if we expect Jesus to be worthy of this trust, can we not also assume that Jesus is trustworthy in our North American cities as well? This is a key lesson that God loves to teach his urban evangelists. It's a lesson the urban evangelist learns very early in his spiritual development for service in the city.

Another critical lesson that urban teachers and pastors must learn comes under the heading of servanthood. It is a given that a pastor or teacher serving in an urban context will be in close contact with people from minority cultures. Evangelizing people from minority cultures and serving with people from minority cultures presents a special challenge to Anglos who have grown up in the majority culture. As members of the majority culture, we have to one degree or another this notion that our opinions, our assessments, and our ideas are inherently accurate. Call it a variation of the "might makes right" theme. This majority mentality may trick us into thinking that we can identify community needs, create and implement programs to meet these needs even though we have never lived in the diverse community of people who have these needs. The result is that we make these people *objects* of ministry and neglect also to make them *partners* in ministry. Even a cursory reading of Ephesians 4:11-16 will show that Jesus does not send pastors or missionaries into a city only to make people *objects* of ministry.

When a pastor graduates from our seminary, he has probably had four years of intense academic training in one of our college preparatory schools. He has had four or five years of rigorous college training in a classic curriculum of history, Greek, Hebrew,

German, and Latin. He completes his training with three years of seminary training which takes him through the history of the development of systematic theology and 2000 years of church history. The quiet question lurking behind this intense training and our own majority mentality might be crassly stated thus: "What don't I know and if I don't know what can't I figure out on my own?"

This is in no way a judgment against our academic training. It is rather a warning about how our heritage of church worker training coupled with our majority mentality may lead us to a wrong conclusion that I already know how to serve everybody in any situation. Once this warning has been stated and accepted, our thoroughly trained pastors and teachers can then accept this fact that before they start offering too many answers to people from a different culture, they must first learn what more of the questions are. We must accept the fact that people from different and minority cultures probably have a long list of questions that are truly different from any question that we have ever asked since we come out of the culture of majority.

Here is a simple and concrete example of how a mentality of servanthood in the heart and mind of an Anglo called worker might look. Upon entering an urban and multicultural mission setting, the Anglo pastor or teacher begins by asking Christian brothers and sisters questions like this:

- What do I need to know about you in order to serve you as a Christian pastor/teacher?
- What are the challenges confronting you that I need to understand in order to support you as your pastor or in order to teach you as a Christian instructor?
- Tell me what special challenges face this church/this community?
- How might a Christian pastor/teacher/congregation address these challenges?
- What are the key questions and sins and problems that you as a long time member of this community/culture group would identify so that our Bible classes and sermons might offer immediate and relevant answers, correction, and solutions?
- What limitations do I have as an Anglo evangelist/teacher and how can you help circumvent them so that we can reach and teach as many people as possible?

Questions like the above are difficult for many of us from the majority culture to ask because they assume that we need help. They assume that we don't know everything. They assume that we must rely on our Christian brothers and sisters in this community or culture group that is new to us to help us apply our intense and excellent training with the most accuracy and salutary benefit. Oddly enough, as soon as we admit these things, our brothers and sisters from minority cultures will honor us for our forthright admission that we need them and must rely upon them for the benefit of God's kingdom in their midst.

A mentality of servanthood allows for a partnership that will not only produce blessings for God's kingdom, it will also allow for the development of true mutual respect between the Anglo servant and those whom he or she serves. Our Anglo background has led us to believe that to admit to professional and personal limitations and insufficiencies is to admit to incompetence. When working in a minority culture, admission to such limitations and asking the brothers and sisters from that minority culture to train us and mold us and to guide us so that we can overcome or circumvent these limitations is the beginning of competence. Ask a minority if he or she finds it difficult to communicate with white folks. If they will admit to you that they do sometimes experience this difficulty, ask them to explain why. Assure this person that you really do want to know and that you really can handle the truth. Your willingness to ask this question and to

listen to the answer may be a sufficient test to determine whether you could be competent to serve as a pastor or teacher in the city.

What is my function in the city as a called worker?

This leads us directly to the point about a pastor's function in the city. To one degree or another, a pastor serving in a monocultural context sees his role as being theological expert, family life trainer, congregational visionary, community evangelist, and church programming authority. To one degree or another, the people this pastor serves in such a monocultural context see his role in much the same way.

The function of a pastor serving in an urban and multicultural context is in some ways different than that of a pastor serving in a monocultural situation. In many ways, both function the same. Both the pastor in a monocultural situation and the pastor in a multicultural situation must divide the word of truth correctly and apply it appropriately for the flock they have been called to serve. Both pastors are careful to define sin as Scripture defines sin, to confront that sin with the law, and to comfort the repentant sinner with the gospel. Both pastors will equip leaders to lead the church. Both pastors will work to nurture the faith of their flock and also encourage their flock to reach out to the lost.

Both the pastor in a monocultural contest as well as the pastor in the multicultural context would also do well to see his role more like Paul wanted Titus to see Titus's role. Again, it is especially important, however, for pastor in an urban, multicultural context to consider adopting Paul's advice to Titus. Paul told Titus to "straighten out what was left unfinished" (1:5). Paul was directing Titus to finish the job of establishing true doctrine and eradicating false doctrine on Crete (1:10-14). Paul gave Titus three means by which to finish this job:

- First, Titus was himself to proclaim publicly the true Word and to refute publicly all falsehood (2:1,15). Titus was the local theological expert, God's representative of the truth. As such, his place was before the whole congregation, in the pulpit, so to speak, publicly proclaiming the "grace of God" (1:11) that "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness" (1:12).

In an urban context, the pastor must be ready to address publicly the huge variety of sects, false religions, twisted doctrines, sins and satanic deceptions that are perpetrated--often in the name of God--in the city. The people will be confronted constantly by a barrage of "new" teachings and old hedonism due to the city's inherent tolerance for social extremes. The urban congregation is surrounded by nonsense of this type so it must have access to a divine perspective on whatever lie is currently in vogue. The pulpit and Bible classes represent critical learning resources for God's people in this regard.

- Secondly, Titus was to organize the believers in Crete by means of appointing elders and overseers to make sure that this true Word was taught and obeyed in the lives and homes of the individuals (1:5, 8, 11). Titus could address large groups through preaching and teaching but it would require elders from the local towns working

directly with the folks in their homes and neighborhoods to make sure that they appropriated, accepted, and lived by God's truth. Elders would allow for accountability among the local believers and understanding of the challenges and weaknesses and questions facing the local believers. Elders would also allow for the personal support and encouragement of many more weak or tempted believers than Titus could ever help himself.

To be sure, there is not an exact correlation between the elders of Crete and the elders of our current North American congregations. The goals that Paul had regarding the elders of Crete and the goals we might have regarding the elders we raise up in our urban and multicultural congregations should be very similar, however. The urban pastor must realize that though the pulpit is a great means to educate the crowd, the pulpit does not get into the individual homes and lives of the crowd. Nor does the pastor have the capacity to do this by himself. The urban pastor must make training up leaders and elders a top priority. These leaders can get into many more homes and lives to make sure that people understand, believe and live by God's Word. Most of the membership losses we experience at Garden Homes are the result of the streets reclaiming weak or immature Christians. We need more elders to help more young Christians stand up to Satan's attacks and deceit. This will be true for any urban congregation. The city church must match Satan's determination for holding on to immortal souls.

- Finally, Titus was to organize further Crete's church by teaching Christian roles to various groups (2:1-10). Older men, younger men, older women, mothers, and wives were to receive instruction to help them fulfill their respective roles and responsibilities. In this context, older women were to teach the younger women (2:4-5). Paul recognized the impact spiritually and socially mature women could have on young women in particular and on family life in general. Titus could accomplish much more for family life in terms of Christian faith, unity, and joy if he would enlist these older women to train up and support younger women.

An urban pastor will soon find that cross-cultural differences in family, raising children and discipline are nothing less than acute. The urban pastor will serve families in an urban, multicultural context for years before he can begin to understand and to appreciate these differences. The urban pastor would do well to teach and to enlist spiritually and socially mature women to teach younger women because they will know the issues, they will be able to teach and rebuke appropriately and, they will greatly increase the urban pastor's impact by taking the true Word of God into many more homes and many more lives.

In general, the urban pastor will need to preach and teach Bible-based roles and responsibilities for men, women, husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters. Suffice it to say that family life in the city, as it is everywhere, is in a crisis state. The future of the church as well as the city rests largely upon a Christian congregation's determination to teach these roles and to hold people accountable to carry out these roles.

Why is this Titus-like approach especially important in the city? 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. The Anglo or cross-cultural pastor must equip his mature leaders to teach

and to exercise authority among their own groups so that the group can be properly and sufficiently served.

This is true because of cross-cultural issues but also because of the huge need. In an urban context, a pastor will soon find himself overwhelmed with evangelism and counseling opportunities that he is not only ill-equipped to handle but also unable to handle due to time constraints. This may also be true in a monocultural context but it is just more true in an urban and multicultural context where there is no heritage of faith, no older generation "in the Spirit." The function of an urban pastor in a multicultural context must place a high priority on equipping local leaders to evangelize, counsel, and nurture local people. A vital focus of the Anglo pastor's ministry in this context will be on the leaders.

This is supposed to be our approach in the foreign fields that our church body serves. There is increasingly less difference between our world fields and the urban fields of North America. For all the same reasons, our North American urban fields require the same emphasis on the development of local leadership. Our synod's Board for Ministerial Education has recognized this. This board has approved a recommendation to establish a pre-seminary satellite training program that will serve specifically ethnic minorities, allowing the students to remain in their culture while they prepare for seminary. There are many details that need to be worked out but the program must go on and it must succeed.

Will my family be safe and happy living in the city?

Perhaps the greatest concern Anglo urban pastors and teachers have is the safety and happiness of their families who must live with them in an urban and multicultural context. The key issue is violence in the city. Violence in the city is a real issue. We must deal with this issue honestly and openly. To deny the reality of potential violence to called workers serving in the city serves no one. On the other hand, if pastors and teachers can be convinced that God's angels will protect them overseas, and that their synod will stand by them in their needs overseas, is it too much of a stretch to expect that pastors and teachers can be convinced of the same things if they accept a call to serve in North America's cities, even in an inner city? This to me is the bottom line: Do we believe Jesus when he says, "Go...Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19,20). Either Jesus is faithful and reliable--and we'll go--or we don't trust Jesus--so we'll stay.

The pastors and teachers that accept Jesus' promises and go into the city will need to learn how to work with God's angels to keep their families safe. Moreover, they must be very aware of their family's fears and must be able to support their families if there is an incident of crime or violence against the family. In other words, the pastor and teacher must recognize the need to be involved in regular Bible study that specifically addresses concerns of violence, they must recognize the need to communicate strength to their family members and they must also recognize the need to let their family members speak openly about their fears and concerns. The worker family that feels safe in God's

promises and care will provide the worker a foundation, a foundation that is built on Christ, the Chief Cornerstone, without which the worker cannot function.

The worker and his or her family will also need opportunities to know and enjoy their own cultural background. The worker and his family will need opportunities to enjoy "furloughs" out of the city. The worker and his family will need rest and recreation outside of the city so that they can return together with renewed energy and commitment to the city. This paragraph only introduces a key and major issue. We close this issue with an encouragement to our church body: Once we get people into the city, let us do all that we can to make them thrive in the city in terms not only of their work, but also in terms of their social life, family life and sense of personal security. Then, let us trust God and let us proclaim God in the city.

Anecdotally speaking, the families that I know who are serving inner city churches will admit that they take precautions to protect their families. Their emphasis, however, would not be on the fear or concerns that they have in view of raising families in these environments but rather on the blessings their families have come to enjoy as a result of their calls to inner city churches with multicultural memberships. The benefits of serving a multicultural congregation and community in the city include:

- Developing sensitivity and understanding regarding race issues and relationships;
- Seeing our children grow in a faith that strengthens and equips them to participate and enjoy this ministry;
- Being exposed to a different culture group's expression of faith, joy, and appreciation of Jesus (way of worship, music, fellowship gatherings, attitude toward suffering);
- Cross-cultural appreciation of food, customs, and communication;
- Insights into the strengths and weakness of our own culture;
- Seeing first hand the joy and new life that adult converts enjoy, renewing our own appreciation for Jesus and his Word;
- Learning up close and personal about how Satan, the world and sinful flesh are serious in their efforts to attack faith and how they must therefore not take this faith for granted;
- Giving our children a head start in learning how to live in an international, cross-cultural nation and how to enjoy this rather than being intimidated by it;
- Families in the city need to see a model of what a Christian family is, how it works, how it deals with problems, and how it shows love. Just being a Christian family is an important and exciting role and ministry for the called worker's family in the city.

6. Conclusion

God is a farmer for souls and he wants to reap a world-wide harvest. God has called his church to go into the whole world to plow with the law, sow with the gospel and to thresh out a church by the power of the Spirit. God would have us go. He would have us go willingly and confidently. Included within the scope of this world-wide ministry are the cities. Carrying out God's Great Commission into the cities does present its own challenges to our church body. Some of these challenges are difficult. But God would still have us go into the cities and into the inner cities of North America. For obedience's sake and for our conscience's sake and for the elect's sake, we need to go.

At this point, the writer and the reader can identify with Jonah's turmoil when he was sent into the city of Nineveh. Jonah was angry. That city was evil, full of violent men, and was the capital city of his nation's most feared enemy. These weren't his kind of people. Jonah was not afraid to go. He just didn't want to go because he knew how powerful and effective God's Word is. Jonah didn't want to see these people saved.

To me, the irony of Jonah's story is that though he didn't want to go to Nineveh, he knew exactly what to do once he got to Nineveh. He walked through the streets plowing and sowing with the Word of God. He got out amongst the people, met them in the streets and preached. Just as Jonah suspected, that Word worked. People repented and turned to the Lord for mercy. God in his perfect and universal mercy saved this generation of Ninevites and their city from total destruction. Jonah's ministry was abundantly blessed in spite of Jonah. Such is the power of God's Word even in the mouth of such a prophet!

What if we WELS Christians are afraid to go into our modern cities because we perceive them to be full of violent criminals? What if we are afraid to go into these teeming, growing cities full of so many different peoples representing so many different "foreign" cultures about which we know nothing? What if we hesitate to plow and sow in North America's metropolises because we don't know how to do mission work in this context or because we don't see how we could afford it? Or, what if we don't want to go into these cities with God's Word because maybe it would work--but we don't want it to work? What if we don't want to see these people respond in faith to our preaching and receive salvation, for, after all, these people represent the enemy who are messing up our tax base, causing upheaval in our public schools and blighting the evening news with their sordid aggression and crime? In summary, what if we are afraid that evangelizing the city might not work or what if we are afraid that it might, in fact, work very well?

To whom it may concern: Jesus lived his perfect life and suffered his innocent death on the cross to redeem from Satan and eternal hell the whole wide world of sinners of whom I am chief. Jonah's problem was not his racism or his fear of a violent city full of gentiles. Jonah's problem was that he did not understand his own great burden of sin and so could not appreciate the grandeur of God's mercy that covered his sin. Is it possible that Jonah didn't appreciate his Messiah because somehow, somewhere, he forgot how much he himself needed that Messiah? If we as a church body or an

individual pastor or teacher are afraid or unwilling to go into the heart and core of any city, fear and racism is not our problem.

God tried to point out to Jonah what Jonah's real problem was. If I may paraphrase the Lord in this fashion: "Jonah, you feel compassion for a silly plant that provided you a spot of shade but you feel nothing for thousands of human souls who will face an everlasting judgment when they die. These many souls are ignorant of the spiritual truths that will save them from that judgment. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

That question with which God concludes Jonah's book always gets me. When I get fed up and frustrated, when I start looking for a boat heading out for the calmer suburban seas, when I just don't want to deal with the city, it's this question that puts my life and my call back into perspective. I am a great and wicked sinner. Yet, God has had mercy on me and so even promised to share his glorious, eternal home with me. I am now perfectly, blissfully safe. But what about that great city? Should God not be concerned about urban North America? What a ridiculous notion! Of course he is. Should I not be concerned with the eternal destiny of souls in urban North America? Should pastors and teachers and the grassroots of the WELS not be concerned with urban North America? Remember, now, what this question is really asking. God's question really asks, "Do I appreciate my gracious, merciful Savior and all he did for me enough to take him on the road and downtown to the peoples and folks so that all might have the chance to enjoy the free gift of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ?" God doesn't ask rhetorical questions. He is waiting for our answer.

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