

A Short History of WELS Outreach to Asians in St. Paul, MN.

By

James Fleming

Senior Church History Paper

4-28-95

Professor Brenner

I intend to present the history and background information concerning the WELS evangelism outreach to the Asian people living in the St. Paul area. I will present this information by interviewing Pastor Loren Steele on videotape and asking him questions concerning his work with Asian people. I believe that this interview with Pastor Loren Steele has historical significance because Pastor Steele is the first WELS pastor to reach out to Asians here in America. In many ways it is a world mission with in the United States of America. Pastor Steele has used new methods to reach out to these people with the Gospel.

Date of Interview: March 31, 1995

Interview : Pastor Loren Steele, Immanuel Congregation, St.Paul, MN.

Background information on Loren Steele:

(In reporting this personal information on Loren Steele, it was a little difficult to get firm dates and places from him. The order of these events may not always be correct, but I have done the best I can. In the future another student may want to pursue his life story in more detail. This personal information was obtained outside of the videotape interview.)

Loren Steele was Born Aug. 19, 1943 on a naval base in Norfolk Virginia. Loren calls himself a war baby. He attended grade school in Eagle Rock, California. He completed his high school education in Los Angeles, California. Following high school education he attended Humbolt State college for two years. Then he attended the Art Center school in L.A. for three years and graduated with a four year degree in art. After obtaining his Art degree Loren was. . . in his own words "An^{ci} adventurer." He traveled around the world taking on different jobs. He worked as a logger in California. He worked in Alaska with the Fish & Wildlife Department. He also traveled to Mexico, the South Pacific, and New Zealand. He also worked as a professional artist to earn a living.

On Oct. 8, 1966, Loren was married and moved to Hawaii. Consequently it was at this point in his life when Loren was introduced to Christianity through his wife. Later his marriage was blessed with two daughters. At this same time (1966) Loren entered the army, serving in intelligence. He dealt with top secret information concerning Vietnam and U.S. security.

Somewhere around 1969 Loren left the service and went back to Humboldt State University for two years to get his teaching credentials. I'm pretty sure following this that Loren taught school and practiced his artistry during this time.

In 1979 Loren entered Northwestern College to prepare for the pastoral ministry. In his second year as a student Loren was baptized by Pastor Walter Schumann. He graduated from Northwestern College in the Spring of 1982 and in the following Fall he went on to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In 1986 Loren graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and received his first call to Immanuel, St. Paul, MN. In April of 1994, he was called as permanent pastor to Asians at Immanuel congregation, St. Paul, MN.

While listening to Pastor Steele speak about his life, where he had been and what he had done, it almost seemed as though the hymn "Amazing Grace" should have been playing in the background. Anyone who speaks with pastor Steele will be influenced by his love, zeal and passion to carry God's Word to unbelievers. Truly God by his grace has made this man, "a man of steel," when you see the difficult challenges he faces in his ministry. May God bless this his servant in the future!

Summary of the Video Tape Interview

Why the impetus for outreach to Asians in St. Paul, MN? It was a natural for Loren Steele because of his background with Asians. He lived in California where he had exposure to them. He lived in Hawaii where he had exposure to Asians. His work in military intelligence

gave him exposure to Asians. How did he reach out to them?

Besides the traditional evangelism methods of knocking on doors, sending out flyers and making phone calls, Steele and Immanuel congregation began the new concept of the ESL - "English as a Second Language" - school. This may be one of the most significant changes in evangelism methodology that WELS has seen as of late. Immanuel, St. Paul is the birth place for this concept. How does it work? The church teaches English classes to anyone who wants to attend. The classes are easy going, there are no grades, students come when they can and students do not have to pay for books or tuition. The church pays for it all. How do the students learn about the classes? Through word of mouth, one family member tells another, one friend tells another. Pastor Steele did not mention that they have any problem finding students for their classes.

How does the Gospel come in? Teachers use Bible stories to convey the Gospel message and teach English. God has blessed this school by bringing many souls into his kingdom through the ESL! (See also the *Northwestern Lutheran*, Feb. 15, 1992 for more information on the ESL)

Of course where ever God is active saving souls, Satan will also be active trying to take souls to hell with him. What challenges do Asians and new converts face in America? The challenges are many. There are social difficulties. Some children refer to themselves as, "Point Fives." They are half Asian and half American. At home they are Asians. At school they are Americans. Asian culture and American culture differ radically and Satan has a field day with this conflict.

There are problems with drugs coming from Asian countries. Drugs mean money to those selling them and an escape to those using them. There are problems with gangs. The gangs provide protection, money, and a home outside of their true families. There are problems with

prostitution. Pastor Steele tells the story of how at one time he had to make a rescue mission to Milwaukee to save a girl who had been sold as a sex slave for \$4,000.00. Finally these people struggle with poverty.

Yet through all these difficulties some become Christians. Pastor Steele states that, "It may take 4-9 years to make a WELS Christian out of a pagan." He also relates how the Gospel message and faith change their lives radically, he states, "The notion of the happy pagan is a lie!"

How do these new converts worship? They use the same liturgy that most German WELS Lutherans use, a simplified and translated form of, *The Service of the Word*. They also use the historic instruments of the church, the organ and piano. Pastor Steele relates that these new converts love to sing songs in English and in their mother tongues (Vietnamese, Chinese, Hmong, etc.). Along with Sunday morning worship, almost all attend Bible class, because this is simply what they have come to know. The same goes for those children taking catechism instruction. They come to class because they want to, not because they have to. These believers are very interested in doctrine. They will be the theologians of the future.

How has God blessed this outreach to Asians and where do you see it going? Pastor Steele relates that the Lord has blessed him and Immanuel with many people in various Bible classes and English classes. There are a many who come to worship on Sunday morning. But Pastor Steele also relates that it is difficult to use Synod statistical categories for his people, because some come regularly to church, but are not members or have not been baptized. Others have taken membership courses, but have not formally joined Immanuel. But that doesn't bother Pastor Steele as long as they keep coming.

Where will this outreach to the Asians go in the future? God has already blessed it with one man, Jerry Chang, who is being trained as a pastor. He has already returned home to Laos,

Thailand, Vietnam to preach the Gospel message there. The advantage here is that Jerry knows the languages, he is not a foreigner and he knows the culture. Perhaps one day these countries will have self-supporting Lutheran church bodies themselves.

My interview with Pastor Loren Steele was fascinating and entertaining to say the least. The one statement that Pastor Steele made in regards to spreading the Gospel message that will live in my heart forever is this, "Just go . . . You have to have a fire in your gut that burns so hard, that it's more painful to sit at your desk, than it is to get out on the street!" It is amazing how God works and how he uses sinful human beings to carry out his work. In the years ahead it will be interesting to see what happens in this one tiny area of God's church. May the Lord continue to bless it!