

THE WORLD AT OUR DOORSTOP: THE STREAM OF IMMIGRANTS
FLOODING INTO NORTH AMERICA'S LARGEST CITIES DEMANDS
OUR STRONGER COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL CITY MISSION WORK.

BY

LUCAS F. BITTER

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. JOHN BRUG, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WI

MARCH 2013

ABSTRACT

Globalization and urbanization are growing trends which present the Christian church with wonderful mission opportunities. Unfortunately, the WELS is not taking full advantage of these opportunities because we are not very well established in big cities. The purpose of this thesis is to draw our attention to the globalization and urbanization and the great opportunity they give us, to examine how and why the WELS is falling short in the major global cities, and to push our synod to prioritize, fund, and carry out global city ministry to a greater extent than we ever have before. The methods used to accomplish these goals included research of sociological and ethnographic statistics, a review of WELS and church history, an examination of what other Christian denominations are doing, and of course a thorough study of God's Word on the topic. The writer also conducted a number of personal, phone, and email interviews with global city pastors and those involved with our synod's home missions. In sharing the results of his research and study, the writer aims to strip away many of the misconceptions and excuses for avoiding city ministry. This thesis concludes that although finances are the main reason we in WELS hesitate to do more global city work, the mission field is so ripe that the work is absolutely worth the extra cost. Going to a lot more global cities is not a hopeless task or even an unreasonable one. If we work together and use our funds wisely, we can do a lot more. We just need to make a conscious, unified effort to do so. The thesis closes with a few practical questions which may enable our synod leadership and those in charge of finances and missions to start a discussion and come up with suitable answers, so we can stop letting finances get in our way of doing valuable work.

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Introduction

North America is changing, whether we are ready to admit it or not. Granted, it is changing more quickly in some areas than in others. There are still small rural communities in North America where, despite the arrival of cell phones, Internet, and other modern technologies, life goes on pretty much the same as it always has. Predominantly white, blue-collar families know most of the other people in their community, many of whom have lived there their whole lives. It is still possible for a person in one of these communities to spend his/her entire life in one county with minimal influence from elsewhere. But this type of insulated, agrarian lifestyle is now very much the exception rather than the rule. Many more communities all over North America, including the small towns in the heartland, are experiencing significant changes. These changes are not some blip or anomaly on the timeline of human history. No, we are already experiencing, to varying degrees, the effects of one of the greatest migrations in human history.¹ Doug Saunders writes in his New York Times bestseller, *Arrival City*,

What will be remembered about the twenty-first century. . . is the great, and final, shift of human populations out of rural, agricultural life and into cities. We will end this century as a wholly urban species. This movement engages an unprecedented number of people—two or three billion humans, perhaps a third of the world’s population—and will affect almost everyone in tangible ways.²

The migration Saunders is talking about involves people moving from the country to the city. But it’s bigger than just rural vs. urban. This migration also transcends rivers, oceans, and national borders. The entire world is being connected as never before. All you have to do is look around you and you will see that the very faces of our nation are changing.

By the year 2035, demographers believe that the Anglo-Saxon population will be one minority patch in the cultural quilt of America. 1990 census figures show that White America’s current growth rate was 6% between 1980 and 1990 while minority groups grew at many times that. The Hispanic community grew by 53%. The Asian community boasted of a growth rate of almost 108% over that decade.³

This cultural diversity is coming from the incredible waves of foreign immigrants who are crashing onto the shores of North America. We are becoming as diverse and immigrant-driven as we’ve ever been, and the largest changes are happening in the cities.

¹ See Appendix 1, which shows that our time is a key changing point in world urbanization trends.

² Doug Saunders, *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 1.

³ E.A. Sorum, *Change: Mission & Ministry Across Cultures* (Milwaukee: WELS Outreach Resources, 1997), 163.

This great migration has already had a tremendous impact on our Western world, with diversity impacting virtually every corner of society. It has already had a tremendous impact on our churches, as small rural congregations shrink and as nearly all our congregations see more diversity in their mission fields. But in order to understand what is happening and to see how God's people should react, we need to start at the beginning. We can boil down the drastic changes we are seeing in North America to two key trends: urbanization and globalization.

Urbanization

It's not the first time this has happened. Whenever a rural society grows in population to the extent that there are "too many farmers and not enough land," something has to give. And so many of a generation's young people choose not to carry on the family farm, but instead to move to the city.⁴ When this happens in many rural communities all at the same time, there is an explosion of growth in urban areas. This is what we call urbanization. It happened in Europe in the late 1800's, resulting in exponential city growth and the Industrial Revolution. And it is happening again in Third World countries today.

Urbanization is happening in the developed world too, because there are other factors at work besides rural population growth. Technology also plays an important role in urbanization. During the Industrial Revolution, mechanical technologies led to an absolute explosion in factory jobs. Factories were in cities, so people came to the city to work. We see the same thing happening today in developed nations like the United States. The U.S. has developed such sophisticated farming technology that it has taken away many farmers' jobs. They simply have no choice but to move to the big cities and find other means of employment. There are lots of jobs in the cities. In our electronic age more and more white-collar workers are heading to the cities to run the world's businesses. Service jobs and physical labor jobs are available in the cities too, for all kinds of workers are needed to serve the massive populations there.

So we see that all over the world, for various reasons, people from the country are moving to the city. In 1900 about 8% of the world's population lived in big cities. Today that statistic is over 50%.⁵ And it is estimated that by 2050, more than 70% of people in the world will live in urban areas.⁶ It is

⁴ Keller, Timothy J. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 154.

⁵ Susan S. Baker, Harvie M. Conn, and Manuel Ortiz, *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World* (Phillipsburg: P & R Pub., 2002), 29.

⁶ Saunders, *Arrival City*, 22.

difficult to even visualize the sheer number of people we are talking about here.⁷ And stopping this trend would be nothing short of impossible. As the world's population grows and as farming technology advances, people are forced to the cities to survive. Eventually a "sweet spot" seems to appear in developed countries, when there are just enough farmers in the country to provide nourishment for the nation:⁸

The wealthy nations of North America, Europe, Australasia, and Japan, which were largely peasant-populated as recently as the late nineteenth century, today are between 72 and 95 percent urban, figures that have not changed in decades. In most of these countries, less than 5% of the population is employed in agriculture; this is still enough to produce more export food than all the peasant-heavy countries of the developing world combined.⁹

Urbanization is most dramatic in developing countries as more and more people flood to their cities each day, but it is happening everywhere. Major cities across North America are constantly being filled with a swarm of people from other regions of the continent. Cities are in vogue; they're "the place to be"—and it's easy to see why. In addition to jobs, cities are leaders of commerce and culture. In order to do business on a global stage, find recognition as an artist, or be exposed to the latest fashions and trends, you simply have to move to the city. And the bigger the city, the better.

Globalization

But people from the country are not just moving *to nearby cities*. They are moving to cities all over the globe. Modern transportation has made it easier than ever for immigrants to travel across the world, and Internet technology permits them to stay connected back home. As a result there are now more people immigrating to other countries than there have ever been before. And when immigrants move from the developing world to the developed, they are drawn swiftly and predictably to major urban areas. Cities are where the jobs are, cities are where cheap apartments are, and cities are where other recent immigrants are. All these factors are filling the world's cities with more and more immigrants from various countries, and as a result we see a level of racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity in our biggest cities that is above and beyond anything our world has experienced. There can also be significant economic diversity among immigrants. Many Americans think of all immigrants as poor refugees with nothing but the clothes on their backs, but this is not always the case. Illegal immigrants may often be

⁷ "If the urban to rural ration of [developing countries'] populations stabilizes near 75 percent to 25 percent, as it did in Europe and North America, the next three decades will see over half a billion people move into the cities of Africa and Asia alone—in other words, one new Rio de Janeiro (ten million people) *every two months*." (Keller, *Center Church*, 154.)

⁸ Although ironically, many food-rich countries still have to import food due to spoilage, theft, and inefficient shipping methods of their own products.

⁹ Saunders, *Arrival City*, 21-22.

poor, but North America is also gladly taking in the doctors, lawyers, and other wealthy, skilled workers from around the world. This just adds to the complexity—big cities have lots of both rich and poor immigrants. And once again, the bigger the city, the better.

All this globalization has resulted in a special type of city—an enormous, highly diverse metropolis with huge numbers of people from just about everywhere. For the purposes of this paper I will refer to this type of area as a “global city.” A few modern examples of global cities would be London, New York City, and Toronto. All three of these cities have huge populations. They all have powerful, almost city-state-like influence on the areas around them. And they all are absolutely bursting with immigrants.¹⁰

Urbanization. Globalization. You view the statistics any way you want but the conclusion is obvious. These things are happening and will continue to happen until, as Saunders says, “we end this century as a wholly urban species.”¹¹ We are entering a new age in world history. America cut its teeth in a world that was very rural. That world is changing. Can the Christian church change with it? Can WELS change with it? If we take God’s Word seriously, we have to.

God Cares about Cities

The global cities of our world are each filled with millions and millions of people. And people are something God cares very much about. God demonstrated his unique love for human beings at the very beginning of the Bible when he created them with special care and affection in the Garden of Eden. God didn’t make mankind simply by his word, as he did the other animals. Instead, the Bible says “God created man in his own image.”¹² Man was molded from the dust of the ground, and God himself breathed life into him. And later God handmade a woman from Adam’s rib and placed her by his side. Man and woman were given the special task of ruling over the rest of creation, of filling the earth and subduing it.¹³ As Augustine famously stated, “You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹⁴ God delighted to create mankind in his image and for himself. And ever since then God has cared for and watched over people. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God immediately promised a Savior.¹⁵ He gave his Old Testament people all sorts of shadows and signs and

¹⁰ About 36% of New York City’s inhabitants were born outside the USA (New York City Department of City Planning, 2005), 33% of Londoners were born outside of the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2010), and nearly 50% of Torontonians were born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011).

¹¹ Clearly an overstatement, but the point is clear—we will soon become far more urban than rural.

¹² Genesis 1:27, New International Version (All Bible quotations in this paper are taken from the NIV)

¹³ Genesis 1-2

¹⁴ Augustine’s Confessions Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5.

¹⁵ Genesis 3:15

types to sustain their faith and point to the Messiah, and when the time had fully come God sent his own Son to earth in a real human body to suffer and die for all people, to redeem all people from sin. At the end of the Bible the Savior himself commanded his disciples¹⁶ to preach the gospel to all of the earth, so that people everywhere may know him and be brought to glory in heaven. The Bible is an incredible book; it's nothing other than a love story—albeit a one-sided one—between God and the human race.

God loves people, whom he created in his own image. And cities contain more people, both in population density and in sheer number, than anywhere else. Tim Keller writes, “Cities have more of the image of God per square inch than any other place on earth.”¹⁷ Unfortunately their image of God has been lost. Perhaps a better way to phrase it would be that cities have more people *who need to be restored to the image of God* per square inch than any other place on earth. Cities dominated by unbelievers are cities dominated by the image of Satan. But this is just all the more reason that God, who wants all men to be saved, cares so much about them! Don't just take my word for it, though. Listen to God himself. In the book of Jonah God called his unwilling prophet to Nineveh—a city that was not just foreign but pagan and evil. It was also the capital city of Israel's enemy, Assyria. 120,000 people lived there (more than nearly any other city at that time) and it exerted city-state-like influence around the entire area. It was the Ancient Near East's closest equivalent to a modern “global city.” Nineveh was headed straight into the punishment that it thoroughly deserved, but God was so concerned about all the people who lived there that he first sent Jonah to preach repentance. After a once-in-a-lifetime fishy detour Jonah finally made it to Nineveh, where he preached God's Word—and sure enough, the whole city repented and was spared God's judgment!

You might remember Jonah's interesting reaction to this amazing act of mercy. He pouted! It wasn't necessarily because he was afraid of cities or because he was a racist. It was because he feared the well-publicized brutality and violence of the Assyrian nation. And sure enough, in the coming years Assyria would be a giant thorn in Israel's side. Now, God certainly detested Assyria's idolatry and their violent, murderous lifestyle—after all, he was prepared to destroy the whole city of Nineveh if they didn't repent! But as we see throughout the rest of the Bible, God's love wins out over his wrath. Even though Nineveh was very sinful, it was still full of people—people whom God loved. And God showed Jonah exactly how he felt about it. “But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left. . . . Should I not be concerned about that great city?”¹⁸

¹⁶ Matthew 28:20

¹⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 141.

¹⁸ Jonah 4:11

So God is concerned about cities, but he also wants his people to be concerned about cities. When the Israelites were taken captive into the great global city of Babylon, God didn't tell them to hide and tremble in fear of all the evil people that lived there. Instead he told them, essentially, to "bloom where they were planted"—to live lives that glorified him in the city, and to pray for its well-being.¹⁹ Although his people were in exile, God could still work things for good by making the Israelites a witness to all the unbelievers around them. We should take the same attitude towards cities today. Cities are not places to avoid. They aren't places where only the heathen live, and if we're stuck in them we should flee to the suburbs as quickly as possible or else hide out and try not to be noticed. No, God wants us to be salt and light for the world in cities just like everywhere else. In our prayers, in our attitudes, and in our actions we should treat cities the way God treats them—important oceans of humanity who desperately need to know the gospel from our lips and from our lives.

Early Church Mission Strategy

In the New Testament Jesus commanded his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and as the apostles went out to preach, they naturally reached out to cities because that's where the most people lived. Peter, James, and other early church leaders did plenty of work in their home base city of Jerusalem. Paul and his companions went to other cities on missionary trips. The focus on cities is notable, because the disciples were living in and reaching out to a new kind of world. Their world was more connected than it had ever been before. It had increasing numbers of people gathering in urban areas. In short, it was a world with many similarities to ours today.

Remember all the different factors which God used to spread the gospel in the days of the early Christian church? The *pax romana* gave people a break from just trying to survive in wartime and enabled the gospel to spread peacefully. Greek became the *lingua franca* which enabled people from all over the Mediterranean world to communicate with an ease they had previously lacked. The Roman road system improved overland travel dramatically from where it had been just a few centuries before. All of these factors didn't just enable the gospel to spread—they also enabled people to get to cities and enabled cities to become diverse. Cultures and worldviews were constantly clashing in cramped city living. Even among God's children there were racial issues. Paul had to remind people, "For there is no difference between Jew and Greek—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him."²⁰ The similarities to our world are striking. You only have to glance through the book of Acts to see that Paul

¹⁹ Jeremiah 29:4-7

²⁰ Romans 10:12

and the apostles were doing ministry in a globalizing, urbanizing world. Without presuming that our ministry contexts are identical to theirs, let's take a look at some of the strategies they used and see what we can apply to North America today.

City-states in the Roman world²¹ were the biggest, the most diverse, and the most influential cities—just like the global cities of today. The apostles recognized that these bustling, mostly heathen trading hubs had awesome potential for gospel outreach. This is why, while they didn't exclude rural villages,²² Paul and the other missionaries seemed to focus primarily on the biggest cities possible.

In Acts 17, Paul travels to Athens, the *intellectual* center of the Greco-Roman world. In Acts 18, he goes to Corinth, one of the *commercial* centers of the empire. In Acts 19, he arrives in Ephesus, perhaps the Roman world's *religious* center, the hub of many pagan cults and particularly of the imperial cult, with three temples for emperor worship. By the end of Acts, Paul has made it to Rome itself, the empire's capital of *military and political power*. John Stott concludes, "It seems to have been Paul's deliberate policy to move purposefully from one strategic city-centre to the next."²³

Former WLS President David Valleskey adds,

Paul evidently saw these cities as hubs from which the gospel could radiate into the rest of the provinces. That is exactly what appears to have happened. He preached the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia, and "the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region" (Acts 13:49.) He preached the gospel in Thessalonica, and the Lord's message rang out from there into the rest of Macedonia and even into Achaia and beyond (1 Thessalonians 1:8). He preached the gospel in Corinth, and it spread into the surrounding province of Achaia (2 Corinthians 1:1, Romans 16:1). He preached the gospel in Ephesus, and "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" as "the word of the Lord spread widely" (Acts 19:10,20). Paul thus evangelized whole provinces or regions of provinces by evangelizing the strategic city of the province or region.²⁴

Valleskey goes on to point out that cities are just as strategically important today if not more so, but ironically, it is for a different reason. In Paul's day cities were important because people were traveling from the cities outward. Today, cities are important because people are moving from the outside inward. Either way the concept is clear. Big cities have lost none of their importance for mission work since the first century world. In fact, they're probably more important today in our hyper-urbanized, hyper-globalized world.

²¹ Rome, Corinth, and Athens, were perhaps the three foremost city-states of the time. Paul preached in all of them and wrote major letters to two of the three.

²² The account of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14) explains how the peasant crowd of Lystra attempted to deify Paul and Barnabas and when that failed, decided to stone them instead.

²³ Keller, *Center Church*, 148.

²⁴ David Valleskey, *A Portrait of Paul* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002), 59.

Let's take a closer look at exactly why big cities are so important for mission work. First of all, there are obviously way more people in big cities than anywhere else. Christ-like love for sinners motivates Christians to reach out to all of them. But there was another reason the disciples reached out to the largest cities they could find: they had great influence on the culture. The same thing is true today. Modern cities sit at the cutting edge of art, pop culture, and technology, and they exert a sort of peer pressure on the areas around them. Many people from the country look up to the city and copy the fashions, fads, and even the vocabulary which the city produces. If a message catches fire in the city, it naturally spreads out to the suburbs and rural areas. But it's not just a one-way street. People come to cities from all over the place. Then they travel back to their homes and farms and villages, or at the very least they continue to communicate with their friends and relatives in suburban and rural areas. Because of this, when the gospel is planted in the city there are all kinds of places it can go.

There were, and still are, all kinds of advantages to focusing on city outreach. Interestingly, the early church seems to have been much more urban than Christianity is today. Pastor Tim Keller writes, "By the year 300 AD, 50% of the urban populations of the Roman empire were Christian, while over 90% of the countryside was still pagan. . . . the very word 'pagan' comes from the Greek word *paganus*, meaning a farmer or man of the country."²⁵

If we accept the early church's ministry model of intentionally seeking out the biggest cities not just because they are population centers because they are key leaders of the culture, we cannot possibly look at our world today without getting excited. Cities were a vital key to the spread of the gospel in Bible times, when urbanization and globalization were happening to an extent—so in our hyper-urbanized and hyper-globalized world, the possibilities are endless! Consider the number of different countries that might be represented in a diverse global congregation.²⁶ The congregation members may well have personal connections with people on every inhabited continent! This is no small matter when you consider today's technology, which allows immigrants to keep in touch back home better than ever before.

²⁵ Timothy Keller, "Advancing the Gospel into the 21st Century Part IV: City-Focused Strategy," *The Movement*, 2004, http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/tim_keller_2004--4_advancing_the_gospel_into_the_21st_century_part_4.pdf (accessed December 10, 2012.)

²⁶ Last year on Pentecost Sunday, Hope Church in Toronto put a world map up on the wall and had each member stick a pushpin into their home country. By the time everyone had left the church there were pins in 17 different countries!

I think we've established how important and logical it is to do ministry in the biggest cities. You would think that as the mission-minded synod we are, global cities would be foremost in our thoughts. So why are we hardly doing any mission work in them today?

Where is the WELS?

The WELS' near-absence in global cities is unsettling, but in order to understand why we are the way we are today we need to look at our history. It's not just global cities. The majority of WELS ministry hasn't been done in cities at all. This goes all the way back to our synod's beginnings. The various groups which eventually joined to create WELS as we know it today were mostly made up of European immigrants. They were coming to a country which was urbanizing, but nothing close to as thoroughly urbanized as it is today. Unlike today's immigrants, who seem to gather first in big cities, many of our German, Norwegian, and their ancestors were farmers.²⁷ "Circuit riders" and country pastors served a body of tough, rugged pioneers. Simply because of our synod's origins, it's not surprising that many of the oldest churches in WELS are in the country.

However, the WELS was never completely devoid of city work. One example is "Grace Downtown." Grace Lutheran Church is one of the very oldest churches in the WELS, founded by Johann Muehlheuser himself²⁸ in 1859. Grace sits in the heart of downtown Milwaukee today, just two blocks off Water Street, an area which has been the heart of the city ever since Muehlheuser's time. Some sort of big city presence was a necessity. There was no way for the WELS to get really organized among a scattered bunch of farms, so the city of Milwaukee became our early headquarters and has stayed that way through the years. As a result we have more churches in and around Milwaukee than any other city. But big-city churches are not the norm in our circles. As the synod grew and planted churches, a trend began that has now become a commonly quoted stereotype: "The Missouri Synod took the cities while the Wisconsin Synod took the country." I'm not sure why the WELS stayed out of the cities while Missouri didn't, but it did make sense to have a lot of country churches, since we were a mostly German synod and most of the Germans were farmers. We have a rural heritage and history which still affects our preferences today. Pastor Mark Jeske wrote in a *Forward in Christ* article in 1998,

WELS has never been an urban church body. Our roots and emotional center have always been country and small-town churches. We are like the people of Lake Wobegon, who, Garrison Keillor says, "when confronted with life's big choices, went unhesitatingly for the small

²⁷ Technology hadn't yet taken away rural jobs and forced farmers' kids to the cities.

²⁸ Muehlheuser was the founder of the Wisconsin Synod.

potatoes.” We chose to invest manpower in Hadar, Neb., long before Omaha; Colome, S.D.; before Sioux Falls; Fort Morgan, Colo., before Denver.²⁹

All this made sense back in the days when we were a synod of German farmers. But the obvious question is, “Since we’re not made up primarily of immigrant farmers anymore, why are we still doing so little mission work in big cities?” I would like to say that it’s not ever the result of racism, classism, or complacency—but I’m not sure that’s always true. When I asked one WELS member from the Los Angeles area what he thought was holding our synod back from urban mission work, he was brutally honest. He said, “Don’t kid yourself. People would rather witness to their suburban neighbors than to a homeless guy. It’s as simple as that.” We all need to examine our hearts and motives and make sure we are viewing things in the proper perspective. We are so incredibly blessed by God to belong to an orthodox church body and to live in a country with freedom of religion, but I pray we don’t become complacent. A hunger to reach out to the lost must trump our personal prejudices and biases. If we are avoiding reaching out to people in the cities because we are too self-centered, then shame on us. However, on a synodical level I think there may be some other explanations.

Maybe we’re afraid of failure. Our old, strong, well-established city churches in Milwaukee took a big-time hit during the 1970’s and 1980’s, as America’s inner-city demographic became primarily African-American and “white flight” sent many of our core members to the suburbs. Formerly prosperous churches found themselves slowly aging and shrinking and were forced to reach out to their new neighbors or die. Many of them didn’t make it.³⁰ Other urban churches in Milwaukee, like St. Marcus, Garden Homes, and Atonement, have managed to re-invent themselves as diverse community churches, but the transition hasn’t been an easy one. If we had been quicker to embrace new members with a different skin color than our own, it might have been easier. The concept that “city mission work is just too hard” is not intrinsically true, but it is one excuse that gets offered up because of past history.

Maybe we’re just afraid to live in cities. I believe our limited experiences in inner-city Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, and the like have given our synod as a whole some incorrect stereotypes of what all inner cities are like. Contrary to popular suburban belief, many inner cities are not virtual war zones where gangs rule the streets and children grow up in a vicious, multi-generational cycle of poverty. This is especially untrue for the global cities. The more globalized an area, the more it differs from what

²⁹ Mark Jeske, “Concern for the City,” *Forward in Christ*, 1 September 1998, <http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/september-1998/concern-city> (accessed December 10, 2012.)

³⁰ It is interesting to read the *Central City Spiritual Service Study* from 1973, a survey of churches between Hampton and Greenfield Ave. in Milwaukee focusing on their plans for the future. The churches clearly have mixed feelings about the changing neighborhood. Relocation has been discussed. Some churches feel more optimistic than others but many of them consider themselves quite secure. Now fast-forward 40 years. Of the 15 churches surveyed, only 11 are still in existence today. The churches that were shrinking in 1973 all died. And the other churches seemed blissfully unaware of huge adjustments they would have to make just to survive.

many of us in the Midwest think of when we picture an “inner city.” An inner-city neighborhood filled with immigrants can be much more of a cheerful place, an exciting place, a place of opportunity. Immigrants have typically risked all they have to take a shot at the success in a new country. They are not “stuck” in these poor neighborhoods with no way out. On the contrary, they’ve done everything they can to get there! They are working hard to make the most of this opportunity and earn enough money to move on to the suburbs, leaving the inner-city for the next wave of immigrants. Thus although there are still problems of crime and poverty, a very diverse, globalized inner city may function as more of a stepping stone than a dead end. Many of these areas are what Doug Saunders describes as “arrival cities.”

Arrival cities are known around the world by many names: as the slums, *favelas*, *barrios* of the developing world, but also as the immigrant neighborhoods, ethnic districts, urban slums, migrant suburbs of wealthy countries, which are themselves each year absorbing two million people, mainly villagers, from the developing world. . . . When we look at arrival cities, we tend to see them as fixed entities: an accumulation of inexpensive dwellings containing poor people, usually in less than salubrious conditions. In the language of urban planners and governments, these enclaves are too often defined as static appendages, cancerous growths on an otherwise healthy city.³¹

Saunders goes on to explain that although some arrival cities fail for various reasons and turn into dangerous “ghettos,” properly functioning arrival cities can actually be of great benefit to society.

(The arrival city) is, in the most successful parts of both the developing world and the Western world, the key instrument in creating a new middle class, abolishing the horrors of rural poverty and ending inequality. . . The arrival city functions as a *network*. . . an *entry mechanism*. . . an *urban establishment platform*. . . a *social-mobility path*. . . the arrival city is a machine that transforms humans. It is also, if allowed to flourish, the instrument that will create a permanently sustainable world.³²

Most inner cities are simply not as dangerous as they’re made out to be. The drugs and crime are often not as bad as outsiders assume, especially in global inner cities full of immigrants. But maybe it’s not crime we’re afraid of—maybe it’s the postmodern worldview. The bigger the city, the more it becomes an eclectic mash-up of cultures, opinions, worldviews, and beliefs. You can walk past a group of philosophy students, a homeless beggar, a wealthy businessman, and a Muslim woman dressed in full *hijab* without even blinking an eye. Every kind of culture is accepted in the city—except, often, “narrow-minded” Christians who claim to hold the only absolute truth. Cities seem to hold an irresistible draw for America’s youth. Keller states, “According to the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Atlantic*, approximately 32 percent of Americans in the Millennial generation live in cities—and 88 percent of them want to.”³³ So many Christian young adults have traveled off to the big city and lost their faith amidst the bright lights

³¹ Saunders, *Arrival City*, 18-19.

³² Saunders, *Arrival City*, 19-27.

³³ Keller, *Center Church*, 158.

and postmodern haze that I wonder if we have started to view the city as a spiritual deathtrap, instead of a great mission field where God wants us to go.

I also wonder if we have become spoiled by our country's relatively Christianized culture. Sure, we live in a society alongside evolutionists, atheists, and agnostics. Sure, many Americans are "slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful. . .senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless."³⁴ But most of them have at least heard of Jesus or of the Christian church before. Christianity is still a factor in their lives, even if they don't believe it. And there are still areas with an old-timey Christian view where going to church is just part of the culture. Take, for example, the Bible Belt in the American South. Pastors in those regions have been doing great work for years amongst a largely Christianized populace. The big issues down there are decision theology, Baptist theology, low view of the sacraments, etc. Like anywhere, there are blessings and challenges. There is lots of work to be done. But most people in this area of the country have some type of Christianity in their background. At least outwardly, America is still a Christian nation with Christian concepts. After all, what's more American than Christmas, a holiday based originally on our Savior's birth? But this is precisely what makes big cities so different—*big cities aren't "American" anymore*. They are quickly becoming a mash-up of people from all over the world, many of whom were not born and raised in a country with Christian presuppositions, and who may know very little of Christmas, Christ, or the Bible.

This isn't going to go away. Anthropologists, economists, basically everybody agrees that urbanization and globalization are going to continue for the foreseeable future and the world will become more and more diverse in every way you can think of. The big, "non-American" cities are not places to be ignored, pushed aside, or overlooked. They are the future. The tough question we need to ask ourselves as a synod is this one: "How long can we hide out in the Midwest and Bible-Belt South, and ignore what is slowly and surely happening in our country?" It isn't just a Great Commission issue—it's a survival issue. We can't remain a rural synod forever. If we don't make our way to the cities we will gradually shrink and die out. (See Appendices 2 and 3 for graphs demonstrating the steady decline in WELS membership over the last quarter century.)

If you want more proof, just look at the latest presidential election. Mitt Romney secured the white rural vote, like Republicans thought he would—but it still wasn't enough. President Obama won because he got the minorities, immigrants, and big cities. Romney would have needed to win almost every single swing state just to have a fighting chance. This last election made it painfully apparent to Republicans that the demographics of America are changing and the rural, white vote is not going to win

³⁴ Romans 1:30-31

them the country anymore. We have to acknowledge this same culture shift if we want to make an impact now and in America's future. We have to realize that our rural, white roots are becoming a thing of the past. In order to impact our changing society we must get into the cities and share the gospel with all these newcomers. Even here in the "WELS heartland" of the Midwest, we can see the influence that liberal big cities wield on the politics of a whole state. As cities continue to grow, our whole society will gradually become more diverse, more liberal, and less Christian. We can't all transplant ourselves to the Bible Belt where Christianity is still popular. We can't just surround ourselves with likeminded people. We have to be comfortable doing ministry in liberal environments where there are many who disagree with us.

It's all too easy to sit back and let others do the work. We may watch the WELS Connection and take pride in some of the fine urban work that is being done in Milwaukee and Minneapolis. We may feel as though we've got that niche filled. We pat ourselves on the collective back for doing urban ministry. But the fact is that Milwaukee, the Twin Cities, and other familiar places of WELS urban ministry are still not the hotspots of where our culture is going. Take Milwaukee for example, where almost all of our urban teaching and preaching ministries are. Yes, Milwaukee is a city; yes, it has more than one ethnic group, but it is not on the cutting edge of these trends. Urbanization and globalization are at their greatest in the huge cities of North America, many of which are on the coasts. In Milwaukee we are feeling ripples of diversity and migration, but the real waves are crashing into North America's global cities. It is the global cities that have not just the most people but also the most immigrants, providing a constant flow of gospel opportunities. And it is in the global cities that we are falling utterly short.

Let's take a moment to clarify. What is a "global city?" Statistics can be misleading. It is difficult to compare the true size or diversity of the biggest cities, because population statistics are skewed by the sprawling suburbs around many cities. There are lots of variables. But in order to account for both urbanization and globalization, let's take a look at North America's top ten most populated metropolitan areas and also the top ten cities with the most immigrants.

Most Populated

Rank	City	Population	Year	Country
1	Mexico City	21,163,226	2010	Mexico
2	New York	19,069,796	2010	United States
3	Los Angeles	12,828,837	2010	United States
4	Chicago	9,461,105	2010	United States

5	Dallas-Fort Worth	6,526,548	2011	United States
6	Houston	6,086,538	2011	United States
7	Toronto	6,054,191	2011	Canada
8	Philadelphia	5,965,343	2010	United States
9	Washington D.C.	5,582,170	2010	United States
10	Miami	5,564,635	2010	United States

Most Immigrants

Rank	City	Immigrant Population	% of Total Population	Year
1	Toronto ³⁵	2,333,000	49.9%	2006
2	Miami ³⁶	1,994,677	36.92%	2010
3	San Jose	649,751	36.31%	2010
4	Vancouver	831,000	35.9%	2006
5	Los Angeles	4,394,068	34.28%	2010
6	San Francisco	1,245,521	29.5%	2010
7	New York City	5,317,616	28.10%	2010
8	Chicago	1,675,949	17.64%	2010
9	Dallas-Fort Worth	1,090,385	17.73%	2010
10	Washington D.C.	1,073, 591	20.23%	2010

As you probably noticed, there are seven cities which make both of these lists: New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, Toronto, Washington D.C., and Miami. For simplicity's sake let's define these seven as North America's greatest "global cities." Now let's take a look at how many WELS congregations there are in these places. The following numbers were tabulated using the WELS locator (<http://welslocator.locatorsearch.com>), calibrated to find WELS churches within 20 miles of each global city.

New York City: 2 churches. (Sure Foundation in Queens, plus I'm adding Grace of God on Long Island because that's arguably a global city of its own.)

³⁵ Vancouver and Toronto Statistics taken from Statistics, Canada, 2006 (<http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-557/p29-eng.cfm>)

³⁶ All figures taken from 2010 U.S. Census "American Community Survey" (<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>)

Chicago: 6. (Some are suburban like Jerusalem Morton Grove, Palos Lutheran in Palos Heights, and St. Matthew's in Niles. Only 3 are in the center city of Chicago. St. Matthew's in Niles is actually extremely globalized, more so than any of the others, even though it's 20 miles out of the center city.)

Los Angeles: 3. (One is in North Hollywood and one is in Torrance. Only one is in the center city of L.A.)

Dallas: 3. (One is in Duncanville and one is in Garland. Only one is in the center city of Dallas.)

Toronto: 2. (One is in Mississauga, which is an affluent suburb. Only one is in the center city of Toronto.)

Washington D.C: 0.

Miami: 1.

To sum up this portion of the paper, WELS has 17 churches within a 20-mile radius of the top ten global cities in North America. That's 17 churches for 65,087,282 people (or just one church for every 3,828,663 people!)³⁷ If we take a closer look, we see that the numbers don't tell the whole story. Even when we do get into the largest, most globalized cities, often we find ourselves working primarily in the suburbs and staying out of the true urban center. Of the 17 churches listed above, 8 are in suburbs or other townships. This doesn't mean that they are always less globalized. Sometimes pockets of the suburbs are the most globalized areas of all; it's different for every city. In many cases, however, we are staying in areas that are more within our comfort zone instead of "taking the plunge" to the inner cities and the global neighborhoods. Even when we do have churches in globalized neighborhoods, not all are "neighborhood churches." Some are still primarily serving white commuters who have moved out of the area.

I think the shortfall in these numbers is pretty obvious. I'm not suggesting that numbers are the best way to indicate our success in gospel ministry, nor am I knocking the sufficiency of the gospel or the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm also not ignoring the fact that we've had financial troubles for a while and we haven't been able to open many missions for the last decade or so. But it is a simple fact that we have a ludicrously low number of churches in the very places where the opportunities may be the ripest. It's true that the suburbs of these big cities usually have more money, more people like us, and are more in

³⁷ Compare that to our 438 churches for the 5,686,986 people in Wisconsin (just 12,983 people per church!)

our comfort zone. But the center cities usually have more people, more unbelievers, more immigrants rotating through, and thus more evangelism opportunities.

I am trying to avoid generalizing, which is basically impossible because cities are so vastly different from one another. For example, in some places (like Dearborn, Michigan near Detroit, and Niles, Illinois near Chicago) the suburbs are actually more globalized than the inner city. In those situations the suburbs may be the places providing us with the most ministry opportunities. I am not trying to paint a universal picture of global city ministry. The bottom line is that every setting is different. Each pastor needs to figure out his setting and minister there to the best of his ability. But we can't do anything in global cities if we don't put pastors in these settings! No matter what the various cities, suburbs, and global neighborhoods are like, a Great Commission-focused evangelism plan in America today simply must include global cities. We can't put a few churches in the suburbs and say, "Good enough." We have to reach in to the great mission field of immigrants inside these vast metropolises. Global cities, with their core of Hindus, Muslims, and postmodern atheists, are a spiritual desert where millions are thirsting for the gospel. We must break in and bring people the Water of Life. ***Having fewer churches in all the inner global cities put together than we do in some Wisconsin towns is not going to cut it.*** We need a synod-wide change in our thinking. We need to get serious about global cities.

Challenges of Global City Ministry

I've been pushing hard so far for global city ministry with its many opportunities, but it would be foolish to act as though this were easy. No ministry is easy in a sinful world, and because global city ministry is different and out of the box for us, it presents us with a set of different and outside-the-box challenges.

The first challenge is so obvious that it doesn't even occur to us sometimes. WELS pastors aren't used to big-city life! Most of our pastors grew up in rural or suburban settings, and switching to the city is much more of an adjustment than we realize. Even a pastor who is a remarkably flexible and adaptable person still needs to deal with culture shock. Once the early "tourist mentality" and excitement phase wears off, reality sets in. This is not a vacation. He will not be "going home" anytime soon. The city now is his home. This challenge is compounded by the fact that it's not just the pastor serving in the city; his family is also living there. An urban missionary doesn't just need to be adaptable; he also needs a wife and kids who are also willing to go out of their comfort zone and adapt to an urban lifestyle that is new to them too. Global city pastor Tim Spiegelberg (Hope Lutheran Church, Toronto, ON) comments via email interview:

After the initial excitement faded, the adjustment took longer than I expected. I had to learn cultural differences from 22 different countries in addition to Canadian differences. In addition, I had never served in such a large city. My family have adapted well, although there are still some difficulties with education. There are many things to which our family is exposed here in the city that they had never come into contact with in a smaller Midwest setting.

Another challenge is the anti-Christian nature of big-city culture. There are several reasons why big cities have earned such an anti-Christian reputation. First, the huge population makes cities a gathering place for social outcasts. No matter how weird or deviant your behavior may be, you can probably find a kindred spirit in a big city. Cities provide a haven for homosexuals, activists, liberals, free-thinkers, and others who may not be accepted in the more conservative rural areas where they were raised. American cities are also well-known for being filled with postmodern thinkers who eschew organized religion and absolute truth in favor of “tolerance” and subjectivity. This means that many city dwellers don’t want to go to church. After all, some of them came to the city to get away from church! Others are young and affluent professionals who have no time or felt need for church. Cities can give off a mood of apathy and unfriendliness towards all religion, especially Christianity.

But it’s not just atheists running all the cities. Pagan religions are flourishing in today’s global cities. It shouldn’t surprise us that religion still abounds amidst the postmodern minefields. The human heart will always thirst for God and natural knowledge will always leave people looking for a higher power. Many people in the cities still are looking for religion (especially immigrants, who typically come there for jobs, family, or security, not to escape their conservative background.) Unfortunately, too many are getting it in the wrong places. Islam is growing at an astounding rate in North America.

Most of the projected Islamic growth (in the Americas) will take place in North America, particularly in the U.S. and Canada. If current trends continue, the Muslim population in the United States is projected to more than double in the next 20 years, from 2.6 million in 2010 to 6.2 million in 2030. Canada’s Muslim population is expected to nearly triple, climbing from 940,000 in 2010 to 2.7 million in 2030.³⁸

The majority of these Muslims are immigrants, and you know where that means they’re going to be. . . . the big cities.

Every big city is different but in Toronto, where I vicared at Hope Lutheran Church, many immigrants are attracted to Islam. One reason for this is the physical aid that Islam provides to them. All a person has to do is say their prayers and come to the *masjid*, and in return, other Muslims will look out

³⁸ Statistics from Pewforum.org, a project of the Pew Research Center, January 27, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-regional-americas.aspx> (accessed February 6, 2013).

for their physical needs. Sometimes you will see a “Muslim relief van” driving around Toronto with a bunch of food for Muslims. Islam is growing at a tremendous rate in cities all over the world and in some places it is actually taking over sections of major cities. The number of mosques, *particularly in the most immigrant-driven, urban places*, is as high as or higher than the number of churches. Sharia law has even been imposed in big-city neighborhoods in France, England, etc. Soon it will be in Canada and possibly areas of the United States as well. Former mission counselor John Huebner comments in an email interview,³⁹

Islam is making strong headway in major cities and elsewhere. It is frightening to me to see how rapidly they are growing. I do not know what they are doing besides intentionally serving their own people (many immigrants are of Arabic background...similar to the way we served primarily German speakers in our early history)...but there is something about their law and order approach that seems to offer hope to many in the inner cities. Their emphasis on moral conduct makes them appealing to abandoned women who long for that in their husbands.⁴⁰

Hinduism is also popular in big cities, not so much because of recruitment but because lots of Indians and other immigrants were Hindus long before they ever got here. Huebner writes, “In Queens, I once saw about 100 Hindus gathered in an open alley with some kind of ceremony going on.” I saw something similar in Toronto, actually downtown in the world-famous Dundas Square at the heart of the city. A large group of Hindus were chanting the “Hare Krishna” and inviting passersby to come to a huge Hindu parade in the following weeks, which was being marketed as an Indian “cultural celebration.” The Hindu missionary who approached me was very nice. If I were a new immigrant with no friends in the city and a felt need for religion, I might have taken him up on his friendly offer to join in what amounts to idol worship. Not only are people living in an anti-Christian culture in these cities—*in many cases they are being actively recruited by Satan*.

Yet another challenge is racial diversity. This is a big one for our predominantly white, German-descended synod. More and more WELS writing has been done in recent years on the importance of reaching out to other cultures that are different from our own. In Milwaukee and the other cities where WELS has more experience, we have become used to some racial diversity in the form of Black, White, and Hispanic areas, with some Hmong immigrants occasionally added to the mix. In a global inner city all of this is blown out of the water. Truly global diversity is really a sight to behold. In some places you

³⁹ Via email interview

⁴⁰ It is probably useful to note here a distinction between “Islam” and “Nation of Islam.” Nation of Islam is an organization founded in Detroit in the 1930’s, which has grown to popularity in some of America’s big cities. Nation of Islam is a racially motivated group that is so extreme some consider it to be Black Supremacist. It is not the same as the Mohammedan religion that allegedly goes all the way back to Ishmael. Actual Muslims look down on Nation of Islam as heretics and not true believers. Actual Muslims, often from African and Arabian countries, are the ones that seem to be impacting global cities the most.

can go to every door of an apartment building and find somebody from a different country. Cross-cultural ministry is no longer a choice you have to make as your neighborhood turns over—instead, you literally have no choice. Your church is a big jumble of different nationalities, and maybe the only culture you don't find much of is your own. Diversity can be fun at first, with different languages, foods, and music. But when it comes to different worldviews, communications, and thought patterns, cross-cultural work becomes very challenging. People naturally want to cling to others who are like them, and so prejudice and racism always end up cutting both ways. A pastor in an extremely multi-cultural setting will have to deal with his prejudices against other people's cultures, their prejudices against his culture, and their prejudices against one another's cultures.

Yet another challenge is the constantly changing nature of immigrant areas. The same revolving door which brings in so many new people also churns them out. Immigrants start out in the more affordable inner city but gradually get more established and move to the suburbs to raise their children. Other immigrants are refugees, who can be particularly transient. This is because refugees have no choice of where to live. They get put in government-subsidized housing and have to move around to wherever the government tells them. This can create difficulties in establishing long-term members. An inner global-city mission may bring in lots of new members—but some of these members have to move, go back home, or get deported when their refugee claim is rejected. It can feel like two steps forward and one step back. This can become a little different style of ministry than we are used to. Like any church there is a core of long-term members, but you also can find yourself in a situation where you are serving many immigrants for short periods of time.

All these challenges of global city ministry may seem daunting, but there are daunting challenges in every field of ministry. All of the challenges I just listed can also turn out as blessings, as we'll see in the next section. And in fact many other challenges, ones familiar to us from our rural settings, would not be present in an inner-city startup. For example, in a global city you will never have to worry about a lack of prospects. If you're starting in a new area, there is not an engrained, "keep-it-to-ourselves" mindset among your members—quite the opposite! There is also no long church history with stubborn, controlling families that have been there for several generations. None of the challenges listed so far should stop us from doing global city mission work. There is one big issue, however, which complicates things. This issue is *finances*.

Nearly every pastor that I interviewed talked about financial difficulties. Think about it: If you are trying to open a church in a global city, that usually means you're in one of the most expensive places to live in the world. Your congregation, however, is mostly made up of immigrants who have either spent

all the money they have to get to the city, or of refugees who are so poor that the congregation may be providing them with food, clothes, transportation, and even money when necessary. The revolving-door aspect keeps a number of your members shifting through. How can a congregation like this possibly become self-supporting in 3-5 years? How do they get a building for a reasonable price? You can't buy a field and build a church on it. You have to pay a boatload of money just to buy a small storefront. Where do we get the money? This is undoubtedly the biggest challenge which is keeping us out of global cities.

Blessings of Global City Ministry

Thankfully, God is able to work even all these challenges out for the good of his gospel. Each challenge can really be viewed as a blessing. First of all, life in a big city sharpens pastors in an increasingly postmodern world. It's one thing to read about postmodern thought, anti-Christian worldview, and the need for apologetics, but it's something completely different to experience these things firsthand. Spiegelberg writes,⁴¹ "My faith has been challenged and honed more so than ever before. When the city chews on you only two things may happen; either you become sharpened and honed in your faith, or you get spit out and sent back home." It may be a challenge to constantly butt up against different worldviews and religions, but it certainly doesn't make you weak. It is well documented that the best way to learn something is to teach it. Figuring out how to answer opposing viewpoints is a great blessing in helping pastors grow in their own understanding of Biblical doctrine. Pastor Paul Biedenbender, who serves at an inner city mission in Denver, relays his experiences:

With so many unique challenges and opportunities, continuing my own spiritual and professional growth has to happen for survival. I've thoroughly enjoyed studying cultures, urban missiology and church planting. . . . Keeping grounded in the Word is a also necessity and a "not always as obvious as it should be" blessing. Knowing I can go to the cross with my failures, with my worries, for strength and peace, for motivation—these things are certainly not unique to big city ministry, but they too are worth mentioning as a key aspect to my call.⁴²

Having his worldview challenged by competing worldviews is actually a great blessing to the spiritual city pastor.

Secondly, global city ministry is a valuable "beachhead" against the increasing menace of Islam and other pagan religions. We cannot sit by and allow Muslims and pagan faiths to spread their message all over the global cities, while we are keeping the gospel in the suburbs. Muslims need God too. They are afraid of the God they worship. Their religion is one of struggle and of fear. Like anyone else, they

⁴¹ Via email interview

⁴² Via email interview

need to hear about the true God whose love endures forever. Unfortunately, one of the effects of a fear-motivated and stifling religion like Islam is that once a person is “in” it can be very dangerous for them to convert to something else. We do need to reach out to Muslims no matter what the cost, but perhaps a more efficient strategy, in the words of Pastor Spiegelberg, is to “get them before they become Muslims.” In the Toronto arrival city where Spiegelberg serves, the Muslims are dishing out lots of physical aid to immigrants and sucking them into their mosques. They’re getting people “right off the boat,” so to speak, because they’re not afraid to set up shop in the bustling, dirty arrival city and reach out to them. We need to do the same. We don’t have the financial resources that Islam has but we have something better –the gospel of Jesus Christ. Global cities give us a better opportunity than anywhere else to share the gospel with immigrants before the Muslims get to them.

Another blessing: global city ministry puts you in contact with huge numbers of people. There is absolutely no shortage of prospects. The revolving door nature of the global inner city makes ministry like sitting by a stream full of spawning salmon. If you miss one, you just go after the next one. Do you want a prospect list? Do you want a mission field? Do you to take the gospel to all nations? Just sit on a sidewalk bench in a global city and watch what happens for half an hour. The whole world is there. This is a ministry much different from some of the rural areas we’ve become accustomed to, where it’s a challenge to find unchurched people or evangelism prospects. In a global city, the challenge is deciding which people to reach out to first. If nothing else, this sheer mass of humanity must turn our hearts to the cities. Being around so many unbelievers is a wonderful opportunity! We can’t view big cities as a black hole of anti-Christian thought and enemies of God who don’t deserve our time. These are the largest masses of humanity ever concentrated in one place! Don’t get me wrong, we must continue to present the gospel to Americans in rural and suburban areas. Just because many people already have a church and others are tired of Christianity doesn’t mean we stop working in those places. But look at what we’re missing out on! In global cities you can do the equivalent of global mission work right here at home. People always talk about how there is such a hunger for the gospel in places like China, because the Chinese haven’t heard Christian teachings before and it’s totally new and exciting for them. Do you realize that 285,000 Chinese people live in Toronto? Or that 445,000 Chinese people live in New York City? According to New York City pastor Tim Bourman, “You can reach cultures, races, and individuals in the city that you could never reach if they were in the home country. These people are dying without the gospel, but here in Queens you can reach them!”⁴³ It is not an exaggeration to say that in global cities, all nations really are at our doorstep. God isn’t subtly nudging us in the ribs with the missiological implication; he is beating us over the head with it!

⁴³ Via phone interview

Racial diversity may take us out of our comfort zone, but this is a good thing. The gospel is the answer to prejudice, racism, and cultural divisions. This is precisely what makes Christianity so special. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) The gospel brings about a special unity that transcends all earthly divisions. Seeing people from so many cultures praising one Lord is one of the most uplifting and heartwarming parts of serving in a global city. One of my neatest experiences while serving at Hope, Toronto was Pentecost Sunday. We read from the Bible about how God caused the gospel to be proclaimed in the many different languages of the world, and the rest of our service reflected the same global emphasis. On that Sunday, each member of Hope dressed in the traditional attire of their home country, turning our congregation into a joyful mosaic of flowing Indian robes, traditional South African dresses and bonnets, and the bright colors of the Caribbean. We sang the traditional African tune “Siyah Humba” (We Are Marching) with verses in five different languages. I still get chills thinking about the joy and excitement that practically overflowed from the church on that day. Diversity within a congregation is like a little glimpse of heaven. In Revelation 7 God describes the saints standing before his throne as belonging to every nation, tribe, people, and language. Heaven will be a joyful mixture of all different kinds of people. There’s no reason our earthly church shouldn’t seek to be the same.

The revolving-door aspect of global city ministry also has a strong upside. It lets you all learn from each other and grow together in faith, and when a person’s time there is done, they simply have to move on. It is sad but it’s not the end of the world. You’ve mutually strengthened one another’s faith, and now your members are moving on to apply the solid Christian teaching they’ve picked up from you elsewhere. Who knows how many people they will touch with the gospel in the new areas to which they travel! Global cities allow you to build the invisible Church even if not every person is able to stay in your visible church. If you have a constant ebb and flow of immigrants running through your congregation that means you are probably influencing an even larger chunk of the city. What has a greater effect—to gather and keep all your Christians in one little enclave, or to have them get sent all over the place? Why not rejoice at the opportunity to equip people with the gospel while they are with you, and then be excited for them to share it when they leave?

The dominance of pagan religions in global cities is a huge opportunity. Look at this from a big kingdom picture. Yes, in the WELS we desperately need to reach out to Christians who go to churches with false teachings. Proper use of law and gospel have been lost or at least hidden in many North American Christian denominations. We know that there are many people in these denominations who are still members of the invisible church and although we want to correct false doctrine, share the gospel, and strengthen weak faith, we also talk about not “sheep-stealing.” There are many Baptists, Catholics,

Presbyterians, ELCA members, etc. who have their misunderstandings but will still be in heaven someday. But in global cities we have an entirely different opportunity. We're not just polishing up weak Christians from other denominations. We have a chance to bring the gospel to heathen who are desperately thirsting for a loving God and who have never heard of Christ. In global city areas you have a real chance to convert a Hindu or Muslim to Christianity. This is a person who you can be sure was in the jaws of Satan, headed straight to hell, and now they are a child of Christ. Yes, the work can be difficult and expensive. But can you really put a price on finding a person who was definitely going to hell and showing them the way to heaven? Your average global city is packed with tens of thousands, perhaps even millions of these people. *This is the greatest opportunity for heathen conversion the world has ever seen.*

The financial difficulties are maybe the hardest challenge to come to terms with, but we must be willing to reach out to the poor just like Jesus did in his lifetime. We ought to view the chance to use our resources to share the gospel as a blessing, not a burden. In some situations, we simply need to fund an important ministry even though the people there are unable to support it. Specific financial suggestions will be discussed later on in this paper.

What Are Other Christian Denominations Doing?

We've already documented the secularization of big cities. Whether it's wealthy businesspeople with 80-hour workweeks and no time for church, young intellectual atheists with a purely evolutionary and humanistic worldview, or the poor for whom religion takes a backseat to physical survival—there are a lot of people who don't want to come to church. But other Christian denominations have seen opportunity in the explosive urbanization and globalization that are going on and are focusing more and more of their attention on cities. Let's take a look at just a few examples.

Fuller Theological Seminary, a large and influential multi-denominational school system with several different campuses in the American West, is teaching students of various church bodies to focus more on cities when conducting international mission work. "As the escalation of global urbanization has taken place, so has the urbanization of mission work," says Doug McConnel, dean of the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller.⁴⁴ In other words, the small village missionary is going out the door in favor of a city missionary, in other countries as well as ours. But it's not just missionaries. Student

⁴⁴ Srah Eekhoff Zylstra, "Urban Urgency," 16 August 2010, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/august/21.14.html> (accessed January 7, 2013).

interest in urban ministry has caused Fuller's two smaller programs on the subject to merge and expand. Urbanization is generating a lot of interest.

The Southern Baptists, too, are focusing more on cities than ever before. "The International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention is also concentrating more on cities, engaging 30 new urban centers in 2008 (up from 7 in 2007), including 27 cities with populations over 1 million."⁴⁵ Southern Baptists have been paying attention to the major changes that are going on. "We've had an international global research team working to see where people are, so the fact that this has happened has not caught us by surprise," said IMB spokesperson Wendy Norvelle.⁴⁶

Is there anything we can take from these things? We don't have a 4,300-student seminary like Fuller, nor do we have the size or resources to open 30 new urban centers a year like the Baptists. But perhaps we can learn from their changed focuses. Look again at the numbers in the above paragraph. The Baptists quadrupled their amount of urban mission starts in one year, going from opening 7 urban missions to opening 30! Clearly they have identified the trend going on in our country and are reacting to it. This is something we should be doing as well as if we are serious about reaching as many people as possible with the gospel. Of course WELS can't open 30 new urban missions a year—but how about just one? *If we opened one new mission per year in the center of a global city, in just 10 years we would have more than doubled our total amount of global center city churches.*

It's easy to write off information from the Baptists, Fuller, or most other denominations, because our small synod operates on a whole different financial scale. Most other church bodies have deeper pockets than we do, so they can afford to open more missions, especially in expensive urban settings. Or in many cases other church bodies are more historically rooted in big cities than we are, and so it's easier for them to have an established congregation sponsor or daughter a new mission start (this is an affordable and practical option which, outside of Milwaukee, we mostly don't have the option of in WELS. More on this later.) But you don't have to come from a large, wealthy, already-urban synod to do well in global cities. Let's take a look at one specific, very interesting example.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, NYC, led by Tim Keller, is perhaps the best-known example of a global city ministry that has exploded in recent years. Redeemer began in April 1989 with an average Sunday attendance of sixty people. By 1992 they were worshipping 950 per Sunday. Today Redeemer holds five services a Sunday in three different locations with a total of 5,000 members, and

⁴⁵ Zylstra, *Urban Urgency*

⁴⁶ Zylstra, *Urban Urgency*

shows no signs of slowing down. In fact they are currently engaged in a capital campaign to fund even more aggressive expansion.⁴⁷

At first glance this looks like a typical, fast-growing megachurch. It's tempting to immediately assume, "They probably have way more money than we do, and they probably have a 'tolerant,' modern, wishy-washy doctrine which causes huge numbers of liberal New Yorkers to like it there." Not so fast! A closer look at Redeemer's humble beginnings should make our ears perk up immediately. The Presbyterian Church of America is almost exactly the same size as WELS⁴⁸ and is what Keller describes as "suburban,"⁴⁹ with little experience and few connections in large urban areas. Theologically, the PCA is significantly more conservative than the much larger PC (Presbyterian Church), condemning homosexuality and not using women pastors, for example. Tim Keller in particular is quite conservative and Biblical in his doctrine. When you read his writing, you begin to realize he has a very "Lutheran" focus on law, gospel, and salvation by Christ alone. The facts are clear: Redeemer Presbyterian Church sprang from a *small, theologically conservative body without much experience in urban areas*. Sound familiar? Redeemer's beginnings sound eerily similar to a WELS urban church plant. So how have they experienced such incredible growth?

We know that God's kingdom here on earth grows solely through the power of the Holy Spirit, working through God's almighty Word. But with this in mind we would be foolish not to pay attention to sociology, demography, and culture, and use whatever knowledge we can glean to bring more people into contact with the Word. Looking at it from this perspective, there seem to be several possible explanations for the rapid growth at Redeemer. First, *Keller has successfully targeted the young intellectuals and professionals*.⁵⁰ This is impressive since of all the groups in big cities, the young intellectuals may be the most intimidating group for churches. The stereotype is that they've all just come out of college where they've learned atheism, humanism, etc. Now they're living the dream life in downtown fancy apartments where it would seem they have no need for God. Any ministry to young intellectuals can be intimidating and frustrating, let alone making them the building block of your

⁴⁷ On Keller's website, renew.redeemer.com, he details the "multi-site model" which Redeemer is working with and will expand on in the next few years. Keller calls it a "generative model," or a church that is designed to grow, split, and generate new churches. It seems like an ideal plan of attack for a city—he's already got three sites and 5,000 members but right now he's on a capital campaign for each site to grow to the current overall size and then split into three again. This way they can have different churches in different areas of the city reaching out to different specific demographics, and the costly new starts can rely on the established base for financial support.

⁴⁸ The Presbyterian Church of America had 351,406 members as of 2011. WELS had 383,506.

⁴⁹ Lyle E. Schaller, *Center City Churches: The New Urban Frontier* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 31.

⁵⁰ According to Keller, 85% of his church is single, and the married couples are mainly childless. This is not a family-dominated ministry, which makes it much different from most WELS churches.

congregation! But Keller is no ordinary pastor. He happens to be one of the great Christian apologists of our time⁵¹ and he has been very successful at breaking down the philosophical and rationalistic arguments of atheists and convincing them to at least listen to the Bible. Since Redeemer has won the young intellectuals, that means they have also won the wealth. They've become self-supporting and are constantly splitting off and daughtering new congregations. This is obviously much quicker and more feasible if you've got plenty of money.⁵²

Despite their base of young intellectuals, Redeemer has a tremendous amount of financial, racial, and cultural diversity, just like the rest of their Manhattan neighborhood. That's because, secondly, *Keller has intentionally made his church available to as many different types of people as possible.* Redeemer holds Sunday services at 10:00, 11:30, 4:30, and 6:30. They have a more traditional worship style in the morning and a "jazz service" in the evening. They have done a great job of *contextualizing* their ministry to appeal to the different types of people in the area.

Overall, maybe the biggest reason for their growth, earthly speaking, is that *Redeemer simply has some fantastically skilled people working there.* Keller, as mentioned, is one of the great apologists and is simply brilliant, so his messages are respected by the intellectual elite living and working in Manhattan. Also, almost immediately after Redeemer began they hired a "demographics expert with a seminary education" as an administrative assistant.⁵³ They then continued to add music ministers, assistant pastors, and all sorts of lay leaders, all while still being partially subsidized by the denomination.⁵⁴

What can we take from all this which will help us, a similar-sized synod with similar lack of experience in cities, to plant urban missions? In the big picture, there is no magic bullet. It's up to each pastor in a given situation to figure out his ministry context. He has to first get to know the culture of his people, figure out what makes them tick, and then contextualize his church's ministry to fit their needs. But the PCA did one thing we should absolutely take note of and emulate. The Presbyterians *sent some of their top manpower into Manhattan and let them figure the area out.* And then, the PCA didn't hesitate to pay for more called workers whenever Redeemer needed them! They focused their manpower and money in an inner global city because they knew it was important. Like Keller and the rest of the PCA,

⁵¹ His book *The Reason For God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* was recently #7 on the New York Times Bestseller list. He is also the author of numerous other books on apologetics, church planting, and ministry.

⁵² Although this is not the case in many of our mission settings, there are some areas where we've started with the wealthier people, which has taken a lot of the financial pressure off. Our world mission work in Hong Kong is one example. Divine Savior in Doral, FL is another.

⁵³ Schaller, *Center City Churches*, 35.

⁵⁴ Schaller, *Center City Churches*, 35.

WELS has always been more comfortable in suburban settings, but we have to recognize the great need in the city and go all-in.

For a final example, let's look at another Lutheran denomination. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has always had more of a presence in big cities than we have. They also have more resources and, consequently, more programs. One of their programs is a mission society called CFNA (Christian Friends of New Americans.)⁵⁵ This is a Registered Service Organization of the LCMS that provides aid for immigrants and refugees in the St. Louis area. They offer new citizen support, job training, health care aid, and most importantly, "spiritual development." This is a classic example of meeting someone's earthly needs as a bridge to start meeting spiritual needs. The initial emphasis is not as much on joining a specific congregation as it is on learning about Jesus and growing in your relationship with him. This type of ministry might be considered in a global city where we have several congregations (hopefully there will be more global cities we can say this about in the future.) One general immigrant outreach ministry could feed members into multiple churches, like the CFNA does. The important thing to note is that LCMS is recognizing the immigrant opportunities in St. Louis and working in a special program designed just for them. We could use this program not just in big cities, but anyplace where lots of immigrants are arriving. Immigrants need specific things—ESL, job training, help with their paperwork, physical relief, etc. If you're in an immigrant neighborhood and you can find a niche or an unmet need among the immigrants of that area, you will quickly find yourself with as much interest as you can possibly handle.

The WELS needs to do what the other denominations are doing and emphasize global cities more in our pastoral training system. We need to do what the PCA did and concentrate money and men to the biggest cities, specifically global cities, where we can have the most impact on the flood of people there. We need to do what LCMS is doing and intentionalize reaching out to immigrants in more of our ministries. The point is not specific methodologies; the point is a synod-wide focus. Our global cities can't be only rare novelties that show up on the WELS Connection and cause us to ooh and ah at all the diversity. Instead, global city ministry needs to become a synod-wide goal. If that doesn't happen we will simply never concentrate our resources into those areas. Not only will WELS membership continue to shrink as the old members of our country churches slowly die off, but we will also miss the chance to preach the gospel to millions of people who desperately need it.

Places We Are Doing Well

⁵⁵For more information, visit CFNA's website: <http://www.cfna-stl.org>

Despite our overall weakness with urban ministry, especially in global cities, there are a few thriving WELS congregations in global cities that are doing things we should take note of.

Sure Foundation in Queens, New York City is set right in the heart of one of the biggest global cities in America and is doing very well. The WELS had been working to get something going in New York City for decades, with various missions opening and closing and no long-term success. In 2000 two Seminary graduates were assigned to Sure Foundation and were instructed to pick anywhere in NYC that they wanted to start a church. They chose Queens because it was centralized and immigrant-based, which would also allow them to be family-oriented in their outreach. After renting for awhile they started a big building project which, although it was very expensive, has turned out to be a tremendous blessing in terms of giving them visibility. The building was one of the key steps which helped Sure Foundation to survive in contrast to previous NYC mission efforts; another big success point has been ESL. They have a flourishing ESL program which has blossomed into two separate services, Spanish and English, every Sunday. They also have what Pastor Bourman describes as an “extremely aggressive” evangelism program with many outreach events throughout the year. God is richly blessing the work at Sure Foundation. They’ve grown from 12 communicant members in 2000 to 100 total members, with 15 adult confirmations a year and 30-40 visitors per Sunday. For years WELS had struggled in New York City, but Sure Foundation is something we sunk significant money into and it has worked. However, it is also one of the most expensive home missions that the WELS has and it’s not coming off subsidy anytime soon. It’s a classic global city situation: big cost, even bigger opportunities. There are approximately 5,000 people living within a block of Sure Foundation in massive high-rise apartments. The opportunity was simply too great for us to pass up and with strong synod support and a great staff, things are going extremely well. I have to believe that a carefully researched, generously funded and staffed mission start would work in the center of other global cities just like it did in New York, even without any established base at all. Every setting is different but with money and resources for a strong start you can find your niche in the neighborhood and find people to share the gospel with. There’s certainly no shortage of prospects.

Divine Savior Lutheran Academy in Doral, Florida is an entirely different model. They started with an interesting strategy which could possibly be replicated elsewhere. Doral is located right next door to Miami, one of the top ten global cities on our list, and the area has lots of immigrants, especially from Mexico and Cuba. It’s a textbook global city. Doral’s model, unique in our circles, is the idea of having the school support the church instead of vice versa. Divine Savior has noticed that the immigrants in their particular neighborhood are not poor—in fact, they are very wealthy. People are looking for good education for their kids, and if it’s too cheap they won’t pay for it because they figure

it's not a quality school. DSLA has pounced on this opportunity by charging high tuition rates and running a high-quality, professional school, and as a result their school has grown by leaps and bounds. There are over 400 students enrolled in the school, all of whom are learning about Jesus. The next challenge for Doral is to try to transfer this growth over to the church. Overall, the financial side of the Doral model might be the most interesting part. They charge a lot for the school, and as a result they aren't draining off the home missions budget. They are completely self-sustaining because people are willing to pay for the high tuition rates.

Another church in a similar area is **Cross of Life in Mississauga, Ontario**. Pastor Joel Schultz started the mission there in 2003. For a few years it was tough to get people to come to outreach events, until Pastor Schultz realized that they were willing to pay for them. Mississauga is a community of wealthy immigrants much like Doral, and so the church started a high-quality soccer camp and charged an expensive fee. Right away wealthy parents recognized a quality program and they were more than happy to pay top dollar for it. The one-week camp obviously doesn't generate enough money to fund the church the way Divine Savior in Doral school does, but it has grown to a size of nearly 300 kids per year and a lot of new members have come to the church through it. Mississauga would be an interesting place to consider Divine Savior's model of building a high-quality school and using it to fund the church, but Canada's education laws allow only two types of schools—Catholic and public. The WELS currently has no Lutheran Elementary Schools in Canada, and it doesn't seem like there will be any in the foreseeable future. Still, however, this is an interesting demographic—the wealthy immigrants who are willing to pay for quality. Could we seek out these types of communities and plant schools in them, thus funding the church?

Hope in Toronto, Ontario is one of the most diverse and most immigrant-based churches in the WELS, since it's actually set right in the arrival city. Hope was started by Pastor Tom Haar in 1990 and, like other global city churches, it is still not that close to paying off its subsidy. Scarborough, the "arrival city" where Hope is located, is the exact opposite of Mississauga. The church is made up of mostly poor immigrants who are warm and generous (the food pantry and coat closet are overflowing as the more established members help the new immigrants) but not as financially blessed. If you're looking at finances, Hope is a 20-year drain on the mission budget which still won't become self-supporting for at least another decade. If you're looking at big-kingdom picture, though, Hope is doing fantastic things. It is growing steadily and is already well known in the neighborhood as "that church with the steel pans." Many of the members are former Hindus and Muslims. Others are Lutherans from Guyana, Trinidad, Africa, and a plethora of other places. Almost nobody is native to Canada. Last year I taught at Hope's music camp and had the privilege of seeing a young Hindu girl named Keethana confess her faith and join

the church against the wishes of her Hindu parents. Keethana had never had any Christian teaching before or set foot in a Christian church, but over the five days of music camp one year and two days the next she learned that Jesus was her Savior. Contrast Keethana's worldview with that of so many North American unchurched who simply are tired of hearing about Christianity. We didn't have to do apologetics or answer her misgivings about Christianity in order to convince Keethana to start listening to us. . .she simply heard the gospel and was hooked! Global cities are an especially exciting place to preach because there are many people who have never heard the gospel before. This is the type of opportunity that is abundantly available at a global city church like Hope. It's a thrilling mission field.

How Can We Do Better?

One quick proviso: none of this has to be limited to global cities. Urbanization and globalization are happening all over the place. Lots of cities are growing explosively, and rural areas are gaining immigrants too. Every good pastor in his individual setting is always keeping an eye out for nearby outreach opportunities like campus ministries, institutional ministries, and other things—and in the future more and more of these outreach opportunities will take the form of explosive city growth or immigrant pockets. In a completely natural way our pastors will focus more and more on urbanization and globalization as they land right in their laps. But we can't just be reactive as this stuff leaks out to our rural churches. We need to be proactive. We need to go find global diversity where it starts—in the big city.

First of all, we need to recognize that there are two different types of global city plants: those that have an established base and those that don't. The first would come in areas like Chicago. Here the different churches of the city and suburbs need to work together. As they all grow and get more members from different places, they will start to find very promising globalized areas inside and around their city. If they do a good job of communicating, they can pool their funds to reach out to them. Imagine the different Chicago churches all working together to each take partial ownership of a new mission start. This type of mission start could save the BHM some money, as the different churches are all picking up part of the cost and possibly the missionary is a tent minister for the first few years. This is something that could be done in any city where we have an urban or suburban base.

The second type of global city plant is the tougher one. This is a lot more expensive but just as vital: it's the plant without an established base. Sure Foundation has done this in New York, Hope did it a long time ago in Toronto, but neither one is off subsidy yet and won't be for some time. This is the kind of pricey mission that you just keep paying for and it can be frustrating. It's important; however, because this generation's solo starts are the next generation's established base. By the time Sure Foundation gets

off subsidy in 15-20 years or whatever that might be, they may have grown numerically to the point that they are ready to daughter. Put a a tent minister in an area they've handpicked and researched and give him heavy support. . . now you've got two missions going in NYC for the BHM price of just one tent minister.

We have to think big and we have to think in terms of teamwork. Please note that we are about to discuss strategies for *funding*, not methodologies for outreach or evangelism. Those things could be a topic for a whole different paper.

Global City Planting (with an established base)

Our synod has precious few established bases in global cities. Milwaukee and the Twin Cities are not as globalized as Chicago. Houston probably has the next largest base, and besides that we don't have many churches in global cities outside the Midwest. **Would it be possible for the base congregations surrounding a global city to develop a team mindset, join together and pool their funds to start a mission?** For example, Chicago churches could start a special "Chicago Fund," which maybe could be added to by wealthy donors from around the synod. Keep in mind that for a church to be in a globalized area, it doesn't necessarily have to be downtown. For example, St. Matthews in Niles, IL is located in an extremely globalized community. This ultra-diverse neighborhood is about a 20-minute drive from Chicago, but even though it's not in the center city it has an incredible range of immigrant diversity, both in ethnic background and in economic status. 50 languages other than English are spoken at the local high school. The church has members of 27 different ethnicities. If all the Chicago-area churches were willing to pool extra mission dollars and take ownership of another new globalized ministry like this one there would be many advantages. The groundwork would be laid. The area could be pre-canvassed. The cost would be partially or totally covered by local congregations outside of BHM budget. The local congregations could provide seed members when worship begins in the mission. They can support the local pastor with manpower, canvassing help, etc. All our established bases in or near big cities should be thinking in a team mindset. "What can we do to reach out to our city that the synod as a whole maybe can't afford?" Houston-area congregations could consider something similar, maybe with a Hispanic ministry. This is happening all over the synod anyway as churches naturally grow and start more churches, but we need to be especially mission-minded and team-oriented in the precious few places where we have an established base right near or in a globalized city.

But what about the rest of the global cities, the majority of the really big ones where we have nothing yet? Our mission offerings themselves need to be used more and more in global cities, for

although they are expensive in the long term they have tremendous opportunities and really are the future of where we're going as a country.

Global City Planting (without an established base)

We need to nurture our valuable plants in cities where they are alone (New York, Toronto) as well as planting more, so that this generation's global city plants can become the next generation's established base. The hardest question to answer here is, "What is the best stewardship of our home missions dollars?" It would be foolish to switch our whole home missions budget over to global city missions, which grow slowly and cost a lot. But it would also be foolish to ignore global cities just because they're expensive. They are full of millions and millions of people for whom Christ died. The amazing love our Savior has shown us compels us to reach out to other cultures as well as our own with the good news. A statistic that is very commonly quoted is that "30% of WELS Home Missions are in multicultural settings." This is a really misleading statistic when you realize that both Antigua and St. Lucia are counted as part of Home Missions. The two Canadian missions in Toronto are also extremely diverse. I wonder what percentage of our home missions *in the United States* are actually multicultural? We need to do a lot more. I recognize that we can afford to open precious few new churches each year, let alone keep on paying for the global city ones, but it's almost impossible to overstate the importance of establishing a WELS presence in globalized, big-city areas. Once again, this is essential not just from a spiritual but from a practical point of view. The biggest cities are where the world is going, they are where the people are, and right now the WELS is largely not in these areas. We can't afford to be left behind or over time our synod will die out. We are talking about two different principles here. On the one hand, we need to be wise with our precious mission dollars and "make them count." On the other hand, we have to establish a stronger presence in global cities no matter what the cost. The following list of suggestions is not meant to totally balance these two principles. That's the tough job of the Board for Home Missions and individual District Mission Boards. The following is simply a list of ideas we should consider as we seek to be good stewards of both our finances and of the gospel.

We need to explore alternate funding ideas, like **daughtering from a distance**. Similar to the way Chicago or Houston-area churches might unite to start a mission, could we possibly have wealthy congregations across the country work together to start a mission? Could wealthier churches in areas without many outreach opportunities pool their dollars and "adopt" a global city mission halfway across the country? There are obvious difficulties in conducting a capital campaign to fund something halfway across the country, but it's something to think about. Maybe the new mission pastor could make a special effort to share the fruits of his labor with the donating congregations. If it doesn't work to do it as a

congregation, there are lots of individual wealthy WELS members out there who have money to give but no specific place to give it to. Perhaps both individuals and congregations could give to a special “global city fund,” above and beyond their CMO’s, to be used in some way for global city ministry.

Can we **use schools to build churches**? Divine Savior Academy in Doral’s model for building off of wealthy immigrants seems similar to what Keller did in Manhattan. I wonder if we could seek out wealthy suburbs in other places and try to replicate this kind of model there: Use the need for quality education to bring people into contact with the gospel. Some might object to this strategy and say we’re favoring the rich by ministering to them first, but we’ve got to be practical. These things take patience. In some areas perhaps we can first work on getting a quality school going among wealthier immigrants, and using it to support the church. Then, once it’s all self-supporting and the school and church both have grown, we could use the funds to reach out and help daughter a congregation in a nearby poorer area. One downside to this approach is that it takes so long and requires you to keep changing your focus, from the school to the church to the daughter congregation. It also requires you to look almost extremely far into the future. Can you go from starting a school, to supporting a church, to being ready to daughter a new mission, in 20 years? 30 years? It’s hard to know what God has planned in that whole amount of time. Another problem requiring consideration is the seed money needed to start a quality school. I would consider this to be a high-risk, high-reward option but it’s worth pondering. Imagine having a St. Marcus or a Divine Savior right smack in the middle of L.A.!

We need more exploratory missions in the center city. Historically, many of our home mission plants have been in the suburbs. There is something to be said for building a base in the suburbs first and then reaching in, but does that ever actually happen? It’s easy to plant in the suburbs and say, “The next generation will reach inward when they have more money.” And then you pass the buck for 15-20 years and see if anybody’s interested in the push later. We already have a lot of suburban churches. We have almost no center city churches.

When we do plant a global city church, we need to understand the financial challenges and be patient with it. **Churches in global cities need a different scale of “success”** than churches in places where self-support is possible in the short term. *We just have to realize that they are not going to get off subsidy as quickly.* This doesn’t mean we stop making our globalized home missions accountable to the synod, or “let them off the hook” of reporting their numbers. But as we look at their mission reports we have to be fair. Financial growth or becoming self-supporting is one way to tell if you are doing well, but it is not the only indicator. A global-city congregation may have a high number of baptisms and adult confirmations but a low amount of offerings. This doesn’t necessarily mean that there is a spiritual

stewardship problem in the congregation. For the reasons listed previously, immigrants often struggle to support their churches. Because of their immigrant nature, most global city churches need continued outside aid in order to do their valuable mission work. It might help us if we stopped comparing global city missions to other home missions, and started comparing them to world missions. In many ways a church like Sure Foundation, New York City or Hope, Toronto has more in common with Antigua or India than it does with a suburban start in the Bible-belt South. We don't found a church in Africa and then close it in 3 years because it doesn't have a building or isn't off subsidy yet! We have been patient to a fault with some of our world missions, recognizing that it takes time to work within another culture, especially in impoverished areas. We should be taking this same approach to global city missions. *They are different from the rest of home missions.* Getting off of subsidy or buying land for a building is not the only measure of success.

Any good investor knows the value of diversifying his portfolio. Stocks vs. bonds. Aggressive vs. stable. Potential jackpot vs. steady gains. You need some of both so that your portfolio grows no matter what the market is doing. In a somewhat similar fashion, we should **“diversify” the home mission budget by splitting it into two groups.** As we said before, it would make no sense to do only expensive global city starts. But it also makes no sense to line up a global city mission next to wealthier suburban ones, and then cut it if it doesn't compete financially. You're comparing apples to oranges. I think we should split the Home Mission budget into two specific categories—churches which are expected to become self-supporting quickly, and those which we will be funding for years. A global city mission which barely grows in souls or finances may still need to be cut, but at least it's being cut compared to other churches in its category. What percentage of the budget should be allocated to short-term funding, and what percentage should be used for long-term funding? Which mission starts should fall into the 3-5 year subsidy category, and which ones should fall into the “patient long-term funding” category? These are questions that need to be answered by our synod leadership, our mission boards, and those who do exploratory work in preparation for a new mission.

On a related note, it is imperative that our church body be willing to **fund some long-term leases.** Long-term leases are something synod has so far been unwilling to do because it's so expensive, but it's just going to be necessary for global urban ministry. So far our global city missions have been forced to continually renew 1-year or 3-year subsidy agreements. This isn't bad insofar as it keeps the churches working hard, but it's a lot of paperwork and a lot of stress. It's hard to push forward as a congregation when you fear your subsidy may not be renewed next spring, and the year after that, and the year after that. . . .we need a new system. Yes, long-term lease agreements are expensive, but they are also more practical for global city work. Instead of a 3-5 year subsidy plan, let's try an 8-10 year subsidy

plan, or even a 10-15 year plan. This is much more realistic to the actual timeframe, and in reality we're spending this money anyway as they keep renewing their short subsidy plans. We just need to admit to ourselves that we're going to be funding a 10-year lease. A long-term lease makes more sense than constantly re-applying for subsidy every year or two. It also gives the BHM a more stable financial picture to plan around, as they can know more exactly what they'll be spending in 8-10 years without the drama of repeated applications.

Global city missions need to link up with world missions. Global cities are full of immigrants, all of whom have connections to other countries. Although the immigrants may be poor by North American standards, many of them are quite wealthy compared to others in their home countries. After all, in many cases they were the ones who were able to save enough money to emigrate! Often when they go back home, they are afforded *de facto* the role of community leader, because they have "made it" in the developed world. Imagine the possibilities of all this in our globalized, connected world! What if an immigrant in a global city decided to train in the PSI program, then travel back to his home country and do mission work there? What if a national pastor from one of our missions in Africa traveled to Toronto to work among African immigrants? The WELS currently has no concise, specific plan for linking global city immigrants with world missions, but these kinds of things are already happening naturally as individual believers find out ways to reach out to their countrymen. Peter Kruschel writes: "As our WELS missions in other countries grow in number and in numbers, it has become *more and more common for members from our world missions to emigrate to the United States and Canada.*"⁵⁶ Kruschel goes on to cite several examples of individual immigrants spreading the gospel, including Spanish work in Antigua by native Puerto Ricans and a link between Home Missions work in Farmington, New Mexico and the Navajo nation. As more and more immigrants come into our country, we are going to see more and more opportunities for home missions to work hand-in-hand with world missions.

All this just goes to show why it is so important for us to be in global cities!! Every day that goes by without a presence in the immigrant hubs, we are missing valuable opportunities to connect to the world. Our world mission members who come to our country provide us with some openings, but imagine the possibility on the other side of the coin. How wonderful it might be to start a world mission in a country where we've never had any churches, all because we found some immigrants who are willing and excited to take the gospel back home! Global city churches are so much more than just individual congregations trying to survive. They are valuable connecting points to the world. Pastor Bourman

⁵⁶ Peter Kruschel, "A Cry from the City: The WELS' Need to Address Multi-Cultural Issues," Paper presented at *Issues in Multi-Cultural Worship*, a conference sponsored by the WELS Commission on Worship, July 1998, 6.

states, “Global cities may well be the key to both home missions and world missions.”⁵⁷ I am absolutely fascinated by the potential in this area. I can’t wait to see how the gospel will spread as our world becomes increasingly more connected.

It is important for young pastors-in-training to know about urbanization and globalization and the effect they will have on all of our ministries. This is why we need to **send more vicars to global city settings**. I feel truly blessed and privileged to have vicared at Hope in Toronto, where I had experiences that I know none of my classmates were able to have. Sending vicars to global cities is just the first step in creating a ministerium that is more comfortable in big cities. Let’s think outside of the box here. Why not send more than one vicar to a global city at once? Why don’t pastors Bourman and Olsen both get one in NYC? This would serve the threefold purpose of making our young pastors comfortable in cities, giving them a passion for multi-cultural work, and putting cheap manpower into the cities. The Vicar in Mission Program can be very inexpensive for the congregation. There could be logistical difficulties with two vicars serving the same church, but if they have separate bishops does this have to be a problem? If we are going to be considering sending some larger staffs into the cities in the future, this could be good training for that. Another difficulty could be that we are trying to handpick the best bishops to take vicars each year, but let’s be honest: some of the best bishops are in the cities anyway. The cities require a special degree of adaptability and openness which any vicar would do well to emulate.

At some point we have to talk about **tent ministry**. This is an intriguing potential ministry strategy that doesn’t break the bank. Tent ministry has been catching on and showing great promise in recent years in our synod. In this ministry model a pastor picks up a part-time job for maybe 20 hours a week, and then uses the rest of his time, evenings and weekends, to make evangelism calls and write sermons. The pastor gets paid half-salary by the church and half from his secular job until the mission gets going well enough to support him full-time. Sometimes the church doesn’t pay him at all initially, and his full income comes from his secular job. There are some definite advantages to this model. For one thing, it enables you to start missions even when you don’t have much money. I interviewed Pau Moua, a tent minister to Hmong people in Anchorage, AK, and he told me what he thinks makes tent ministry work. According to Pau, the main thing he couldn’t live without is the support from nearby Faith Lutheran Church. They educate his four children for free, encourage him in his work, and support him in “little ways” like providing housing, grocery help, etc. All of this help, combined with great commitment and resourcefulness from Pau, has enabled Faith’s Hmong congregation to grow and flourish to the point where Pau is now a full-time paid pastor.

⁵⁷ Via phone interview

Tent ministry isn't easy. It requires sacrifice and flexibility on the part of the missionary but it has worked well in places. Tent ministry has worked especially well for PSI graduates who are ministering to their own culture. It's also the original way that the apostle Paul did his ministry, so as not to be a financial burden to people. But is tent ministry a viable option for starting churches in global cities?

I'm convinced it will only work under certain conditions. First of all, there just has to be an established base nearby to provide support. Pau Moua basically told me he could never have done what he has done without the support of the sister church. The burden on his family would simply have been too great. I think nearby support⁵⁸ would be especially needed in a really big city, where the cost of living is much higher than in other places. Secondly, I think global city tent ministry would be most practical with a young couple who are both working. "Double income, no kids" seems to be the norm in the biggest cities today, again just because of the cost of living. If the pastor's wife has a good job and doesn't have kids to stay home with, she could contribute significantly to the family budget and enable her husband to get a less time-consuming job and focus more on church work. He'll need all the time he can get. Big-city ministry is really challenging. It takes all of your time and energy to make a mission prosper amidst the hustle, bustle, postmodernism, and all the other challenges we've talked about. And a separate part-time job really cuts into your time—Pau says that often he's barely able to get his sermon done in a week, let alone plan outreach events, etc. So could tent ministry could work for a global city start-up? Probably, but the conditions would have to be right. The pastor would need a church nearby to support him with finances and manpower when necessary. It would also be extremely helpful if he and his wife were both earning income and didn't have kids yet.⁵⁹

The Best Methodology

We've talked a lot about funding strategies, and I could say much more about specific outreach methodologies, but I won't. The point is not strategy or methodologies. Strategies depend on location. Pastors in their individual settings can and will find out what their ministry niche is. They can and will find ways to reach out to people. But they can't do it unless we are willing to put them in global city settings. They can't do it unless we make a conscious synodical commitment to global cities.

If you really want a methodology, here's one I discussed in an interview with WLS Professor E.A. Sorum: "The best methodology we can have is a mission spirit, starting with our pastors and instilled

⁵⁸ Both financial support and manpower—for example, to help with canvassing and evangelism

⁵⁹ Keep in mind that tent ministry, as we've normally conducted it, is temporary. Within a few years the church could hopefully build enough of a base to qualify for a fulltime, subsidized pastor.

into every single member.” That really is the key, isn’t it? There is no magic bullet or secret potion. The gospel continues to work the way it always has, replacing human hearts of stone with hearts of faith, love, compassion and thankfulness. In all our churches we need to continue to preach law and gospel, and then especially to emphasize mission work as a fruit of our sanctification. When our people are excited to share God’s Word with anyone they can, we are in a good place as a synod. When our gospel-motivated people see the great opportunities in the global cities, they will be ready to support them with special offerings. When they live near a city or a diverse area, they will be ready to reach out. They will be ready to accept people of other cultures. They will be ready to work hand-in-hand with other congregations. The best methodology for global city mission work is really the one we already have—the gospel. I am confident that the great love God has shown to us will compel us to reach out to the immigrants flooding into our global cities. God is opening a gigantic door for us. It’s time to walk through it.

Final Questions That Need Answering

There is no spiritual reason for us to stay out of global cities. They are filled with many unbelievers, but each one of those people is a precious soul for whom Christ died and who needs to hear the gospel. Lack of mission zeal, spiritual apathy, racism, and fear of the unknown cannot overcome our Savior’s call to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” There is really only one thing preventing us from flooding global cities with new startups, and that reason is finances. Pastor Bourman sums it up well when he comments, “We are a suburban synod, and we can’t stomach the cost of the city. People just can’t wrap their brains around spending lots of money to live, to travel, to have a church. . . .but they should.”⁶⁰

Instead of being pessimistic about finances, let’s get excited about opportunities. God has placed a great mission field right at our feet, and he has also equipped us with his gospel message, with hearts willing to serve, and with earthly resources. How can we best use the gifts God has given us to reach out to people from all over the world who are now living right in our backyard?

Let me close with four questions that we need to answer:

- 1. What is the goal of the BHM—to create self-sustaining churches, or to preach the gospel to people who may otherwise never hear it?**

⁶⁰ Via phone interview

2. **What’s the best way to start in a global city with no established base? “Inside out” or “outside in?”⁶¹ Tent ministry or multiple staff members?⁶² Rent or buy a worship space?**
3. **Should “solo starts” or “established bases” get the priority? In other words, if we can only start one new church in a global city, is it better to go for a new area in New York City, Toronto, Miami, or L.A., or is it better to use our established base in the globalized areas of Chicago or Houston?**
4. **Are there other ways (besides the BHM budget) to pay for global city missions? Special, separate fund where wealthy donors with an interest in missions can pool their money? Long-distance daughtering?**

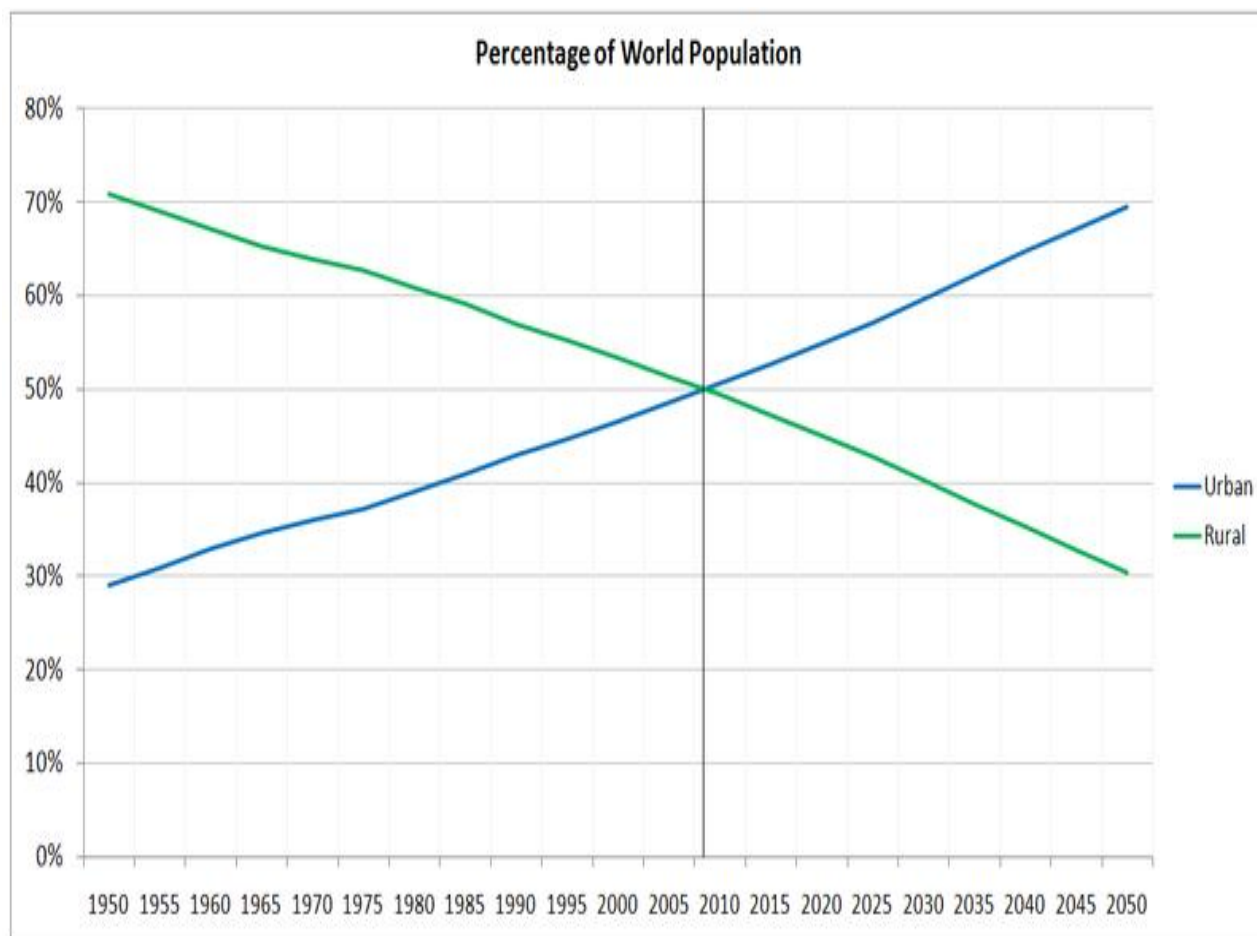
I am not able to provide all the answers but my hope is that this paper will narrow the issue down to a few tough questions. We need to get our synodical heads together and hammer out some solutions. The fields are incredibly ripe; a truly global harvest is waiting right here on our doorstep. The masses of immigrants pouring into our biggest cities can be ignored no longer. The time is now. Let’s go where the people are.

⁶¹ Tim Keller says, “You can’t reach the city from the suburbs, but you can reach the suburbs from the city.” This is true of culture, but financially speaking this may be a half-truth. It would have been absolutely true in Paul’s time, when the wealth of most cities was at the center. But today much of the wealth needed to sustain city ministry is in the ring around it. We need to decide which is better: to plant in the suburbs first and fight our way in over several generations, or to take the higher-cost inner-city option and enjoy the immediate neighborhood mission field.

⁶² The majority of the global-city pastors that I interviewed recommended the latter option. As Pastor Nathan Cordes, serving at the ultra-diverse Niles IL church just outside Chicago, says: “Send teams, not individual missionaries. So what if that means we start fewer churches. Let’s start great churches.” Quality over quantity might be the argument for this one.

Appendix I

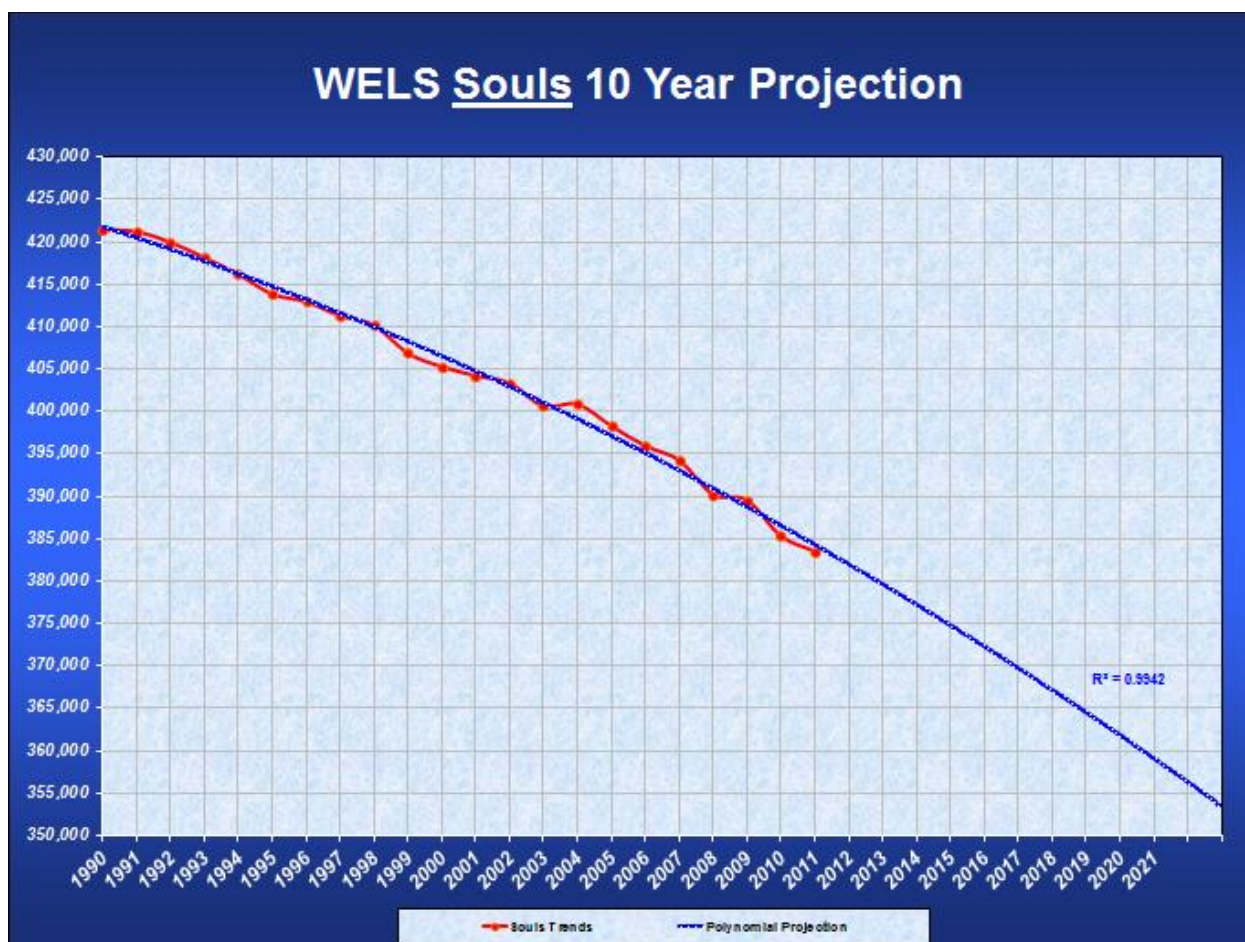
Worldwide Urbanization Graph



Data Source: United Nations. <http://esa.un.org/unup/p2k0data.asp>

Appendix II

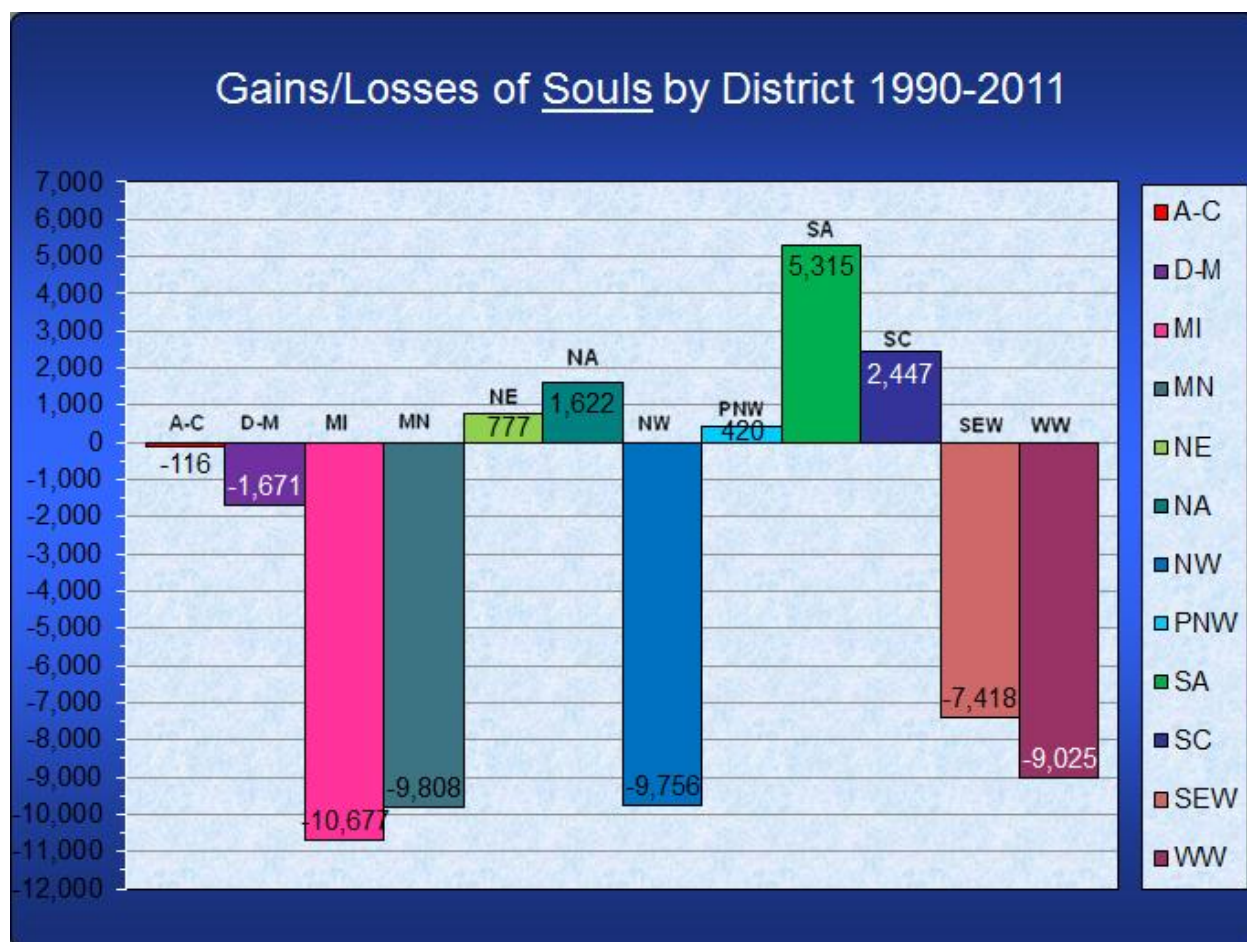
Declining WELS Population Graph⁶³



⁶³ Graph taken from a PPT Presentation entitled "Defining Current Reality So that People Get It" by Pastor Elton Stroh

Appendix III

Gains and losses by district—note that the biggest, oldest districts are shrinking the most. Is this because our white, rural base is aging and dying out without replicating itself?⁶⁴



⁶⁴ Graph taken from a PPT Presentation entitled "Defining Current Reality So that People Get It" by Pastor Elton Stroh

Appendix 4

Interview form for global city pastors

***Please note: if some of these questions don't apply to you, feel free to leave them blank. Not all of you have served in big cities, but you still have valuable experience working with globalization and immigration.**

How long have you been serving in a major urban area? Why did you take the call? How did your family feel about it then?

How hard was it to adjust? How do they feel about it now? How do you feel about it?

How much help and preparation did you receive before you took the call and when you arrived?

All over the world people from the country are moving to major urban areas. How does urbanization affect your ministry?

Major urban areas are increasingly becoming a mixture of different homelands, races, cultures, and languages. How does globalization affect your ministry?

What, if any, struggles do you run into with the legal/illegal status of immigrants?

Does your neighborhood have a few main ethnic groups or is it extremely diverse? Do the different groups get along?

What is the economic status of your neighborhood?

What special challenges have you found which seem unique to big-city ministry?

What special blessings/opportunities have you found which seem unique to big-city ministry?

What would you want the BHM to know if they were planting a new mission in your area for the very first time?

Is there anything you would change about the way WELS funds big-city missions?

What question(s) do you wish I had asked on this survey? How would you answer those questions?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

May I have your permission to quote you in my paper?

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Godlovescities.com (Tim Keller's website)

Additional Research

Personal interviews were conducted with Professor E.A. Sorum of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Pastor Tim Spiegelberg of Hope Lutheran Church in Toronto, ON.

Phone interviews were conducted with Pastor Tim Bourman of Sure Foundation in New York City, Pastor Keith Free of the Board for Home Missions, and Pastor Pau Moua of Faith Hmong in Anchorage, AK.

Email surveys were sent to a number of pastors in cities and globalized areas, as well as mission counselors and pastors on home mission boards. The following pastors responded to the survey:

Biedenbender, Paul (Denver, CO)

Birkholz, Mark (Mission Counselor)

Bourman, Tim (New York City, NY)

Cordes, Nathan (Niles, IL)

Timothy Flunker (WELS national Hispanic consultant)

Gabb, Steve (Los Angeles, CA)

Daniel Habben (WELS Canada Mission Board)

John Huebner (Former mission coordinator)

Kruschel, Peter (Mission Counselor)

Olson, Daniel (New York City, NY)

Prange, Victor (Burlington, WI)

Spiegelberg, Tim (Toronto, ON)

Vogel, Mike (Calgary, AB)