

**South Side Ministry: Spanish  
Outreach in St. Peter Lutheran  
Church, Milwaukee**

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During the decade of the 1960's, many things were changing. The world seemed to be a completely different place to live in the minds some people. One such change that was occurring happened in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The Hispanic population was growing and the WELS knew the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Outreach efforts were in place to spread the good news to the Hispanics in the South Side of Milwaukee. This happened in a medium sized congregation known as St. Peter.

But the sudden boom of the Hispanic population caused many of the people to move and live outside the area of the church. This, along with other factors that will be discussed later in this paper, caused a fall in membership and a sudden lack of interest in the Spanish mission.

However, the command of our Lord is still present: "Go and make disciples of ALL nations." Although the ministry to the Hispanic people in Milwaukee was dying, it was not completely dead. A revival was going to occur in the middle to late 1990's. This revival came about during the ministry of Professor James Getka and Pastor Matthew Krenke. This paper<sup>1</sup> deals with their ministries, some of the hardships involved with Spanish ministry in Milwaukee's South Side, and also some of the great opportunities that they have had there.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following paper is a synopsis of my interview with Pastor Matthew Krenke and Professor Getka of the Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> I have decided that, since this paper is a synopsis or a summary of an interview with these two men that I will follow the same format as my interview: I will first state the question and give their summary answer to that question.

- *Please take a moment and introduce yourself: Name, Place and Date of Birth, Schooling etc.*<sup>3</sup>

Pastor Matthew Krenke grew up in Mobridge, South Dakota. He went to school in South Dakota until he was eight years old. From there he and his family moved to Baraboo, Wisconsin where he attended school until they moved to Texas in 1984. While in Texas he attended public school but deep in his mind, he felt that he wanted to either be a pastor or a teacher. When it came time for Pastor Krenke to go to high school, he did not want to go to a public high school. Instead his parents sent him off to Prairie du Chen at the Lutheran Preparatory school there. He graduated from Prairie du Chen in 1989, but he was still unsure about his future in the pastoral ministry. Right after graduating from Prep, he went to Northwestern College in Watertown where he attended school for one year. Then he took a year off.

Pastor Krenke answered my question of why he took that year off with one answer: he felt that he was young and immature. Still in his mind he felt that he wanted to be a pastor or teacher. While living in Texas, he had aspirations of attending Texas Tech, but he was intimidated by the thought of attending a big school. Instead he went to live with his parents, who at this time lived in Florida. While in Florida, Pastor Krenke attended the University of Central Florida in Orlando and was a full time restaurant manager. Yet, once again, he knew that his love would only be found in either teaching or preaching. He wanted to do this teaching and preaching in a WELS school or church, so he knew that he had to attend a WELS school to accomplish this. His love of teaching or preaching would not have been met if he could not teach and preach the truth of God's

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the questions that I asked did not apply to both of the interviewees. Included with this paper will be the complete list of questions that were asked of these two gentlemen.

Word. He decided to finish what he started and returned to Northwestern College and then to the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, where he graduated in the spring of 2001.

Professor James Getka took more of a direct route in his road to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was born in Burlington, WI on May 28, 1965. He attended Shoreland Lutheran High School in Somers, WI and graduated in 1984. After which he attended Northwestern College in Watertown, WI and graduated in 1988. His final journey in education was at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. He graduated in the spring of 1992.<sup>4</sup>

- *What was your situation (family, economic, etc.) as you prepared to be assigned?*

Pastor Krenke was married to his wife Susan. They were expecting their very first child. They were excited to begin their life together, not only living together, but also to do God's mission work together. As a newly married couple that was expecting their first child, they were broke at their assignment to St. Peter Lutheran Church. But that did not detour them from their desire to spread God's Word to the nations. Pastor Krenke chuckles at the thought that his wife had: to receive an assignment anywhere but Milwaukee.

Again, Professor Getka's assignment and ministry was slightly different than Pastor Krenke's. He was single at the time and as many single men before him, he was assigned to be a tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, MI. He served here for three years when he was called to serve at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Milwaukee.

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<sup>4</sup> Professor James Getka's interview was an interview via email. I was not able to get in touch with him to find a time when I could go to Michigan to interview him or that he could come here. Included in this paper will be a written interview that he emailed to me so that I would have his answers to my questions.

- *How did you prepare yourself for the call to South Side?*

To Pastor Krenke, this was the last thing that he expected. He never would have dreamed that he was going to get assigned in Milwaukee, especially Milwaukee's South Side. Sure he had experience in urban teaching since he helped out with North Side ministry, but he had no Spanish training at all. After Pastor Krenke received the call to St. Peter, he knew that one thing he had to do was to learn the Spanish language to survive. Soon after receiving his assignment, he and his wife took part in a Spanish Immersion program in Mexico City. His wife returned home before he did due in part to giving birth to their first born baby, but Pastor Krenke stayed for four months. Although four months helped Pastor Krenke with his Spanish, he wishes that he had more time in his studies there. He knew that he had to do this because he would never have survived in his ministry unless he knew Spanish. Because of this intensive study, he was able to begin his adult Bible Information Classes, have religious studies and instructions.

Professor Getka was a little bit more prepared at the time. During his time at Saginaw, he had taken a group of MLS students to Mexico for a Project Host trip in the summer of 1993. His Spanish training was a little bit more intense than Pastor Krenke's because he took one year of Spanish with Professor Sprain at Northwestern College in 1987. Through this training he became more familiar with the language and its usage. When asked the question of language study, Professor Getka gave the following answer: "Because the church was in such disarray, the council and I concluded that I shouldn't go to Mexico for any length of time right away. So, I signed up for a 2-week course at Berlitz language studios in Milwaukee. One of my teachers ended up being the wife of a WELS pastor! With those two weeks, and some help from LSM guys and members, I

started to do the Spanish liturgy about once a month. Sometimes, just the LSM guys and I attended; other times, a few members and visitors came in. But, the Berlitz course wasn't enough to make me fluent in Spanish. I tried picking up what I could from the members and the neighbors, but eventually I went to Mexico for 6 weeks with my wife and students from the synod. That helped a lot, but again, only gave me 6 weeks worth of training, while other sem students going to vicar in Puerto Rico got 6 months!!

“After a few years, I started taking courses at UWM to get ahead with my Spanish. By the time I left, I was preaching, although faltinly, in Spanish about 1 time a month, and doing liturgy, with a bit more ease, about 1 time a month, too.<sup>5</sup>”

- *What were your expectations before you came to the South Side?*

Pastor Krenke did not know what to expect after his assignment. “Your call is where God wants you to be<sup>6</sup>.” Although we are not adequate to serve in God’s ministry, he will be there to help us through it. There was one thing that Pastor Krenke did not want to do: he did not want his church to be just a neighborhood church. He wanted to reach out to others that were not in the immediate neighborhood. At the time, there were still many members living around the church, but as the neighborhood worsened, many of the people moved out. This was not Pastor Krenke’s idea of being a neighborhood church – because now it was not just that.

Professor Getka gave the following response in the email that he sent to me on this question: “I was not really prepared for everything that I ended up being involved in. They called me to be the principal of the 1 room school the church still had. I had no principal experience. They called me to serve the Spanish neighborhood—I had not

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Getka’s words, no editing involved.

<sup>6</sup> Pastor Krenke interview.

working knowledge of Spanish, just a strong interest in it. I did have the desire to work in the inner city, since I had visited St. Marcus while I was at WLS, and thought that what Jeske was doing there was really amazing. I don't think I realized how taxing it would be however!

“In October of 1995, the Southside Guys and I decided that from that time, St. Peter's would have a Spanish worship service, whether anyone showed up for it or not. What had happened was this: For a long time (a few months) the LSM guys had offered services, but few if any people attended. They tried altering a few times, and the worship ended up being a Bible class from the Communicating Christ videos in Spanish. Even then, nobody attended, so the guys got discouraged, and finally didn't really prepare much of anything. Then, one Sunday, a lady and her son and her grandchild showed up for church. She had been part of the large group of Hispanics that came from St. Stephens back in the 1970's. Sadly, we had nothing prepared for them that Sunday in October. So, after they left, we decided to have services every Sunday. That meant I had to learn Spanish to take part in the service.<sup>7</sup>”

- *What was the state of the Wisconsin's Synod's Latino missions when you were assigned or called to South Side?*

Many of the WELS churches in the inner city began to dwindle. But St. Peter Lutheran Church realized that if they were going to survive in this neighborhood, they needed to do outreach to those new neighbors in the area. The urgency that was not there for many years is there now. Not only is this Latino outreach important in Milwaukee, but it is important every where in the United States with the rapid growth of the Latino culture. One of Pastor Krenke's dreams is to have someone called to the church that has

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<sup>7</sup> Professor James Getka, written interview answer.

the sole responsibility to do this outreach. He often feels like he does not have enough time – either spends too much time doing outreach and not enough time with his “traditional”<sup>8</sup> members – or he feels that he does not devote enough time to mission work.

Professor Getka stated that when he began, the WELS was not very Latino mission minded, except in the Southwest portions of the United States. As he received his call and accepted the call to St. Peter’s, he was told this was going to be his pioneer territory to see what he could do in this territory. Area congregations along with WELS Kingdom Workers sent mission money of some \$13,000 to St. Peter when they heard the need for funding there. The main plan was to do canvassing and to do Bible classes with any prospects that they came across. Unfortunately, very few of them became members.

- *What challenges (doctrinal, practical, political, economical etc.) do you see for the Wisconsin Synod in their Hispanic outreach in the near future? Distant future?*

In the near future, there are several problems that we face, but the major one that is facing Pastor Krenke at St. Peter right now is the same problem facing almost every church in the WELS: money. They just do not have the money to do everything that they want to do there. But as always, God has been there and he will always help out.

Another problem facing the church today is what kind of worship do they do? Are they going to stick with the traditional WELS *Christian Worship* formats of liturgy, or do they switch it up? What is going to feed the people more? Some of the Latinos that attend the church have a background in the Catholic Church. Along with that comes their

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<sup>8</sup> By traditional I mean the typical German WELS member. Now a day this is not true but instead of having this explanation in the paper proper, I decided to shorten it to just “traditional.”



feeling of what an “organized” church service is like. But many of them do not want to have anything to do with the Catholic Church and that includes an organized liturgy. The idea of being in a church that reminds them of the Catholic Church scares them off. However, many, if not most, of the Latinos were Catholic only in name and they do not know what it is like to have a liturgy. So to them, it does not matter.

Another big problem with outreach to the Latino population is that many of them do not have their green cards. Citizenship is very important issue because many of them are not citizens. The neighborhood changes frequently because people move in and move out all the time.

And Pastor Krenke gave one more piece of information about the problems that faces this semi-dwindling congregation: How can we make it a self-supporting congregation? Or is that not a possibility? Do we need to spend mission dollars on this church or should we have a larger congregation sponsor them?

Although much of what Professor Getka gave for information was an echo of what Pastor Krenke mentioned, I felt once again to let him speak for himself. His answer was written out in further detail in the email he wrote to me: “First of all, the WELS has to get its financial house in order. Secondly, they will have to deal with determining, as the old adage goes, what must change, what must not change, and what may change. I don’t put myself in the “Church and Change” camp, but I’m a bit reluctant to call myself a “Union Grove” guy, too. I guess I see myself somewhere in between, specifically because I believe our approach to foreign mission work at home (home missions in other cultures) has to involve some change on our parts, especially changes of attitudes, perspectives, and appreciation. God hasn’t called us to make German Lutherans out of

Latinos. He has called us to plant the gospel amongst Latinos and let the gospel create its own culture among them. So, many things come into question for possible change: worship styles (organ or guitar? Historic or contemporary liturgy? Western rite or a new Latino rite?), evangelism (church signs as invitations, cold call evangelism or network/relationship evangelism), member arriving 10 minutes before worship begins, or 15 minutes after it has started? Committees to thoroughly investigate and detail every aspect of a project, or relying on the Lord to bless our plans? Naturally, every one of these has to be individually answered, and the solution may not be on one extreme or the other. But the fact that we need to objectively look at everything we do and what importance we put on them, and then compare that with how a Latino looks at his/her world, and the importance they place on them, is a necessary study.

“Politically, we have to wrestle to understand the immigration troubles our country is facing. Is it God-pleasing to assist illegal immigrants who are struggling to survive, or is faithfulness in supporting our government’s control of the borders the necessary way to go? Which shows God’s love? Which shows duty to our elders? How important is protecting what we own (land, jobs, possessions, the American way of life, etc.) in comparison with humanitarian assistance to the poor and needy? Can patriotism be sinful? Are we Christians first, then Americans, and if so, what does that mean with the immigration problem? What does God’s Word say about the alien living among us?

“Incidentally, if Vicente Fox really does see the acquisition of the Southwest back to Mexico, as one presidential candidate stated about 4 or 8 years ago, what should a Christian think of the immigration question if there is the underlying agenda to “re-conquer” what was taken from Mexico about 2 centuries ago? Hmmm.... It’s not easy.

“Economically, again, we have to see if we need to change our way of thinking. I think that for a long, long time, the synod has generally looked at charity as the equivalent to social gospel. I have come to see charity, in its best expression, as a testimony OF the gospel. Social gospel is charity without the gospel. There is a big difference. Many of our Latino neighbors are poor, and do need assistance. But more of them are seriously hard working people, and amazingly confident of themselves enough to work jobs that American think are “beneath them.” Our stereotypes of Latinos needs to be scrutinized, and their important part in our economy needs to be acknowledged, and appreciated where necessary.

“Doctrinally, we have to understand the Latinos’ concept of Mary, and the patriotic place she has amongst the people of the Americas, as well as the idolatrous practices that revolve around her. Pentecostalism appeals to many Latinos since they love exuberant music and the emotionalism that lifts the Latino out of his/her mundane, often oppressive life. Lutheran worship often fails to do that outside of the message proclaimed in a sermon. While some may argue my point, I still believe that the words that we say may be wonderfully doctrinal and full of gospel application, but if the way we communicate that message doesn’t convey the meaning or intent of the words, we have hampered the gospel’s proclamation. If we mean what we say, then let’s say it the way we mean it. To purposefully make a sermon dull and lifeless to avoid sentimentality or emotionalism can and often does work contrary to the damning, crushing, hopeful, joyful, serious, uplifting law and gospel message we proclaim.

“That goes for worship too. Not only do we need to strive for worship that communicates the law and gospel faithfully and appropriately, I believe that we also need to strive to touch both the mind and the heart, as Tiefel says.<sup>9</sup>”

- *What opportunities do you see for the Wisconsin Synod in their Hispanic outreach in the near future? Distant future?*

Pastor Krenke sees wonderful opportunities that we have in the near future and also the distant future in the WELS outreach to the Latino population. First of all we have God’s Word in its truth and purity. If the Latinos attended Catholic Churches prior to coming to the WELS, they have experienced many different changes that the Catholics add or subtract from God’s Word. Yet by the grace of God, the WELS has God’s Word in its truth and purity.

Another opportunity that we have and are facing in the WELS is that many of the Latinos want to become pastors and teachers. They have been given the truth of God’s Word and they want to help out. They want to be able to spread God’s Word to all nations too, which includes spreading it to their own culture. And who better to serve the Latino population than a Latino himself!

Pastor Krenke, as mentioned before, would love to see this happen. He does not always feel adequate to spreading God’s Word to all the Latino groups. So he feels that it would be nice to have a full time person called to the church to have his main objective and call to be outreach to the Latinos.

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<sup>9</sup> Again as you can see from the included answers written by Professor Getka, this quote was written by him and submitted to keep all of his thoughts in a row. Professor Getka’s interview questions ended there. Some additional stories and information he provided over the phone may be included and if they are they will be noted as such.

- *Describe, if you will, a typical “day in the life” of your ministry and missionary work in Milwaukee? Would you describe it as a typical day in the life of any missionary work?*

A typical day at St. Peter involves spending most of the day at church itself. In the morning Pastor Krenke is at school, teaching catechism or religion courses. After that he is in the office answering calls that may come in. During the afternoon and evenings he is out doing calls in the neighborhood, although the evenings is not the most popular time or best time to do calls in the inner city.

When he is out doing calls, every time he knocks on a door, he never knows what he will see or who he will meet. Because of that, it is very important to know Spanish to be able to speak Spanish to whomever he will meet. Anywhere from 75-80% of the doors that he knocks on are Spanish-speaking only.<sup>10</sup>

Recently, much of his time is spend in the expansion of the school and doing work with the other church in the area, Christ Lutheran Church. This school is a “choice” school and over 70% are non-members. Some of these non-members are also unchurched. Some are not even baptized. When Pastor first came to this church, he was opposed to the idea of letting the school be choice. However, since 79 of the 105 children are choice, this school would not exist without it. And he feels that this church would not exist without the school.

One of his main goals is to try to be home every evening for supper and to spend time with his wife and children. Most of the time he is able to do this, but there are some days that he is unable to come home.

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<sup>10</sup> This percentage was given by Pastor Krenke. This is from his experiences that he faced by going door to door. This statistic is not given by any census that has been taken.

- *Describe a typical Sunday morning worship service? Have you tried to maintain some of the “traditional” worship settings of other WELS churches or does the culture difference require something completely different?*

A typical Sunday morning for Pastor Krenke at St. Peter Lutheran Church may not seem so typical. They have two separate services: one at 9:15 AM and one at 11:30 AM. The first service is very typical WELS traditional worship service. Everything starts on time and they use the *Christian Worship* hymnal.

However, their 11:30 service is much different. This is their Spanish service. It is suppose to start at 11:30 but most mornings they are lucky to start at 11:45. This is not a “liturgy free” service because it has its own liturgy. But this liturgy is not from *Christian Worship*. Pastor Krenke’s sermon preparation is not the same for the Spanish service because there is no sermon. Instead he does a short devotion for each of the three readings for the day. However, many of the “traditional” worship parts still are maintained in this worship service; for instance confession and absolution.

- *What were some of the major doctrinal challenges that you faced in your ministry to Milwaukee’s South Side?*

As with any place that one goes, there are several different challenges that can face a church in this society that we live. St. Peter is no exception to that. Many different cultural groups live in the area of St. Peter. With these many different cultures come many different backgrounds. Each person has their own idea of life and even who God is. A big temptation at St. Peter is to give the people what they want and to tell them what their itching ears want to hear. St. Peter is not the only church in the area, and the

WELS is not the only synod in the Milwaukee South Side. Many other church bodies tell people what they want to hear and their membership grows. They stay away from the Law and the affects of the Law on someone. So their church grows. That same temptation is there for St. Peter too.

Another struggle is with baptism. Many people come to St. Peter to get their children baptized because they do not charge like the Catholic Church does. An easy temptation would be to baptize them with stipulations that they join the church.<sup>11</sup>

- *As the church in Milwaukee (St. Peter's) became more established in the early '60's, what problems did the church face? Please take a moment, if you can recall, how did the Spanish ministry get started? Who else was involved in this outreach program? Please take a moment to describe the history of St. Peter's.*

The church of St. Peter in Milwaukee experienced a problem that faces many of the churches in an area of Milwaukee that is seen as being “dangerous.” That problem is a quick flight to the suburbs. This moving out of the area began already in the 1960's and 1970's. Because of this flight, membership was quickly declining. So the pastors and congregation knew that they needed to do something about that. The idea was to do outreach to the people that are moving into the area.

Spanish ministry had its beginnings at St. Peter in the late '60's. It began with the pastor and a small group. However due to personality differences, a schism was growing in the congregation. At the time of the split, there were 50-60 Latinos that were attending St. Peter, but this personality conflict drove them away. To this day hardly any of those

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<sup>11</sup> There are several other questions that the interview hits upon, but to save time and to get to another main point of this paper, I will skip over to the historical aspect of St. Peter Lutheran Church.

original families belong to the church.<sup>12</sup> This conflict that was occurring at St. Peter was basically between two pastors, as Pastor Krenke can recall. One of the pastors was more English minded and felt that English should be their main focus. However, the other pastor was Spanish minded and saw the need to spread to the Latino people. This caused an “us and them” mentality as Pastor Krenke calls it. The Hispanics did not feel comfortable, so they followed the one pastor; while the English speakers followed the other pastor. The congregation was split in two.

That is when the Spanish ministry began to die out. But the majority of the congregation that was left after the flight realized that this congregation would not survive if they did not do outreach to the Latino population that was surrounding the church. Professors at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were worried that this congregation would die out, so they sent some students to the church to help out with this outreach.

Finally the church knew that they needed someone to come to this church that had the passion to spread God’s Word to the Latinos. In 1995 they called Pastor Getka to the congregation. Underneath Pastor Getka, Spanish ministry at St. Peter began to flourish once again. He restarted the Spanish services. Seminary students have been sent to St. Peter to help out at the church.

Now there seems to be a great impact on the Hispanic outreach due in part to several social changes. In the ‘60’s, there was a cultural shock if one was use to living in

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<sup>12</sup> Professor Getka shared the following story with me over the phone. When he first came to St. Peter, he wanted to meet everyone in the congregation. This also included delinquents. As he was visiting one of these delinquents, he asked the lady why she stopped going to church. She (a Latino) told him that she loved coming to St. Peter. One day she sat next to a Caucasian woman in church. She turned to this lady and said “Hi” to her. This lady did not acknowledge her and did not even look at her. This Latino woman was so upset that she never returned to the church again.



an all white neighborhood and if that would suddenly change. Today we do not have that problem. The melting pot known as the United States of America is also included in the Milwaukee area. No longer is there this sharp distinction between ethnic groups. More and more we see cross-cultural families living in our area and attending WELS churches. Also there are more and more young people that have Spanish skills than before.

This change is also evident in the members of the “traditional” WELS background. There is a willingness to help out and get involved in the congregational outreach program. Some of the elderly members still have an uncomfortable feeling because they do not know the Spanish language and do not feel comfortable knocking on doors. But they help out in other ways. Many of them lead the food pantry.

Most people in the congregation really want to help out to cause this growth in the church. They do not always help out in the “front lines,<sup>13</sup>” but do help out in other aspects of ministry.

Pastor Krenke has not experienced any “horror stories<sup>14</sup>” thus far about “letting them in<sup>15</sup>” the church. There are concerns that are spoken from some of the “traditional” members – that Pastor Krenke is spending too much time doing outreach and not enough time with them. However, the majority of his members can see and know the importance of this outreach to the Latino population.

Pastor Krenke also gives this advice to Seminary students to prepare for such ministry in their future lives: Learn the language. Learn the culture. If you know the language, even if you do not know it perfectly, it shows them that you are trying and opens the door for outreach and evangelism work in their family.

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<sup>13</sup> Pastor Krenke.

<sup>14</sup> Pastor Krenke.

<sup>15</sup> Pastor Krenke.

Also know the culture. This culture is, obviously, different than our culture. Learn their culture and understand these differences. Not only will this help to open the door even more to outreach, but also will lessen the chances of something embarrassing happening in the future.

His final piece of advice is not to go into the ministry with fear and trepidation of not knowing what to expect, but with a willingness to do the outreach to the Lord's people.

- *Summary*

Every kind of ministry has its ups and downs, and that includes outreach in Milwaukee's South Side. Danger is all around. There is that fear of not knowing what to expect as you knock on the door. Cultural differences are obviously present every time that you do outreach work among people of different ethnic background. And language barriers will also hinder the bridge between the cultures from being built.

St. Peter has faced all of these problems throughout the years of reaching out to the Latino population. At times it seemed as though these problem would get the best of the congregation. At times it seemed like the church was going to have to shut their doors. But the Lord always is there. He was the one that was watching out for St. Peter. He sent his Holy Spirit to guild people as outreach efforts were being made in the 1960's and in the 1990's to the present.

Strife, conflict, hardship and barriers can all cause one to give up. But one thing is very important – remember that the Lord is *always* with you. He will be there to equip you in preparation for his work. He will be there when you knock on the next door. He will be there as you talk to that future prospect. And he will be there when your courage is not very high. “Go and make disciples of all nations!”

## Interview Questions about Hispanic Outreach – South Side Milwaukee<sup>16</sup>

### (Ministry)

Please take a moment and introduce yourself: Name, Place and Date of Birth, Schooling etc.

What was your situation (family, economic, etc.) as you prepared to be assigned?

Where were you first assigned? As you now look back at it, if your first assignment was not in the South Side of Milwaukee, how did your first assignment help you in the outreach of the Hispanics in Milwaukee?

How did you prepare yourself for the call to South Side?

Talk a little bit about learning the language of the people in the area (did it take a while, emersion time, etc.).

What were your expectations before you came to the South Side?

What was the state of the Wisconsin's Synod's Latino missions when you were assigned or called to South Side?

What challenges (doctrinal, practical, political, economical etc.) do you see for the Wisconsin Synod in their Hispanic outreach in the near future? Distant future?

What opportunities do you see for the Wisconsin Synod in their Hispanic outreach in the near future? Distant future?

What would you like to see happen in our Hispanic missions today, in 5 years, 10 years, 25 years?

Describe, if you will, a typical "day in the life" of your ministry and missionary work in Milwaukee? Would you describe it as a typical day in the life of any missionary work?

Describe a typical Sunday morning worship service? Have you tried to maintain some of the "traditional" worship settings of other WELS churches or does the culture difference require something completely different?

What were some of the major doctrinal challenges that you faced in your ministry to Milwaukee's South Side?

From the time that you began your ministry until today, what changes have you made? What changes would you have made while at St. Peter's or at the South Side knowing what you know today?

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<sup>16</sup> These were the questions asked of both gentlemen for this project.

Did you make any other contacts with other WELS Hispanic missionaries during your ministry? How about with non-WELS missionaries? Did you find any help with those?

As the church in Milwaukee (St. Peter's) became more established in the early '60's, what problems did the church face? Please take a moment, if you can recall, how did the Spanish ministry get started? Who else was involved in this outreach program? Please take a moment to describe the history of St. Peter's.

After the ball started getting rolling on the Spanish ministry in the late '60's to early 70's, what happened? Why did the ministry to the Hispanics start to dwindle down to nearly nothing?

Today it seems that the LORD is once again blessing the churches of Milwaukee's South Side. What changes have been made from the late '60's until now that have helped in this outreach?

What are some of the advantages of outreach? Disadvantages?

Since the Hispanic population is on the rise and almost everywhere in the USA there is a need for Hispanic outreach, what do you feel that as Seminary students we could do to help us prepare for this work?

### **(Home life)**

Please take a moment to tell me about your family (Wife, children etc).

Describe a typical "day in the life" of your family.

What kind of things do you do in your leisure time/vacations/etc.?

How often are you able to come home? How often, when doing outreach work do you desire to come home?

How does/did your family deal with growing up in an area well populated by the Hispanic culture?

What have been some difficult times in your life? (Perhaps a story that you would like to share).

How do you feel that your life has change, if you feel it has changed at all? Was this for the better or for the worse?

If this was not your original call, what factors helped to contribute to accepting a call to the South Side? Or if this was your original call, and you are no longer there, what factors contributed to accepting a call away from the South Side?

Did you ever feel like you were in the minority?

What impact did/does that have on your family?

**(Cultural Differences)**

What are some of the chief cultural differences between the US culture and the Hispanic culture?

How long did it take you to get use to the new culture?

How did these differences impact your ministry? In what ways did you adapt to the Hispanic culture? And in what ways did the people that you serve adapt to yours?

What mix-ups or misunderstanding have you encountered because of the difference in the cultures, or language barriers, or ethnic differences?

What advice can you give to help to break through those cultural differences so that the people are willing to open up to you – a stranger in their area?

Is there anything that I missed that you would like to add to this interview?

**Interview Answers from Professor Getka about Hispanic Outreach – South Side  
Milwaukee<sup>17</sup>**

**(Ministry)**

Please take a moment and introduce yourself: Name, Place and Date of Birth, Schooling etc.

Prof. Jim Getka.  
DOB: 5/28/65  
Birthplace: Burlington, WI

Graduate of Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, WI  
Northwestern College, Watertown, WI 1988  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI 1992

What was your situation (family, economic, etc.) as you prepared to be assigned?

I was single when I received my second assignment to serve at St. Peter's in Milwaukee. I had just finished a 3-year assignment as a Tutor at MLS in Saginaw.

Where were you first assigned? As you now look back at it, if your first assignment was not in the South Side of Milwaukee, how did your first assignment help you in the outreach of the Hispanics in Milwaukee?

Evidently, because I had taken a group of MLS students to Mexico for a Project Host trip in the summer of 1993, and had 1 year of Spanish with Prof. Sprain at NWC in 1987, that qualified me to be a pastor to a Spanish speaking neighborhood in Milwaukee.

How did you prepare yourself for the call to South Side?

I was not really prepared for everything that I ended up being involved in. They called me to be the principal of the 1 room school the church still had. I had no principal experience. They called me to serve the Spanish neighborhood—I had not working knowledge of Spanish, just a strong interest in it. I did have the desire to work in the inner city, since I had visited St. Marcus while I was at WLS, and thought that what Jeske was doing there was really amazing. I don't think I realized how taxing it would be however!

In October of 1995, the Southside Guys and I decided that from that time, St. Peter's would have a Spanish worship service, whether anyone showed up for it or not. What

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<sup>17</sup> The following responses are the answers that Professor Getka gave to some of the questions that I wrote to him in an email. There was also a phone interview with Professor Getka which was referred to earlier in the paper. He did not respond to all of the questions; only those he responded to will be included in this portion.

had happened was this: For a long time (a few months) the LSM guys had offered services, but few if any people attended. They tried altering a few times, and the worship ended up being a Bible class from the Communicating Christ videos in Spanish. Even then, nobody attended, so the guys got discouraged, and finally didn't really prepare much of anything. Then, one Sunday, a lady and her son and her grandchild showed up for church. She had been part of the large group of Hispanics that came from St. Stephens back in the 1970's. Sadly, we had nothing prepared for them that Sunday in October. So, after they left, we decided to have services every Sunday. That meant I had to learn Spanish to take part in the service.

Talk a little bit about learning the language of the people in the area (did it take a while, emersion time, etc.).

Because the church was in such disarray, the council and I concluded that I shouldn't go to Mexico for any length of time right away. So, I signed up for a 2-week course at Berlitz language studios in Milwaukee. One of my teachers ended up being the wife of a WELS pastor! With those two weeks, and some help from LSM guys and members, I started to do the Spanish liturgy about once a month. Sometimes, just the LSM guys and I attended; other times, a few members and visitors came in. But, the Berlitz course wasn't enough to make me fluent in Spanish. I tried picking up what I could from the members and the neighbors, but eventually I went to Mexico for 6 weeks with my wife and students from the synod. That helped a lot, but again, only gave me 6 weeks worth of training, while other sem students going to vicar in Puerto Rico got 6 months!!

After a few years, I started taking courses at UWM to get ahead with my Spanish. By the time I left, I was preaching, although faltinly, in Spanish about 1 time a month, and doing liturgy, with a bit more ease, about 1 time a month, too.

What were your expectations before you came to the South Side?

Oh, the glorious plans new pastors have to take on the world and shape it in God's image! I was all excited to see what God could do in an area most people had given up on—the inner city. I was hopeful that the congregation would get behind the ministry of the gospel, become evangelists, volunteer for every needed project, and make worship at St. Peter's as glorious as it could be.

What was the state of the Wisconsin's Synod's Latino missions when you were assigned or called to South Side?

At the time, there weren't very many Latino missions in the Synod, except for what was going on in the Southwest, but even they weren't authentically Latino missions, but were a combination of Anglo/Latino. When I got to St. Peter's, I was told that this was pioneer territory, and that they wanted to see what we could do (no pressure). Money had been dedicated from Kingdom Workers for LSM, area congregations in Milwaukee had sent freewill offerings of some \$13,000 to St. Peter's when they heard how desperately the congregations needed funding. But we really didn't have much of a plan, other than

doing lots of canvassing, and trying to do Bible classes with any prospects we came across. Very few of them became members of the church.

Since then, things have blossomed all over the country—except in Michigan, up to this point!

What challenges (doctrinal, practical, political, economical etc.) do you see for the Wisconsin Synod in their Hispanic outreach in the near future? Distant future?

First of all, the WELS has to get its financial house in order. Secondly, they will have to deal with determining, as the old adage goes, what must change, what must not change, and what may change. I don't put myself in the "Church and Change" camp, but I'm a bit reluctant to call myself a "Union Grove" guy, too. I guess I see myself somewhere in between, specifically because I believe our approach to foreign mission work at home (home missions in other cultures) has to involve some change on our parts, especially changes of attitudes, perspectives, and appreciation. God hasn't called us to make German Lutherans out of Latinos. He has called us to plant the gospel amongst Latinos and let the gospel create its own culture among them. So, many things come into question for possible change: worship styles (organ or guitar? Historic or contemporary liturgy? Western rite or a new Latino rite?), evangelism (church signs as invitations, cold call evangelism or network/relationship evangelism), member arriving 10 minutes before worship begins, or 15 minutes after it has started? Committees to thoroughly investigate and detail every aspect of a project, or relying on the Lord to bless our plans? Naturally, every one of these has to be individually answered, and the solution may not be on one extreme or the other. But the fact that we need to objectively look at everything we do and what importance we put on them, and then compare that with how a Latino looks at his/her world, and the importance they place on them, is a necessary study.

Politically, we have to wrestle to understand the immigration troubles our country is facing. Is it God-pleasing to assist illegal immigrants who are struggling to survive, or is faithfulness in supporting our government's control of the borders the necessary way to go? Which shows God's love? Which shows duty to our elders? How important is protecting what we own (land, jobs, possessions, the American way of life, etc.) in comparison with humanitarian assistance to the poor and needy? Can patriotism be sinful? Are we Christians first, then Americans, and if so, what does that mean with the immigration problem? What does God's Word say about the alien living among us?

Incidentally, if Vicente Fox really does see the acquisition of the Southwest back to Mexico, as one presidential candidate stated about 4 or 8 years ago, what should a Christian think of the immigration question if there is the underlying agenda to "re-conquer" what was taken from Mexico about 2 centuries ago? Hmmm.... It's not easy.

Economically, again, we have to see if we need to change our way of thinking. I think that for a long, long time, the synod has generally looked at charity as the equivalent to social gospel. I have come to see charity, in its best expression, as a testimony OF the gospel. Social gospel is charity without the gospel. There is a big difference. Many of our Latino neighbors are poor, and do need assistance. But more of them are seriously



hard working people, and amazingly confident of themselves enough to work jobs that American think are “beneath them.” Our stereotypes of Latinos needs to be scrutinized, and their important part in our economy needs to be acknowledged, and appreciated where necessary.

Doctrinally, we have to understand the Latinos’ concept of Mary, and the patriotic place she has amongst the people of the Americas, as well as the idolatrous practices that revolve around her. Pentecostalism appeals to many Latinos since they love exuberant music and the emotionalism that lifts the Latino out of his/her mundane, often oppressive life. Lutheran worship often fails to do that outside of the message proclaimed in a sermon. While some may argue my point, I still believe that the words that we say may be wonderfully doctrinal and full of gospel application, but if the way we communicate that message doesn’t convey the meaning or intent of the words, we have hampered the gospel’s proclamation. If we mean what we say, then let’s say it the way we mean it. To purposefully make a sermon dull and lifeless to avoid sentimentality or emotionalism can and often does work contrary to the damning, crushing, hopeful, joyful, serious, uplifting law and gospel message we proclaim.

That goes for worship too. Not only do we need to strive for worship that communicates the law and gospel faithfully and appropriately, I believe that we also need to strive to touch both the mind and the heart, as Tiefel says.