

This paper was presented at the request of President A. Barry to the Council on Mission and Ministry (CMM) of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The CMM was a meeting, held twice yearly, of the heads of the various departments of Synod, seminary presidents, and representative members of the Council of Presidents and the Presidium. Its purpose was to gather for study and information sharing in support of the Synod's mission and ministry efforts. It was given August 26, 1997, and it turned out it would be the last of such events. Surely there have been many and notable bright spots in ministry to underrepresented racial and ethnic groups since the time of this paper, yet the author regrets that more progress has not been made. He also asks you kindly to forgive any language that we would deem offensive or inappropriate today: it was written over two decades ago.

**COUNCIL ON MISSION AND MINISTRY**  
**August 26, 1997**

**OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN ETHNIC MINISTRY**

President Barry and esteemed members of the Council on Mission and Ministry: It is for me an honor, but also a humbling experience, to speak to you this day on the topic of Challenges and Opportunities in Ethnic Ministries in the U.S. I do not consider myself an expert on this subject by any stretch of the imagination, but I must confess that I have some strong feelings and opinions about the ethnic diversity that our nation is facing, and the responsibility of our church toward the "all nations" of Matthew 28. These opinions are based in part upon my experience as a parish pastor of a typical, rural LC-MS congregation, a missionary to the country of Guatemala, Central America, and a seminary professor.

The outline of this presentation is simple:

- I. Melting Pot: Reality or Myth? - Demographic realities in the U.S.

- II. What is and What Could Be - LC-MS and Ethnic Ministries
- III. God's Word and "the Nations" - A Reflection on God's Word
- IV. Confronting Reality: Where to Now? - Unresolved Issues and Open questions

#### I. MELTING POT: REALITY OR MYTH

A few weeks ago, I took my daughter Sarah out to supper at a restaurant near the seminary in Clayton. As we sat and enjoyed our meal, we began to notice the ethnic and racial diversity of the workers and customers that evening. In the first place, the young woman who waited on us had made her way to the U.S. from India. There were also at least two African-American servers, as well as at least one Asian and another Indian. As we looked beyond our table, we noticed a middle-aged black couple in the booth next to ours (By middle-aged, I mean about 10 years older than me). They were not Americans, however. Apparently, they were from some African nation. They spoke to each other in a language that was unrecognizable to us, although they spoke to their waiter in flawless, British English. When we had finished eating and were walking out of the restaurant, we were able to identify persons of Hispanic, Asian, Indian, and African origin, and heard at least four different languages being spoken. We saw only one other Anglo table.

For some of you this may not be all that significant, but for someone like me, who grew up in Southern Minnesota, it made a great impression, for that experience presented to me a

graphic, living picture and confirmation of where our nation is going in terms of racial and ethnic diversity.

The *Mission Blueprint for the Nineties* observed: "The United States of America will experience phenomenal demographic change, especially in the cities where neighborhoods will burgeon with immigrants" (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod 1991, 5). The fact of the matter is that the United States always has been an immigrant nation. From the ancestors of the original natives of this continent, who crossed the Bering Straits to come here, to the latest group of refugees to step off the plane from Sudan, we are all here as a result of movements of peoples from around the world who have come to this continent in search of a better life. The exception to this, of course, are those Africans who were brought to the Americas against their will as slaves.

While white Protestants generally received preferential treatment, the diversity of our nation in terms of language, culture and race, is remarkable. What is even more remarkable, moreover, is the tenacity and strength of our nation in the face of such diversity.

It has been suggested that the extraordinary unity in diversity and strength of our nation has been possible not because of a melting of cultures, but rather due to an allegiance to certain ideological positions on liberty, equality and democracy. Of course, we cannot deny that it has not been

easy going always for many ethnic groups immigrating to the United States, but ultimately our nation has opted to define the essence of Americanism in terms of ideals rather than ethnicity or race (Takaki 1987, 15).

In recent years there has been significant change in the origin and world view of the typical immigrant to the United States. In earlier times, the vast majority of immigrants and refugees to the U.S. were white, northern Europeans. During the last century, and especially since the implementation of the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed race-based restrictions, this has changed dramatically, as non-white immigrants from non-European nations began to predominate.

This means that there is a greater cultural distance between Americans of European descent and those who immigrate today (Moorman 1993, 10, 50). As I said, with the exception of the Africans brought here as slaves, the earlier immigrants tended to come mostly from European countries, and therefore shared somewhat a Judeo-Christian worldview. They also tended to be light skinned.

Immigrants today are more likely to come from places like Latin America, whose worldview has been influenced by Christianity, to be sure, but which also is highly-conditioned by Ancient Native American, as well as African, worldviews. Many come from Africa, Asia, or other parts of the world where Christianity is not the predominant religion. They also tend to be darker-

skinned, and therefore do not blend in as easily with the Anglo majority.

When the earlier immigrants left their homeland, most had little chance of returning. When my great, great-grandfather and his brother came to Minnesota from Germany in 1858, for example, he said goodbye to his homeland, his parents, and also to his two other brothers and a sister, who went to Brazil. He never saw them again. On the other hand, the ease of rapid, worldwide travel and communication means that today's immigrant has a much greater opportunity to maintain contact with his family and the language and culture of his homeland. This means that today's immigrant is less likely to assimilate into the prevailing Anglo culture.

The demographic data and projections for our nation indicate that the United States will continue to become more multifaceted in terms of race and ethnicity. The census tries to count every man, woman and child in our nation; but, for some reason, it undercounts certain ethnic groups, such as Blacks, Hispanics and American Indians by as much as five percent.

However, based upon what is called the "Current Population Survey," and other techniques, the Bureau of the Census can now make fairly accurate adjustments for the current and future demographic makeup of our nation. Current published projections of the Census Bureau, for example, run to the year 2050 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996, 1-2). A wealth of information is

contained in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1996*, published by the Department of Commerce. I would like to provide some "digested" information based upon the data.

First, let me note that a 1989 article in *U.S. News and World Report*, entitled "Remapping American Culture," made the statement: "Someday soon . . . white America will become a minority. In the twenty-first century—and that's not far off—racial and ethnic groups in the United States will outnumber whites for the first time" (*U.S. News and World Report* 1989, 28). The article then asserts: "The browning of America will alter everything in society, from politics and education to industry, values, and culture" (*U.S. News and World Report* 1989, 31). Religion surely could have been added to this list.

Immigration is the factor that will have the greatest effect on the ethnic diversity of our nation. But birth rate projections also play a part in the changing face of the U.S. Projections of the Census Bureau indicate that by 2030 "minorities" will make up the majority of U.S. births. Hispanic babies will make up more than 27 percent of the total, Asians more than 8 percent, and Black, non-Hispanics, 17 percent. The births to non-Hispanic whites will have shrunk to 47 percent (Cowles 1997, 1).

The *Forecast Newsletter* of October 1996 says the following regarding these facts:

The racial and ethnic composition of today's nurseries foreshadows tomorrow's households and work-

places. Hispanics will surpass non-Hispanic blacks to become America's second-largest racial/ethnic group in 2005, according to the Census Bureau projections. And when today's newborns are in their late 50s, it's likely that non-Hispanic whites will no longer be a majority of Americans (Cowles 1997, 1).

The factors of birthrate and immigration obviously mean that a tremendous demographic shift is taking place in our nation, which is most graphically depicted in the chart entitled "U.S. Demographic Shift." As can be seen, the ethnic groups that have their roots in Latin America and Asia will grow dramatically, the Black population will hold its own, while non-Hispanic whites, the group from which the majority of our LC-MS membership comes, will decrease significantly.

America will continue to be diverse linguistically also. In fact, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* lists more than twenty-five major languages spoken in the United States, as well as more than six hundred other languages being spoken (Romo 1993, 52). In 1990, it was estimated that 32 million people spoke a language other than English at home (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996, 53). One would certainly imagine that that number has increased significantly in the past seven years.

The cities have traditionally been the centers of ethnic diversity, and this will no doubt continue. Oscar Romo points out that "Los Angeles is now the second largest Mexican city in the world, the second largest Armenian city in the world, the second largest Korean city, Filipino, and Salvadoran city in the world" (Romo 1993, 54). Eighty-three percent of the children in

its school system identify with one of more than seventy-seven non-Anglo, ethnic groups.

Yet, some of these ethnic groups, especially Hispanics, are beginning to move out of the cities to the rural areas. Many rural midwestern communities have rapidly growing Hispanic or Asian populations (Geoscape International 1997). I remember when I was driving through the town of St. James, Minnesota, population 6000, shortly after accepting a call to serve a dual parish in the area. To my surprise I saw an office door with the sign painted on it: *Minnesota Migrant Council*. I found out there were more than one-hundred Hispanic families living in St. James, plus many others in the surrounding communities. Ligonier, Indiana, north of Fort Wayne, is another example, where about one-half of its five to six thousand residents are Hispanic. At the Great Commission Convocation, I spoke to a man from Lexington, Nebraska. He told me that last year 74% of the kindergarten children in the school where his wife teaches did not speak English as their first language, and this year, that percentage will jump to 80% of the kindergarten students.

Indeed, instead of the melting pot metaphor that I learned as a child, the data suggests that a more apt portrayal might be that the U.S. is a mosaic—a mosaic of cultures, languages, races, and ethnic groups, and that this mosaic will only become more defined and vivid in the future.

The fact that these demographic changes are taking place also in the rural areas, such as the Mid-west where many of our congregations are located, will mean that more of our LC-MS churches will have the opportunity to become directly involved in outreach to Hispanic, Asian and other ethnic groups, and will be faced with the responsibility to do so.

Perhaps I have spent too much time reviewing information that you probably already knew, but it is important that we have a clear, realistic picture of the great opportunities God is presenting to us by bringing people from the many nations to our land. These demographic changes should be before our eyes at all times and that it should influence every aspect of our activity as a church.

## II. WHAT IS AND WHAT COULD BE

Of course, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has made efforts to reach people of many ethnic groups through the years. An important branch of the founding fathers of our Synod came to the U.S. to begin mission work among the American Indian population in places such as Frankenmuth, Michigan. Wilhelm Loehe's vision for the Fort Wayne seminary was that it would be a training center for the preparation of missionaries to work among native Americans—a dream that, unfortunately, and disappointingly for him, was never realized.

The Synodical Conference sent the first missionary to work among African Americans in 1877. Yet, in 1962 the Synod in

convention lamented the fact that there were only about 17,000 Black Americans in our midst after almost a century of ministry among this people group (Commission on Theology and Church Relations 1994, 30). Today it is estimated that there are approximately 53,000 African-Americans in our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregations.

Although the LC-MS had been working in Brazil and Argentina since about the turn of the century, outreach in those lands was directed mainly at the German populations, as happened in the U.S. during the early years of our Synod. It was not until 1926 that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod took notice of the Spanish speaking population in the United States and began work in Texas, and soon thereafter, New York. Today there are some ninety Hispanic congregations in our Synod. The Hispanic Institute of Theology in River Forest has provided for the training of Hispanic pastors in the Spanish language, first as a residential institution, and now as a program that combines theological education by extension with intensive courses on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. It is estimated that there are approximately 6000 Hispanic people in some ninety Hispanic congregations throughout the U.S.

The December 1996 report of Dr. Robert Scudieri, Area Secretary for North America of our Board for Mission Services, provides the following additional information regarding our outreach to various ethnic groups:

Outreach among some of the 1.7 million African immigrants in the United States is taking place in fifteen locations. Outreach among the 1.9 million American Indians is taking place through ten full-time and several part-time workers in thirteen locations. There are currently fifteen Chinese pastors serving in seventeen locations. The Chinese Ministry Conference has made a commitment to begin two new congregations annually. Ministry among Koreans in our Synod has grown rapidly during the last two years, from eleven to twenty-five congregations. A task force and a mission society have been organized, and a missionary is working in Detroit among Muslims. There are plans to call at least two more missionaries to work among Muslims in Detroit. Scudieri's report also mentions the mission work among International Students, Deaf and Blind people, the Hmong people, Jewish people and Vietnamese people.

This is a very brief summary, and it really does not do justice to the efforts of many concerned pastors, congregations, and individuals who are initiating, supporting and carrying out mission work among many of the ethnic groups that make up the Mosaic of people we call the United States of America.

It is plain that the LC-MS has moved out of the era in which our U.S. mission efforts were concentrated among German immigrants. The responsibility to reach out with God's message of free salvation in Christ Jesus to the several ethnic groups in our nation has been recognized by many in our church who have

taken the initiative to proclaim the gospel to those around them. This is why our Board for Mission Services has focused its U.S. mission efforts specifically on the minority ethnic groups, assuming that church planting in the Anglo communities can be carried out at the local level, without too much outside assistance; whereas ministry to people of different cultures and languages is more complex and requires additional encouragement, resources and training.

However, we must take note of what is happening to our churches in the large urban areas. While cities are growing in the U.S., LC-MS congregations are diminishing in size or closing. Scudieri reported that in four of the five largest cities in the United States (Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York) LC-MS baptized membership has declined by 50% in the past twenty years (Scudieri 1996, 11). In other words, probably for a variety of reasons, our churches have found it difficult to minister to the multi-ethnic population in the large urban areas.

While it is possible to point to several initiatives in our Synod to proclaim the gospel among at least fifteen different ethnic groups, and we thank God for them, we can also see that such ministries are limited in scope when we compare them to the evangelistic potential of our 2.6 million members, or the millions of people from several ethnic groups in our midst without a saving knowledge of what God has done for them in Christ

Jesus. We thank God for those who have dedicated so much of their time, energy and resources to these ministries. At the same time, we see that there is much more that could and must be done if one day the ethnic makeup of our Synod is going to reflect the ethnic makeup of our nation.

### III. GOD'S WORD AND THE NATIONS

Having now briefly looked at the present and future ethnic makeup of our nation, and how our Synod has attempted to respond, we turn to some theological considerations. On the radio, television, in the newspapers, ethnic and racial issues have produced an extraordinary amount of political and social debate. The basic question before us, however, of ministry and mission to the ethnic groups in the U.S., is a theological issue, in my estimation. For me, it is problematic when we allow ourselves as a church to be sidetracked by issues that have to do with civil society, or the political agenda of those who have very definite ideas about where our nation is going, or where it should go, or how our nation should address issues such as race, race relations and ethnicity. The question of whether the English language should become the official language for the United States has been hotly debated, as has bi-lingual education for our nations' children (Navarro 1996, 1,7). These questions, and many more that relate to them, are legitimate issues that our nation has to face and settle. Issues of how our nation will define itself, and how it will deal with the variety

of languages and cultures have always been important. It is legitimate and necessary for the well-being of our nation and her people that the debate take place.

However, as church, it seems that we must separate the political agenda from the church agenda. This is not to say, of course, that the church has nothing to say to civil society. We have the responsibility to call attention to the sins of our nation, including the sin of racism, whether that be in its grossest or most subtle form. The CTCR Document on Racism has pointed out: "Because racism is so much a part of the American worldview, it is often difficult for us to recognize it when we see it. We become insensitive to expressions of it" (Commission on Theology and Church Relations 1994, 32). Our church always should be ready to critically examine the issues in the political arena and to speak out against any action that violates the God-given rights of our neighbor. As Luther said, we should "defend him," and "help him and befriend him in any bodily need" (Small Catechism, Explanation to the Fifth and Eighth Commandments, Tappert 1959, 343).

When we seek to address how we as a church, the body of Christ, bought at a price, redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are going to minister to those all around us of different ethnic groups, cultures and languages, we must not allow ourselves to confuse what is a political issue and what is God's will that "all be saved and come to a knowledge of the

truth, for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men . . .” (1 Tim. 2:3-5).

It is one thing to discuss whether it is better for our nation that all speak the same language, or if it is more enriching for all and better for our nation that there be a variety of languages. That is one question, but as it pertains to the ministry of the church, God does not care what language we speak, for the gospel can be communicated and understood in any language. The Pentecost event clearly demonstrates this fact, for it says that “Jews from every nation under heaven” were “utterly amazed.” It says: “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed they asked one another, “What does this mean? (Acts 2:5, 7, 12).

The celestial vision of St. John indicates the place of the various ethnic and linguistic groups in God’s kingdom. John saw a great multitude of people assembled “that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9). These were those who had “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).

At one time, there were those who insisted that German was the only adequate language as a medium for theological study and reflection. One of the founding fathers of our Synod, for example, Pastor Ernst Buerger, who was a part of the first Saxon

immigration and settlement of Perry County, gave ten reasons why he hoped his descendants would never forget the German language. He wrote in his memoirs: "If a German cast aside his language, because he hopes that the Lutheran Church will expand among the English American people, he has a false hope. Before that comes to pass, he can have died. That is God's affair, and who knows whether God will not withhold that treasure as a righteous judgment" (Buerger 1953, 86).

It is interesting how the Sainted Pastor Buerger equated German culture and language with the teaching of the pure gospel. A loss of the German language, for him, meant a loss of pure doctrine. "Do not my descendants do wisely, then, to hold fast to the German language in order not to lose the Lutheran confession and to be able to remain with Lutheranism . . . ?"

I do not cite Pastor Buerger to belittle or disparage him. He lived in a different time, under different circumstances, in a socio-cultural milieu much different than our own. But the attitudes he displays do seem to make two things evident to me: In the first place, we see how near and dear our mother tongue is to us. We see how tenaciously we hang on to the opportunities to hear the gospel and express our faith in what we call the "language of the heart."

We all know that it took our Synod nearly 100 years to make the transition to English. In fact, I was the first pastor of the congregation I served in Southern Minnesota who did not

speaking German fluently. Most of the members over fifty years of age studied the Catechism in the German language. Many of the older members longed for the chance to hear a good sermon in the German language they spoke as children.

More than anything, however, this points out the need to present the gospel in the heart language of people. God's word is clear, the gospel can be preached, doctrinal truth can be adequately expressed, and God can be praised equally well in any language. I remember speaking recently with a woman who is a member of the new Lutheran church that is being established in Jamaica. She was an educated woman, and had a successful, professional career, and she spoke English fluently--the "Queen's English." In Jamaica the people speak English, to be sure. However, the real native tongue that people grow up speaking is called *Patois*. Nonetheless, almost all of our evangelistic work and worship services are conducted in English, and virtually everyone understands it. Yet, when I asked her how she would like to hear a sermon in *Patois* or hymns or liturgy in *Patois*, her face lit up. She explained that, for her, *Patois* was simply much more meaningful. She said it touched her deep down inside in a way that English just could not do. She said that when the preacher would include a phrase or two of *Patois* in his sermon, it simply would cut right to her heart.

The Pentecost event, again, is key here. The message of the gospel was to be proclaimed to people of all languages:

"Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11). Isn't it interesting how many nations were brought to Jerusalem at Pentecost, just as many nations are brought into our midst today?

In fact, the Old Testament as well, pointed out what was to be the multi-ethnic nature of the church. While Abraham was singled out to father a chosen people, it was clear that God's purposes ran far beyond his family: ". . . and *all peoples on earth* will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). The Psalmist reminded Israel that God is a God of all: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among *all nations*" (Psalm 67:1-2). The prophets repeatedly attempted to awaken Israel from its ethnocentric slumber, calling to its attention that God was a God of all nations. Isaiah prophesied: "In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established . . . and the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord'" (Isaiah 2:2-3). Daniel described a vision, similar to that of John's. Speaking of Christ and his kingdom he said: "He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an

everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14). The prophet Micah reminded Israel that: "Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob'" (Micah 4:2).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Jesus would send the disciples to *ta ethne*, the nations, before he ascended into heaven. It is in complete harmony with the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Indeed, Jesus himself challenged the longstanding prejudices and bigotry of his own people as he conducted his ministry in Palestine. He hit a raw nerve in his own home town of Nazareth when he pointed out that God sent Elijah to the widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon, even though there were many widows in Israel; and that God healed Naaman the Syrian, though there were many lepers in Israel (Luke 4:24-27). The reaction of the people demonstrates that we, too, can expect tension and even opposition to ministry toward those who are different than us. Jesus totally amazed his disciples by not only traveling through the region of the despised Samaritans, who were considered to be of an inferior race and culture, but he even took the time to minister to the woman at the well, and the others she brought to him (John 4). The same is true of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

What Jesus was challenging was the ethnocentrism and prejudice of a people who considered themselves inherently superior to others. Or look at the story of the ten who were healed of leprosy. Only one returned to thank Jesus, and Luke adds incisively: "And he was a Samaritan" to show that God's favor rests upon all men, even the most despised, and that all men are capable of responding to his love in faith and thanksgiving (Luke 17:11-19).

One of the most difficult issues to face the early church, was how to deal with the reality that Christianity was not to be a Jewish sect, but a truly transcultural or supra-cultural movement that would touch all peoples, cultures and languages. Peter had to undergo a tremendous paradigm shift before he could come to the point of saying: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34). The brethren in Jerusalem were shocked to hear that Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ, and criticized Peter for his ministry to them. He even had to defend himself to the elders in Jerusalem: "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17). In total astonishment, and almost disbelief, they concluded: "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

Yet many practical questions had to be resolved and issues untangled. That which was cultural had to be separated from that which was absolute, such as the issues surrounding the incorporation of Cornelius and his family into the church, or the requirements to be placed upon the new believers in Antioch so that their presence would not be too offensive to the Jews (Acts 15).

These dilemmas that the early church faced, are being faced by the church today. The relationship between Christ and the cultural milieu of the church will always need to be addressed. The Reformers attempted to deal with such issues when they made declarations such as article VII of the Augsburg Confession: "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere" (Tappert 1959, 32).

H. Richard Niebuhr has pointed out that there are several approaches to this relationship. While we do not agree with all of Niebuhr's conclusions, he is probably quite correct in describing the apostle Paul's and Luther's approach as "Christ and culture in paradox" (Niebuhr 1951, 173). In other words, culture, in that it is an expression of man, who in this life cannot escape the pervasive influence of his sinfulness, like man, continuously will have to deal with the old Adam, even

after the new beginning. I have heard talk of a so-called "Christian culture," but do not know where it exists. At best, it seems, a culture could be, like the redeemed man, *simul justis et peccatur*. Therefore, all cultures contain both good and evil.

Our culture and our Christianity will always be in paradox—in tension—it seems. And therein lies the problem, for when we begin to associate our culture with the true expression of Christianity, we, again, are putting ourselves in the place of God, and setting ourselves up to fall in the same ethnocentrism and self-righteousness of the Jews of Christ's time.

Perhaps we could come to two conclusions based upon what is God's desire for the nations, and our situation as cultural human beings. First, it is God's will that we proclaim his gospel to the nations, to people of every language, culture or ethnic group, for he does not show partiality, but wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth. Second, as we do so, we must use sanctified reason, enlightened by his word, but also imperfect, in working with people of different ethnic groups, to minister to them meaningfully with sensitivity and understanding. In other words, we have to take some risks, and we might make some mistakes, but let us not let our fear of making mistakes paralyze our witness.

I would ask that we not let our fear of things like multiculturalism get the best of us so that we fail to be sensitive

or we don't even try to understand the perspectives, values and worldview of people of other ethnic groups and cultures. When those of us who work in cross-cultural ministry call for patience, understanding and appreciation for cultures that are different than our own, we are not advocating cultural relativism, as if one must blindly accept aspects of a certain culture that are incongruent with God's word. We are not saying that sin is not sin, or that truth is not truth, but we are saying that one should be careful to be sure he truly understands the aspect of the culture of which he is critical. And one should be sure to examine his own presuppositions and prejudices, before judging other cultures.

#### IV. CONFRONTING THE REALITY: WHERE TO NOW?

Having touched upon some foundational thoughts, I would like to mention a few issues and questions that need to be addressed if we are going to move forward as a Synod to meaningfully minister to the ethnic groups in our midst. God has placed a unique opportunity before us, an opportunity that in some ways is going to test our faith, and test our commitment to the proclamation of the gospel.

First, I thank God for the 5-6000 Hispanic people who are a part of the LC-MS. Yet, I think we should also ask ourselves why, for example, are Hispanic people so underrepresented among us, when, if we were to reflect the ethnic makeup of our nation, there would be 250,000 Hispanics in the LC-MS? In other words,

why are we as LC-MS only .5% Hispanic, instead of 10%? Why, after more than 100 years of mission outreach to African Americans, do we have only approximately 53,000 African-Americans in our Synod, when, likewise, we should have approximately 250,000 if we were to reflect the percentage of blacks in our nation? Why are African American people, or Hispanic people, or other major ethnic groups, so underrepresented in our synod? If our Confessional Theology is universal and has application for all, which I sincerely believe it is and does, why is it not reaching the Hispanic people, 70% of whom are without a church in our nation? Is it a question of a need for a better strategy, or more resources allocated? Is it the righteous judgement of God against these nations, as perhaps the sainted pastor Buerger would say? It is certainly true, that ultimately it is God's Spirit who turns people away from their sins and to himself. But, are there other issues that run deeper, and that are preventing us from faithfully proclaiming the gospel to these and other people groups, and bringing them into the fold of Confessional Lutheranism? I do not pretend to have the answer to this question, but I believe it is something that needs serious attention if we are to meaningfully and faithfully proclaim God's word of forgiveness, life and salvation to the nations among us.

At the same time, I would like to present a few general ideas and suggestions that are related to this question.

If we are going to reach out in a more effective and meaningful way, first, it seems, we must deal with the attitudes of our people. In other words, we must begin to help our people see that reaching out to the nations among us is our responsibility, or better yet, our privilege. Of course, a law motivation will not change people's attitudes. It must come from the gospel, as Paul said when he explained the reason he was willing to travel all over and suffer many things for the sake of the gospel. He said: "For the love of Christ compels us, for we are convinced that one died for all. . . ." (2 Cor. 5:14). I don't think I'm being unfair when I say that when I was in Southern Minnesota, it didn't even occur to most of the members of my congregations that they had any responsibility to approach the Hispanic people moving into the area with the gospel—as loving and mature as those people were, and it was a wonderful place to serve.

Perhaps they knew that it could only be done at a price. And I'm not talking about dollars, but at the price of having the complexion of their congregation forever changed. Perhaps they knew that the adjustments they would have to make to meaningfully reach out to the Hispanic people in the area would be painful and create tensions in the congregation. Perhaps they felt that the challenges of relating to the Hispanic people in the area would move them out of their comfort zone.

I wonder, too, if a subtle universalism is not beginning to affect the attitudes of our people? I distinctly remember

speaking at a mission festival once, when someone came up to me afterwards. She was a lifelong member of that church and a committed Christian, raised in the parochial school. She was surprised to hear me say that if someone does not hear the gospel, and if we or someone does not tell that person, he stands condemned before God. Do our people really understand what is at stake here? This is a theological issue of great magnitude, an issue that some missiologists have identified as one of the most significant threats to missions today. Is Acts 4:12 really true?

The leaders of our synod, those of you who are here today, must take the initiative in educating our people concerning these things. The opportunities we have, and the challenges that witnessing to people of other cultures presents, must be raised up before our people continuously if we are going to have a more significant impact for the gospel among the ethnic groups in our land. This cannot be the task of only a few mission execs, or a smattering of concerned pastors and congregations. It must become the concern of all. In fact, each branch, board, commission, entity, or arm of our Synod should ask itself what it can do to assure that we are doing our part in the extension of the kingdom among the nations.

Our universities and seminaries are key to preparing us to reach out to the ethnic groups. Our colleges must be preparing people to deal with other cultures. It cannot be merely some-

thing optional. I think especially of teacher training. Are our teachers equipped to deal with a classroom of kids from two, three, or even more language groups? A pastor from the Chicago area commented to me recently that it has been extremely difficult to find Lutheran school-teachers who are willing, or equipped-to teach in the multi-ethnic setting of his congregation.

The same can be said of the seminaries. The theological formation that takes place during seminary training should include an understanding of the need to and how to minister to people of different ethnic origins. The director of placement at one seminary recently lamented the fact that when he interviews students for placement-and he says he can almost say the words with them-almost all candidates say something like, "I want to go back to a church like the one I grew up in." With all the opportunities for special ministries, mission opportunities, available, so few of our seminary graduates are interested.

It is a matter of theological formation, and our seminaries, as well as the colleges, must become more intentional in providing the knowledge, and forming the attitudes and skills that will help their graduates to face the opportunities to serve in a multi-cultural and pluralistic context.

I know a pastor who suddenly had to face the challenge of 200 Liberian refugees who moved into the area where his church

is located and started attending his church. It was a challenge to him and to the older members of the congregation. There have been some tensions, but it is working. Such situations are going to become more and more common. As we begin to seriously approach and minister to those of different ethnic groups and languages, we can expect tensions, misunderstandings, and even resistance to surface. As we have seen, the ministry of Jesus demonstrated the kinds of reactions we can expect as we reach out to those who are different than us.

A couple weeks ago a pastor called me. He had a real dilemma on his hands. In his town, near the church, a group of Haitians has been getting together for Bible study. The group has grown to more than thirty adults. Leadership for the group is being shared by three men. The group has asked this young pastor to teach them the Catechism of Martin Luther, and to teach them more about the Lutheran church, for they are interested in becoming a part of a local Christian congregation. He asked me: "What do I do now?" It dawned upon me that we are providing very little orientation or preparation regarding how to deal with such situations at the seminary.

To prepare our future pastors, it would certainly help to be more intentional about identifying and calling some professors from the ethnic minorities in our land. I remember that when I was at the seminary there was a Hispanic professor in the systematics department and an African-American professor

in the practical department. In my opinion, their contribution to the life of the seminary and the formation of the students was more significant than some people may realize. Today, it seems like we have gone backwards, for there is no minority ethnic group represented among that faculty. I would also add that there is no doubt in my mind that enthusiasm for mission was much greater then that what it is today. How are we going to open up our churches if we do not also open up the institutions where our church leaders are prepared? It may sound radical, but I would even recommend moving toward a requirement that every seminarian today should have at least a working knowledge of a modern language other than English.

Accurate and meaningful communication of the gospel has to do with much more than language, however, that is, mere words. Translating and proclaiming the message of the gospel is more than merely repeating phrases that, while they are true, convey no real meaning to those who are hearing. The gospel must be preached to people—and this must be especially intentional across cultures—with the recognition that really two “texts” are involved. The “Text” of God’s word, and the “text” of the person or persons to whom we are attempting to proclaim God’s word. As Dr. Voelz has put it, “Meaning is interpersonal” (Voelz 1995, 208). What this suggests, in a nutshell, is that we must proclaim the message of the gospel in ways that are sensitive and appropriate to where the hearer is coming from, or has been,

or is now. This is a general principle of any faithful proclamation of the gospel, but it becomes exceedingly more complex when we are dealing with communication of the gospel across cultures.

Even the very structure of a local congregation should be appropriate to the group that is being reached. A problem with many of our mission efforts to the ethnic groups is that they often depend almost entirely upon subsidy from outside sources. There are some Hispanic congregations that have been on subsidy for forty, or even close to fifty years. These churches have never been able to get to the point of supporting their own ministries. I believe that in at least some instances it is due to the fact that the model of congregational life that has been instituted is foreign to the context in which the congregation exists, and therefore there is no ownership, and where there is no ownership, there will not be much stewardship. At any rate, we must continue to address the question of appropriate approaches to ethnic ministry. Unfortunately, some of the discussions I have witnessed have generated more heat than light. As, for example, the current debate over worship. A notable exception is an article by Larry Vogel, who offers an approach that recognizes the catholicity of our liturgical heritage, but also allows for flexibility and indigeneity (Vogel 1986, 88). A genuine commitment to ethnic ministry in our synod will involve risk, tension, misunderstanding, and opposition. It is a complex

and challenging matter to faithfully and meaningfully communicate the gospel to those who are different than us. Not all people can relate well to those of other cultures. Not all of us will be willing to take the initiative to cross barriers of language and culture to preach the gospel. Not all of us are willing to allow those who are different to incorporate into our midst. Yet, when we think of the great cultural distance that our Savior Jesus Christ was willing to travel, who "being in very nature God . . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death" (Phil. 2:6-7), we can find the example, the motivation and the resources so that we too, as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, will find the way to a more faithful and meaningful proclamation of the gospel to the nations whom God has placed, not at our doorstep, but in our home.

I.N.I.

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August 26, 1997

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Table A  
**Components of Population Change, 1990-2000**  
 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996, 20)

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>INCREASE/YR</u>	<u>PERCENT INCREASE/YR</u>
WHITE, NON-HISPANIC			
1990	188,160,000	989,000	0.5
1995	193,195,000	737,000	0.4
2000	196,751,000	605,000	0.3
BLACK			
1990	30,377,000	453,000	1.5
1995	32,915,000	473,000	1.4
2000	35,225,000	457,000	1.3
AMERICAN INDIAN, ESKIMO, ALEUT			
1990	2,044,000	35,000	1.7
1995	2,194,000	32,000	1.5
2000	2,386,000	33,000	1.4
ASIAN, PACIFIC ISLANDER			
1990	7,345,000	372,000	5.1
1995	9,128,000	331,000	3.6
2000	11,053,000	386,000	3.5
HISPANIC ORIGIN			
1990	22,122,000	803,000	3.6
1995	26,546,000	920,000	3.5
2000	30,913,000	910,000	2.9

Table B  
**ETHNIC AMERICA**  
(Romo 1993, 51)

<u>Ethnic Group</u>	<u>1990 Population</u>	<u>Percent Increase 1980-1990</u>
ASIAN		
Chinese	1,645,472	104
Filipino	1,406,770	82
Japanese	847,562	21
Indian	815,447	126
Korean	798,849	125
Vietnamese	614,547	135
Laotian	149,014	213
Cambodian	147,411	819
Thai	91,275	102
Hmong	90,082	1,631
Pakistani	81,371	415
Indonesian	29,252	204
Malayan	12,243	200
Bangladeshi	11,838	801
Sri Lankan	10,970	275
Burmese	6,177	124
Okinawan	2,247	59
AMERICAN INDIANS, ESKIMOS, ALEUTS		
American Indian	878,285	38
Eskimo	57,152	36
Aleut	23,797	68
PACIFIC ISLANDERS		
Hawaiian	211,014	27
Samoan	62,964	50
Guamanian	49,345	53
Tongan	17,606	183
Fijian	7,036	148
Palauan	1,439	108
No. Mariana Islander	960	38
Tahitian	944	19
HISPANICS		
Mexican	13,495,938	54

Puerto Rican	2,727,754	35
Cuban	1,043,932	30
Other Hispanic	5,086,435	67