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## *Inner City Ministry Interview with Pastor Mark Jeske*

The inner city is a part of the community where many churches face challenges and obstacles. Many times the inner city is filled with high rates of crime and violence. Most people live in older homes that are not in the best of condition and in need of repair. Usually there tends to be a lower rate of education in these areas and numerous families are living off a lower income. In many instances, minorities have found themselves living in the inner city. In the case of Milwaukee, the majority of the inner city is African American. Inside these parts of the city, the WELS has congregations committed to reach out to those who live there and bring them the saving message of Christ. Pastor Mark Jeske has spent over twenty years serving the inner city of Milwaukee at St. Marcus and through this interview he shared his insight about evangelism and worship in this setting.

From this interview, I gained a deeper understanding of how inner city ministry began within the WELS. During the 1960-70's, many WELS congregations in the city of Milwaukee experienced a shift in their communities. Many middle class people were moving outside the city and into the suburbs. Families were leaving the city in the search of living in bigger homes, owning larger amounts of property, and having more quiet lives. After this, many African Americans and minorities moved into the homes of the city. WELS congregations noticed there was a change of the community surrounding their churches. As a result, the churches in the inner city had the option of either shutting their doors or reaching out to the people in their

community. In the midst of social change, some WELS churches decided they were going to reach out and serve the families living in the inner city.

Pastor Jeske emphasized there were some challenges and difficulties he experienced in his ministry. He mentioned one of the major challenges he experienced was that he had never served or really been to an inner city congregation before coming to St. Marcus. His inexperience to this environment was one challenge that took time to overcome. Also, when he reached St. Marcus, there were not many other WELS pastors who had a successful inner city in Milwaukee. He explained many things in his ministry were done through trial and error. Also, he mentioned another difficulty was reaching out to a culture that he was not familiar with. As a result, Pastor Jeske mentioned the hard work that was needed in order to become familiarized with the history of African Americans and understand aspects of their culture.

Pastor Jeske provided me with very practical information about evangelism in the pastoral ministry and for the inner city. He emphasized that having a congregation with outreach mindset comes from strong leadership. When a pastor sets a strong example of evangelism in a congregation, other members see the importance of this part of the ministry. Also, leading the congregation to see the vision of the church will allow them to feel more a part of the congregation's ministry. Teaching the members how to reach out and evangelize makes them feel like they are playing a larger role in their church's future. Pastor Jeske discussed from his experience in the inner city ministry that there is not any special method he learned to be particularly effective when evangelizing to the inner city. However, he mentioned the need to be persistent and continue to evangelizing even when it looks like it is having minimal results. He mentioned just making a positive influence upon the community and having a good reputation can be just as effective as other methods of evangelizing.

From the interview, Pastor Jeske gave many ideas concerning worship style and music in the inner city. He mentioned that it was vital for him to learn about African American culture. He talked about how he spent time learning the music of African American churches. He spent time learning about Jazz, Gospel, and Blues that are popular among African Americans. After spending time studying these styles of music he began to implement them in services. He described the Gospel choir as being particularly useful in this area as well. Also, he mentioned the importance of changing how he preached to better adapt to the members of his congregation. A more narrative and story-telling style of preaching became the style he used in his sermons. Also, he mentioned the importance of continuing to learn how ministry is being done today in other places. Pastor Jeske said that he visits other African American dominated congregations to see how they conduct worship. He does this to see if he can gain something from other ministers who are serving those in the inner city.

While serving in the inner city, Pastor Jeske said he learned many lessons during the course of his ministry. He stressed the significance of learning the culture of the people you are serving. He mentioned the time he spent learning the culture of the African American culture. He said he tried to learn their stories and learn their history. While this requires effort, this shows genuineness to the congregation and may take down barriers that existed beforehand. Also, he said to look for help from others who are serving in same type of ministry. He described how he talked to other WELS pastors to seek input or advice from them. This gives a pastor the chance to find what has worked for others and learn what he could to improve things at his congregation.

In conclusion, Pastor Jeske's interview provided me with a detailed look at how a pastor conducts his ministry inside the inner city. He describes some of his experience in trying to

reach out to people living in a struggling community. He provides perspective in the area of worship and explains how the African American culture has influenced the worship style he now uses. Even though the inner city has its challenges and difficulties, God has richly blessed many WELS congregations and will continue to bless them as the saving message of the Gospel reaches the lost.