

***New Beginnings -- A Home For Mothers***

*From Conception Through Its Early Years*

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*“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Ga6:2).*

Through our Lutheran Reformation heritage, God in his grace has passed on to us in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod the single most important truth that any individual can come to know in his or her lifetime: We are saved by grace alone through faith alone. There is nothing we can or have to do to earn our place in God's kingdom. Through his Son, God has procured salvation for us. Through his Word and Sacrament God works the trust in our hearts that makes this salvation our own. In this truth we live and breathe. We strive for the clear proclamation of this truth with all the gifts our God has given us.

Yet, over the years, some have leveled the charge that in the Lutheran's undaunting quest to preserve the true doctrine, an equally important scriptural emphasis has fallen to the background. We are labeled head Christians as opposed to heart Christians and are charged with being so preoccupied with doctrine that we neglect to live our faith to the full. Those who level the charge point to the apostle Paul's numerous exhortations to live as the new creatures God has made us and to work hard to carry one another's burdens. Although each of us would do well to examine our lives and ministries in the light of this charge so that we may be spurred on to use every opportunity to glorify God, the purpose of introducing this “complaint” is not to debate its legitimacy. Rather, this essay presents a positive example where both true doctrine and life are united in a ministry among us. This exciting ministry in the WELS is designed to address all the needs, both spiritual and physical, of a group of young ladies and their children who are living under the burden of the consequences of sin. This ministry is called *New Beginnings--A Home For Mothers*.

This essay is divided into five major parts that trace the history of *New Beginnings--A Home For Mothers* from the initial concept through its development, birth, and growing pains, concluding with a short evaluation of the ministry plus a look to the future. Sources include the minutes from Steering Committee and Board of Directors' meetings, the *Home's* Policies and Guidelines Manual, and personal interviews with those directly involved in this ministry. The author of the essay, as the son-in-law of the *Home's* first house parents, also draws on personal observations gained from non-official visits to the *Home* and with the *Home's* staff. We begin by turning our attention to the initial concept and impetus for this ministry.

### *Conception*

The fact that New Beginnings is alive and strong today is due solely to the grace and power of God through whom we live and move and have our being. To this everyone who has been involved with the birth of the *New Beginnings* program would wholeheartedly agree. Yet, if the concept and initial development of *New Beginnings*<sup>1</sup> is to be credited to any one person, that individual would have to be Pastor Robert Fleischmann. Pastor Fleischmann was born in Pleasanton, CA, in October of 1956. While he was still a young boy, his family moved to Lake Geneva, WI, where he spent his grade school and high school days in the public school system. Following high school, Fleischmann attended Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN. He graduated from Bethany in 1979 and went on to complete his studies for the pastoral ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. After graduating from the Seminary in 1983, Pastor Fleischmann served his first pastorate at Good Shepherd in Plymouth, WI, a mission congregation which would become self-supporting during his years of service there. In 1988 Pastor Fleischmann accepted the call to serve as National Director of *WELS Lutherans for Life*. During his tenure in

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<sup>1</sup> The stress here is on the initial stages of development. Once the idea took to flight there were numerous people contributing to the development of the program.

this office, the concept for *New Beginnings* would be born with Pastor Fleischmann as the chief idea and organizational man. Pastor Fleischmann would travel all over the country gathering information and ideas, attending meetings, scouting facilities and promoting the program. Finally, Pastor Fleischmann would be the one to sit down and produce the manual for the new *Home for Mothers*. But we are getting a little ahead of ourselves. First we need to find out how the idea for this unique ministry developed.

For quite some time those involved in pregnancy counseling issues were aware of a criticism that their opponents were leveling against them. The opposition liked to point out that our counseling centers work hard to convince single young mothers to keep their babies instead of aborting them, yet they were doing little to nothing to help these young women deal with the difficulties that they face as young single mothers. Recognizing that this indeed was a legitimate concern, Fleischmann began to kick around ideas of ways in which *WELS Lutherans for Life* could address this issue. The initial plan was to have a home to which the mother could come with her newborn child and stay for a year. During her stay, the home would provide the mother with spiritual and vocational training, parenting skills, and the like. The hope was that when the mother left she would not simply return to life on welfare, but that she would have developed many of the skills necessary to become a productive member of society and a responsible parent.

While researching some of the programs that already existed among other pro-life groups, quite a few pre-delivery programs were found. Yet the post-delivery type of program in which *WELS Lutherans for Life* was interested was hard to find. The lack of this specialized program would become a source of one of the main challenges to the development of *New Beginnings*. Because *New Beginnings* was one of the first of its kind, there was no model to follow. We were indeed plowing untilled soil.

But before we get too far ahead, we need to go back to the spring of 1990. It was then that interest in a special project was expressed by the *Greater Atlanta Lutherans for Life* chapter centered in Atlanta, Georgia. Fleischmann met with the Chapter's Board twice and together they did some investigation of pro-life counseling centers in the area including, for example, a successful program administered by a conservation Presbyterian church. The chapter soon realized, however, that the lack of a strong financial base due to the low concentration of churches around Atlanta strongly inhibited them from making such a project their own. The idea of a home for single mothers supported financially by the national organization *WELS Lutherans for Life* seemed the better way to go. Soon afterwards, however, God showed that he had other plans in mind. Two of the key members of the Atlanta chapter left. One was a pastor who took a call. The other was a lay member who relocated to another area. The impetus in Atlanta fizzled, but the concept was not abandoned.

As one might expect, Fleischmann shared his concept of a home for single mothers with other compatriots throughout *WELS Lutherans for Life*. One of these compatriots lived in Denver, CO. And it is to the mile high city that our story moves next. About the same time that the idea of a home for single mothers was being batted about in Atlanta a brand new chapter of *WELS Lutherans for Life* was getting itself organized just east of the Rockies in Colorado. One of the key men involved in this endeavor was Tom Frey, a member of Our Savior Ev. Lutheran Church in Longmont, CO. Tom, as a former employee of IBM, an owner of a Baskin Robbins and a manager of a housing complex, came with a lot of expertise. The reader may have already guessed that Frey is one of the compatriots to whom Fleischmann mentioned his ideas concerning the *Home for Mothers*.

Some years earlier Frey was involved with the purchase of a center in the Denver area which he and others hoped one day to develop into an area Lutheran high school. The idea, however had run into all kinds of opposition and as a result the funding that was needed was not forthcoming. When Frey heard the idea about a home for single mothers, he immediately thought of this facility. His hopes were that this building could be utilized by parts of the program for training.

In October of 1990, Pastor Fleischmann was invited out to the Denver area to preach for their Reformation service. After taking the opportunity at that time to tour Frey's Rocky Mountain Center, as it was called, Fleischmann agreed that the facility was nice and could certainly be used in some capacity. The program however, would still need to acquire a place for the young ladies to live. Because there were uncertainties as to whether this project would even make it off the ground, Fleischmann also thought it best not to purchase a building at this time. It was then that Frey mentioned an acquaintance he knew, Randy Currier, who had recently purchased an apartment complex near what was then the airport in Denver. Soon afterward all three men met and a deal was ironed out. But that is really part of the next stage of the birth of New Beginnings. Our interest here is that the seed is beginning to take root. Not only do we have a concept, but we also have a capable man out in Denver excited about the project and an idea for the location. If there were such a thing as an accident, that is how New Beginnings found its final home in Denver, CO. But now it is time to move on to the next part of the story.

### *Development*

On April 2, 1991 the *Lutherans for Life Rocky Mountain Chapter's* Steering Committee and Board of Directors met for the first time to discuss the proposal of a home for mothers in the

Denver area.<sup>2</sup> For about the next year and a half this would be the forum in which discussions, plans, and proposals for the *Home for Mothers* would take place. After that the *Home* would have its own Board of Directors and separate itself from the local chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Top of the agenda on the proposed *Home for Mothers* was the discussion of a possible sight for the home. In addition to the apartment complex, *Evergreen Village*, mentioned earlier, a few other possibilities had come into consideration. Since there already was a home for mothers (*Bridgeway Home*) in the Denver area, the possibility existed of completely taking over the operation of this established facility. That would also mean assuming their debts and picking up the work they were doing. Another possibility would be to take over partial interest in the *Bridgeway Home*. This would include sponsoring a woman there or taking over the operation of one of their several homes. The final alternative would be to rent one of the three small apartment buildings that the operator of *Bridgeway Home* owns and set up the *Home for Mothers* in it.

The *Bridgeway Home*, however, came with a few hitches. The *Bridgeway Home* was tied in with HUD money and had a mortgage. *Bridgeway* was receiving \$14,000 a year from churches of several denominations and about \$18,000 from various individuals. The *Home's* Board of Directors was made up of community leaders. If we were to take over *Bridgeway*, of course, we would have had to dissolve the Board of Directors and most likely would have lost the volunteer help they had at the time. Finally, it was noted that *Bridgeway's* operator was very closely and emotionally involved with the program. Any partial takeover of the program might have certainly led to conflicts and difficulties. Because of numerous problems that a takeover of the *Bridgeway Home* would entail, it seemed best to go with the *Evergreen Village* approach. The fact that we

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<sup>2</sup> Information included on the next few pages concerning this meeting was obtained from the Steering Committee/Board Meeting Minutes, April 2, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Steering Committee/Board Meeting Minutes from October 21, 1992.

could expand or contract depending on the program's need and were free to develop our own program made *Evergreen Village* the best choice for the *Home for Mothers*.

Two other points should be mentioned here under the discussion of the site for the *Home for Mothers*. The original plan was to have two mothers share a room, to have a private room for the house parents and to also have a separate commons room in which the entire group would meet for meals and Bible study. This plan would be altered somewhat later so that each girl could have her own room if she desired. Also, early on the planners recognized the need to secure the necessary rooms and to make sure that they were fairly close to each other. To insure that this would happen, the program began paying rent for rooms months before the program actually got underway. The question of furnishing the apartments also came into consideration along the way. But thanks to the generous donations of *WELS* members from area churches, this issue, too, was easily resolved.

At the initial meeting Pastor Fleischmann presented his thoughts as to sources of clientele for the new *Home for Mothers*. He envisioned three basic feeders. First, some mothers would come from the *WELS Lutherans for Life Pregnancy Counseling Centers* throughout the country. Others would come by means of referral from agencies in the state of Colorado. The third possibility consisted of referrals made by friends and others. For the most part this would become a reality, although time would prove that a vast majority of the mothers were to come from the Denver area.

Pastor Fleischmann also presented the plans for staffing the *Home for Mothers*. The possibility of calling a husband and wife team was being seriously considered. Because the primary impact of the program was to be spiritual, a pastor/wife team seem most probable, although the possibility of a lay couple had not at all been ruled out. Pastor Fleischmann

anticipated that the woman member of the team would be involved in a lot of training for the clients and would consequently need skills in the development of self-esteem and psychology. As we jump ahead nearly two years, the *Home for Mothers* did indeed begin its calling process with a pastor/wife team. On January 27, 1993 the Board of Directors held the first call meeting for *New Beginnings*.<sup>4</sup> Pastor Robert Sievert, who was serving *Wisconsin Child and Family Service* in Milwaukee, and his wife were called. Two months later the Board called a second time. This time the call was extended to Pastor and Mrs. David Witte.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime Pastor Fleischmann began to express his concerns about the round the clock nature of the house parents' duties. Proposals were put forth to help alleviate the problem. The importance of having the house parents on site was underscored, but they would be encouraged to be less accessible at night. At this time discussion was introduced to provide a relief staff for the house parents. Although at this time monies were added to the annual budget for relief staff, the difficulties encountered in finding someone to fill the position pushed off the reality of a permanent relief staff member until well after the program got under way.<sup>6</sup>

Getting back to the calling process, it should be noted that when the Wittes declined the call, the Board of Directors began to rethink their calling provisions. The thought occurred that the aspect of a double call (husband and wife) might make it difficult to fill the call. It was decided then to extend the call solely to the Spiritual Director with the understanding that the potential existed for his wife to become the House Mother. On June 1, 1993 this call was extended to Craig Schwartz who was teaching at Lakeside Lutheran High School in Lake Mills, WI.<sup>7</sup> Under

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. the minutes for the Board of Directors Meeting, January 27, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, March 5, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, March 26, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, June 1, 1993.

God's guidance Craig accepted the call and his wife Judy was later called to serve as the House Mother. Judy also accepted the call. *New Beginnings* had its first house parents.

But there still was a lot of planning to be done before the *Home for Mothers* could open its doors. There was, of course, the question of financing. At the first organizational meeting in April of 1991, the total estimated cost of operating the *Home for Mothers* for the first year, based on eight clients, was \$85,000. The reality was substantially more, especially when the unanticipated cost of legal fees began pouring in. As of this writing, the *Home for Mothers* operates under a budget of approximately \$10,000 per month. In the area of finances, Pastor Fleischmann stated that, ideally, the National Organization would fund full-time staffing, while the chapters took care of the expenses incurred by the client for transportation to the *Home* and during the client's stay at the *Home*. This plan would basically pan out with the exception of a few cases in which the local chapter could not afford to send the support. Early on Pastor Fleischmann was able to elicit substantial donations for the program so that the *Home for Mothers* was guaranteed the funds it needed to get off and running during those first critical years. One key donor contributed \$265,000.00 for the first three years. As word got out, other donations began to appear from various parts of the Synod. We thank God for moving the hearts of his people to generously support this ministry.

Earlier the issue of legal expenses was raised. Remember that this ministry is a new concept not only to *WELS*, but also fairly new nationwide. There was neither model nor legal precedent. Certainly we needed to protect ourselves and the residents. As one might expect, this phase of the program development turned out to be more of a hurdle than anticipated. A few examples might be in order. As a part of his information gathering process, Pastor Fleischmann visited *Rawhide Boys Ranch* in northern Wisconsin. *Rawhide* is a program established to help

dysfunctional boys who are sent there instead of serving time in a correctional facility. The program is extremely successful with 86% of the participants never becoming repeat offenders. An important aspect of the program is a strong family emphasis. A group of boys live in a large house with house parents, eat their meals together, and basically do everything an average family would do. When the *Home for Mothers* decided that it would be beneficial to model the family emphasis, the program started running into legal questions that one would never dream of. These included questions like: How could the participants come together for a common meal without running into problems of restaurant licensing? How can you run a group home without actually calling it a group home and facing another endless list of rules and regulations?

Other questions also arose. How young can the participants legally be before being permitted to live in the *Home*? What if the mother comes to the *Home* and the father files a paternity suit claiming that the mother had kidnapped the child? In the Articles of Incorporation provisions had to be made for a veil of separation so that if the *Home for Mothers* were to be sued, the National Board could ask to be removed from the suit. All in all it cost well over \$20,000 in legal fees to set up the program. Pastor Fleischmann, however, feels that it was well worth the cost to head off any problems or opposition that may have occurred in this area.

Speaking of legal issues, the legal birth of *New Beginnings* occurred on October 21, 1992. That was the day the Articles of Incorporation were completed and signed. The original officers of the Board of Directors consisted of President, Tom Frey, Vice-President, Arne Asp, Secretary Dana Rabenberg and Spiritual Advisor, Pastor Matt Rauh.<sup>8</sup> In the course of time Pastor David Russow would also be added to the Board and Pastor Fleischmann would replace Tom Frey as President.<sup>9</sup> Tom Frey would later assume the office of treasurer and Pastor Tim Winkel would

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<sup>8</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, October 22, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, June 17, 1994.

replace Pastor Matt Rauh as Spiritual advisor due to the latter's acceptance of a call to St. Peter, MN.<sup>10</sup> Steve Zambo was also heavily involved in the developmental stage of New Beginnings and his role in publicity will be picked up later.

In addition to the legal challenges, there were other obstacles encountered along the way. One was the issue of perception within the church body. This was a ministry unique to the *WELS*. It would take some time to adjust to the idea. The writer of the essay agrees with the statement made by Pastor Fleischmann: "The *WELS* is generally not against new and innovative ideas. It is just cautious." One might imagine that there would be concerns on the part of some individuals as to the financing of the project. Would the *Home for Mothers* pull much needed money out of the District? That, of course, was never the intention. Fortunately, the fact that the finances were already provided for and the legal questions addressed stemmed a lot of the opposition that might have been raised against this new ministry. Communication of the situation quickly alleviated many of the fears and since then the program has generally enjoyed the favor and support of the members of the Synod.

Fleischmann pointed out that another obstacle to the development of the program was the details. No matter how much thought a person puts into developing a program, that person cannot think of every possible scenario as he sits in the "ivory castle" of his office. Eventually, as the program got under way, situations would pop up that had not been addressed within the manual. Because of experience Pastor Fleischmann knew that these types of "situations" would occur. With this in mind he worked at writing the operational manual in such a way that those administering the program could change and modify the manual as needed. Some examples of modifications will be considered in the section on *Growing Pains*.

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<sup>10</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, June 9, 1995.

There were, of course, many other issues that had to be worked out during this development stage (more that can possibly be dealt with in this essay). Issues such as health and dental care, vocational and educational programs for the mothers, AFDC, child custody problems, adoption issues, day care services, employment, screening of clients, developing parenting skills, etc.<sup>11</sup> Although general protocol concerning many of these issues was established during this development stage, most of the details <sup>would</sup> will be hammered out after the first house parents arrive. That brings us to the birth of *New Beginnings*.

### ***Birth***

After two and a half years of intense planning and preparation, Craig and Judy Schwartz, the first house parents, arrived on the scene. As might be expected, Craig and Judy were a little anxious about the task that lay ahead. Yet, they also knew that the God who called them would give them the help they needed and they were eager to get down to business. Craig was a 1963 graduate of the *University of Stevens Point*, WI where he majored in Biology and minored in Chemistry and Education. He did his graduate studies at *St. Mary's* in Winona, MN and completed his MS of Science Education in 1967. After a year of teaching in the public school system in Almond, WI, Craig taught in the *Eau Claire Public Schools* for the next ten years. After a few years in the public system he began summer courses at *Doctor Martin Luther College*. After receiving Synod certification in the summer of 1973, Craig received a call to Lakeside Lutheran High School where he taught for nineteen years before accepting the call to *New Beginnings*. Craig married his wife, Judy, in the summer of 1964. Craig and Judy learned the ropes of Christian parenting as they raised four children of their own and an adopted son. They also gained valuable experience as foster parents. Both Craig and Judy were active in their church

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<sup>11</sup> Steering Committee/Board Meeting, August 17, 1992.

and Judy spent a good deal of time volunteering as a counselor at the *WELS Lutherans for Life Pregnancy Counseling Center* in Madison, WI. Through all these life experiences God was molding and shaping them for the work he had planned for them at *New Beginnings*

On Sunday, October 3, 1993, at 4:00 P.M. Craig and Judy were installed as the house parents of *New Beginnings* at Christ our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Aurora, CO. Pastor Matt Rauh served as liturgist and Pastor Robert Fleischmann delivered the sermon. This would be a good place to include a little about the house parents' duties. The official title for the house father is the Spiritual Director. As the title suggests one of the Spiritual Director's main responsibilities is to plan and lead Bible study in the *Home*. This includes a family-like Bible study held daily with all the mothers involved in the program. The Spiritual Director also oversees homework assignments that the young ladies complete on a weekly basis. At the time of this writing a course entitled, *What's the Bible About?* was being used. The course was developed by a maternity home in Pennsylvania and seeks to present the truths about Jesus' life, death and resurrection in very personal and applicable way to these young ladies. The Spiritual Director is also responsible for coordinating visits made by pastors in the Denver area twice monthly. During these visits, the pastors join in a meal with the residents and afterwards present a topical Bible study to the group.

Besides the oversight of the spiritual growth of those involved in the program, the house father also is in charge of the financial dealings with the ladies. This includes getting a credit report on each of the residents and helping these young women improve their credit rating. The house father works with the ladies to prepare a budget and impresses on them the importance of putting some of their earnings into savings. Part of this financial education program includes a system of vouchers in which the mothers are given their weekly budget in play money. Whenever the mothers want to purchase something, they go to the house father and exchange their play

money for real money. This system allows the house father to keep track of where the money is being spent and to give the mothers encouragement in spending their resources wisely.

The Spiritual Director is in charge of the financial dealings of the *Home* and keeping the program within its budget. Oversight of personnel is also one of the Spiritual Director's responsibilities. Personnel include the staff counselor, relief lady and the bookkeeper. The Spiritual Director is the *Home*'s liaison with the Board of Directors. He produces the publications for the *Home* including a newsletter. And finally, he develops promotional items and goes out and speaks on behalf of the home to church groups, *Lutherans for Life* chapters, etc.

While the Spiritual Director spends a great deal of time and energy overseeing the operations of the *Home*, the Home Manager or the housemother works even more closely with the mothers in the program. One of the main responsibilities of the house mother is the planning and preparation of meals. One meal every day is eaten together by the mothers and the staff in a room called the Commons. As one might imagine, to pull off such a feat requires one very large table and quite a bit of planning. Each day all of the mothers in the program are responsible for bringing a portion of the common meal. Once a week the house mother works together with the girls to plan out the menu and what each individual will bring. Besides the preparation of the meal, clean up duties also need to be assigned and supervised.

The house mother also serves as the one of the contact people between the *Home* and the residents. The mothers can speak to her about any troubles they are having with the program or anything else that may come up. Although initially this role was assigned to the house father, it soon became apparent that many of the young ladies were having trouble dealing with the male figure and the responsibility was transferred to the female members of the staff. Another important responsibility of the house mother is the distribution of donations. Even before *New*

*Beginnings* opened, donations of baby clothes, toys, diapers, strollers, and everything else a new mother could use began to pour in. These donations are organized by the house mother in a special storeroom in the building. The house mother then makes judgments as to how and what articles will be given to the residents as they are needed. This, too, is a job that takes a little strategy. It is certainly not in the best interest of these ladies to just give them everything they want or think they need.

Finally, the house mother is also in charge of organizing and leading parenting classes for the mothers. She spends time meeting with each mother individually to assess her needs and to offer assistance wherever she can from reading lessons to teaching them how to bake bread. During these visits she also encourages the mothers in their spiritual growth and worship life using whatever opportunities she can to invite them to worship. Although the house father and house mother both have a specified list of duties, like any husband and wife team, both work together to accomplish the goals of the program and there is probably no more important lesson taught these young mothers than what they learn as they watch these Christ-filled house parents model life in a Christian home.

When Craig and Judy arrived at the *Home*, there was quite a bit left to be done to make *New Beginnings* into a real home. There was the task of collecting the donated furniture, et al, and bringing it to the home. Household necessities that had not been donated needed to be purchased. Office equipment was obtained and installed. Besides getting the physical plant in order, admissions criteria and other *Home* rules and regulations still needed to be ironed out. To top it off, there wasn't a whole lot of time to prepare because *New Beginnings* real birth date would take place on October 20, 1993. That is the date that the *Home*'s first resident (we'll call her Mary) arrived. Mary came from the Milwaukee area and was a graduate of a WELS Lutheran

High School. Mary would be the sole resident at *New Beginnings* for some time. Although this would cause the Board and house parents some consternation, the slow start was probably a blessing in disguise from God. *New Beginnings* was given the opportunity to ease into its ministry.

Although through the process of trial and error the program would evolve somewhat over time and some of the *Home* regulations would be changed and adapted, the basic program and objectives have not changed a whole lot from the those in place when Mary arrived. A brief look at the *Home*'s objectives and what goes on in the *Home* on a typical day will help give the reader a feel for what this ministry is all about.<sup>12</sup> One of the main objectives is the spiritual nurturing of the participant. The young ladies receive instruction in God's Word and assistance in applying its truths to their daily lives. In addition, they receive specific training in conducting regular personal Bible study and devotions in their own family. Every opportunity is given them to attend weekly worship services in one of our WELS churches in the Denver area.

Another objective includes academic and/or vocational improvement. Those residents who still need to do so are given the opportunity to work for a high school diploma or its equivalency. Others are encouraged to go on to a vocational training course so that they may acquire a specific skill that may help lead them to financial independence. Some of the areas of study available to the residents are medical assistant, X-ray technician, dental assistant, surgical assistant or respiratory therapist. Except for respiratory therapy program, all of these courses can be completed in approximately 7-9 months.

The *Home* seeks to help the residents develop parenting skills so that they can care for their new family. This includes helping the participants and their families learn to communicate

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<sup>12</sup> The following summary of ministry objectives is based on those found in the *Home* Policies and Guidelines, pg. 1.

better and to understand the changes that a new child can bring to the family. In the *Home* the residents are given opportunities to grow in their social skills. This includes good communication skills and learning how to deal with other people. Through personal counseling the participants learn to understand themselves, their needs, their God-given strengths, their weaknesses and then learn how to deal with them in life situations. Finally, the residents are given the opportunity to learn the importance of fiscal accountability and some practical skills in achieving financial independence. In order to offer all these opportunities to the resident the *Home* provides a clean, safe, Christ-centered environment for the twelve months the residents are encouraged to be a part of the program.

A typical day for a resident would include several of the following activities. For those mothers who arrive before they have their baby up to the end of the first month after the baby has been born activities are fairly limited. There are several reasons for this. First, it is often difficult for the mother to obtain employment when she is obviously pregnant. There may be a risk factor involved in the pregnancy. Daycare is also not available to new mothers in the first month after the baby has been born. Therefore the day will be spent fulfilling obligations such as doctor's appointments, appointments with the social services department and with the *New Beginnings* staff. There will be educational planning meetings to set up a strategy for the months after the baby is born. Up to twice a week there will be scheduled activities such as a guest speaker or other opportunities for personal growth and development. The first month after the baby is born is a time for the mother to bond with her new baby.

After that first month, in addition to the activities noted above, the mothers are expected to either find employment in some area in which they already have training and experience or, and this is more likely, they will be involved in one of the vocational training programs previously

mentioned. The residents also help each other out with baby-sitting when another resident needs to be out for some time. The time remaining to the mothers is free time which they can spend with their children or use to take advantage of the many growth opportunities offered at the *Home*.<sup>13</sup> As the reader can see, there are tremendous opportunities available to the participants of this program. Whether the residents utilize them to their advantage depends a lot on them.

With the arrival of the first house parents and the first resident *New Beginnings* was off and running. With God's grace and blessing that little seed of an idea planted by Pastor Fleischmann nearly three years earlier had become a reality. But that does not mean that there will not be some struggles and learning opportunities ahead. During those first months and years *New Beginnings* will experience a number of challenges and changes.

### *Growing Pains*

One of the early concerns that troubled the advocates of *New Beginnings* was the difficulty finding clients for the program. As mentioned early, the first resident was the sole participant for quite some time before another resident was brought into the program. Although there were a few times in those first years when the program was working with three or four residents, the *Home* was not filling to its projected capacity of eight residents. The problem was certainly not the lack of single mothers throughout the Synod and elsewhere who could benefit from the program. Why, then, such a slow start?

In the search for an answer, the question of location was raised. Could the fact that the *Home* was located out in Denver well away from the heartland of the Synod be the reason for the shortage of residents? The fact that the *Home* was located outside the Midwest was not a fluke. There was a rationale behind this move. While visiting another maternity home, the observation

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<sup>13</sup> For a listing of classes and other educational opportunities offered through *New Beginnings* see Appendix 1.

was made that there are often difficulties when a *Home* tries to train girls and break old habits if these girls remain close to her old environment. Maybe the young lady comes from a household where drug abuse is prevalent. Being close to her home will likely make breaking the habit much more difficult. Or maybe an abusive boyfriend keeps showing up again and again. For this reason it seemed prudent to locate the *Home for Mothers* away from the main concentration of WELS churches and thus gives these ladies a chance to make a real new beginning. Here was an opportunity to get away from the old bad and troubling influences.

Although this concept of a new beginning has really worked out well for some of the ladies in the program, the majority of the residents have come from agencies in the Denver area itself. Apparently picking up and leaving everything behind is not as alluring a prospect as we may have at first thought. There is a lesson to be learned here in making assumptions about what other people may think or feel without first asking them for their opinion. It was a learning experience. Because of this there are plans of possibly opening up a similar program a little closer to the Midwest.

Besides location, publicity was also a determined factor in this issue. This was a new ministry and it took time to get the word out throughout the Synod. Many efforts were made in this area beginning already in the development stage of the *Home*. One of these was the production of a promotional video headed up by Steve Zambo. In the video Craig and Judy Schwartz speak about the *New Beginnings* program and what it has to offer its residents. Copies of these videos were sent to all the *WELS Lutherans for Life Pregnancy Counseling Centers* and also made available to any other interested parties.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A copy of this promotional video has been filed with this essay.

Besides this excellent video, brochures and other promotional materials were produced. House parents, Craig and Judy Schwartz, also produced an informational presentation on the *Home* which they would deliver to interested groups around the Denver area and the nation. Another aspect of this promotional program included the development of a newsletter, entitled *Growing Branches*, to keep supporters and other interested parties in the Synod informed about the latest developments and happenings in this ministry.<sup>15</sup> All of these efforts have helped to inform the synod at large of the opportunities offered at *New Beginnings*. By the time this essay was written, there was a fairly steady flow of applicants for the program.

The second major growing pain for the *New Beginnings* program has probably been the challenge that has caused the house parents and the Board of Directors the most grief. Although originally the program was designed for the mother to remain at the *Home* for approximately one year after she has had her baby in order to work through the program and become as equipped as possible to meet the challenges of single motherhood, the reality is that most of the mothers only stay in the program three or four months before they choose to leave. The frustration for those running the program, of course, is that in three or four months they really do not have much time to work with the girls and effect changes in their living habits.

Why was this happening? That was the question the house parents and others involved in the program began asking themselves. Was it something the house parents were doing? Was it the program itself? For a while the house parents even had some misgivings about their ability to administer the program. The problem, however, was much more complex than just the house parents or the program. Many of the young women that the *Home* attracts have throughout their lives generally enjoyed a great deal of freedom. When they decided to come to *New Beginnings*,

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix 2 provides a sample of the *Growing Branches* newsletter.

they had no alternative. They were pregnant. They were not married and/or could not afford to care for their child. Abortion, however, was out of the question. *New Beginnings* came along and offered them a place of their very own. Basically all their bills would be paid for. At the time they were willing to agree to anything. Yet, after a few weeks at the *Home*, they begin to resent the fact that other people were telling them what to do. The staff counselor noted that she sees basically two reasons for this reaction from the young ladies. First, the love and concern shown them by means of Christian discipline reminds them of the lack of love they have experienced through the years from family and others. The second reason is the matter of pride. Who among us doesn't have trouble being told that there are better ways of doing things than our way?

Now match these girls up with people who have grown up in the structured and disciplined life of a family in the *WELS*. There was a clash between expectations and reality. Those who developed the program and those involved in carrying it out had a vision of young ladies coming in and completely turning around during their twelve month stay. If not, there would at least be some visible change. That however, as Fleischmann noted, was not always the case. He pointed to the fact that there are many different levels to the sanctified life. At first those involved in the program were expecting to see these young women go from a level one to a level eight or nine during their stay. This was unrealistic. He noted that these ladies had been learning habits for the past twenty years. It would take longer than a few weeks to change those habits.

*New Beginnings* would have to learn to take these girls where they were at. The goal in most cases could not be to make these girls into good Christians. Instead, the goal would be to plant the seed. God in his own time and according to his own good pleasure will bless that work and cause it to produce the fruits he wants to see. This too was a learning and growing

experience for all involved. Pastor Fleischmann was quick to note that the house parents, Craig and Judy, were doing an incredible job to meet this challenge of the ministry.

These were the two main challenges that *New Beginnings* had to confront and meet in its early years of ministry. There have been others along the way such as financial accountability of the residents, i.e., how much of the cost of their stay should they be responsible for so that they can better appreciate what they are receiving at the Home. Another issue that is under discussion during the writing of this essay revolves around the issue of previous drug usage and admissions policies. Again, many of these issues are of such a nature that they could not have been foreseen and could have only been dealt with as the situation arose. No doubt, these types of issues will continue to surface from time to time as the ministry expands and grows.

*New Beginnings* has also experienced some very positive growth pains. Probably the single most important addition to the program since the opening of the *Home* was the arrival of Lisa Buch. As we will see, Lisa will serve the program in a number of capacities, the most important of which is being the *Home*'s counselor. Before coming to *New Beginnings*, Lisa worked as a part-time hairdresser while attending *U.W. Madison*. Lisa received her BA in Psychology and Social Work in 1993 and her masters in Social Work in May of 1994. Equipped with some much needed skills and a heart to serve, Lisa began her work at *New Beginnings* in August of that same year. Since her arrival, Lisa has been continuing her education by attending Christian counseling courses at *Colorado Christian University* in Denver. When this essay was written, Lisa was working at becoming a licensed clinical social worker in the state of Colorado.

Lisa's responsibilities at *New Beginnings* include meeting with all the residents of the program at least once a week to discuss the resident's personal goals and what needs to be done to accomplish them. There may be some personal or family conflict, or even a conflict with one

of the staff members at the *Home* that may be hindering her progress. Maybe she just needs to talk through her fears of being a single parent. Maybe she is considering putting her child up for adoption and needs to talk through the issue. Whatever the situation may be, having a staff member with counseling expertise is an incredible asset for the girls in the program.

Besides meeting individually with the girls, Lisa works together with the rest of the staff to plan and organize group classes and meetings dealing with subjects that help the residents prepare for the days ahead. Examples of topics are legal issues and parenting, single parenting, and Lamaze classes. Probably just as important as any help Lisa offers the residents is the knowledge and insight she provides the staff. Lisa meets with the house parents on a regular basis to share her insights about what is going on with the residents and to educate the staff about counseling issues and techniques.

As mentioned earlier, the residents involved in the program often have a world view that differs quite substantially from that of the staff at *New Beginnings*. This difference in values and assumptions, plus the constant day to day contact, sets the stage for clashes between the staff and the residents. Lisa's unique position and ability to understand the inner workings of both the residents and the staff members allows her to mediate tense moments and to bring an important balance to the *Home*. God had good things in mind when he brought Lisa to *New Beginnings*.

The reader will remember that quite a bit earlier the issue of relief staff for the *Home* had been raised. For quite some time that position was filled by various volunteer individuals on a temporary basis. Not until Lisa arrived would there be anyone else on staff who lived on sight and really knew the residents so that they could truly fill in for the house parents when they were gone. On September 9, 1995 DeAnne Edgington was hired to fill the position of relief person. DeAnne was born and raised in Calloway, NE. She received a degree in nursing from *Nebraska*

*Methodist Hospital School of Nursing*. As a registered nurse, DeAnne brings another important talent and resource to the *New Beginnings* program. Because she is the official relief person, DeAnne lives on the premises, eats with the group regularly and gets to know all the residents. In this way she can fill in whenever needed. If the relief staff were ever a married couple, the gentleman would also be in charge of general maintenance, similar to what our lay couples are doing in the mission field in Africa.

Two other positive programs have been added to the plethora of opportunities offered at *New Beginnings*. The first is a program that has established a volunteer contact person in each of the congregations in the Denver area. These contact people look for individuals in their congregations who have skills that can be utilized to assist the mothers and the program at *New Beginnings*. Once again the emphasis of strong lay ministry is brought to the foreground with this program. *New Beginnings* seeks to use as many of the gifts that God has given various individuals in his church as possible. Examples of this strong lay involvement are Jenny Brucker, a nurse, who has served *New Beginnings* from early on as volunteer medical advisor, and Kathy Meister who has served as an off-staff liaison between the residents and the Board of Directors. Of course, there are countless other lay individuals whose behind-the-scenes work makes *New Beginnings* possible.

Another program that has been added includes support families. These volunteer families, who come from the area congregations, serve in a mentoring capacity, taking one of the residents under wing, involving them in some of their family activities and inviting them to join them at worship and other church functions. There are incredible benefits for these young ladies when they are given the opportunity to see another Christian family in action.

The latest addition to the *New Beginnings* concept is the thrift store that was opened on April 17, 1996. By generating additional revenue through means of the thrift store, *New Beginnings* hopes to free up the National Organization to shift some of its support to starting other homes similar to *New Beginnings* elsewhere in the country. The early years of *New Beginnings* were filled with both challenges and frustrations, growth and development. In his grace God used those infant years to mold, shape, and develop the *New Beginnings* concept into a program that serves his purposes and brings glory to his name.

### *New Beginnings--Today and Tomorrow*

The question may be asked: Is it all worth it? Is it worth all the frustrations? Is it worth over \$100,000.00 a year? A counter question needs to be asked. How much is one soul worth? Social ministry is as real to life as ministry can get. And with social ministry there are often going to be more frustrations than success stories. Satan and the old sinful flesh are powerful adversaries. Our only effective weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. *New Beginnings* gives us, as a group of believers walking together to share God's truth, the opportunity to preach the Word to those who desperately need to hear it. These young ladies are at a time of crisis in their lives--a time when they are a little more willing to listen to what God has to say in his Word. In this respect then, although the program may not be able to boast of great visible results, *New Beginnings* is a success. *New Beginnings* accomplishes exactly what it set out to accomplish: Christians sharing and modeling their faith with young ladies who are going through a difficult period in their lives .

From the time *New Beginnings* opened its doors up to the time of the writing of this essay, there have been a total of 31 young ladies who have been residents of the *Home* along with 25 dependent children. During that same time 12 babies were born, 4 of which God brought into his

kingdom through baptism while they were still at the *Home*. Since its opening *New Beginnings* has also been involved in 4 adoptions cases. When all totaled up, there have been 56 souls who for a period of time have been nurtured daily by God's precious Word through the *New Beginnings* program. We thank God for this much needed opportunity to share his Word.

Where does *New Beginnings* go from here? Because of the success of the program there are hopes to plant similar programs in other areas of the country. A similar prospective ministry was being looked into for some time in Winona, MN, but it was determined that this operation came along with too much baggage. *National Lutherans for Life* has also approached the *Metro Milwaukee Chapter* with the idea of establishing another home here in the heart of *WELS*.

As for *New Beginnings*, this ministry will continue under God's guidance to fine tune its program so that it can minister to its residents with God's Word in more and even better ways. Ideas for bringing some of the training programs that are presently off site into the *Home*, especially in the area of computer training, are already being considered and investigated. As Pastor Fleischmann put it, "the future of the ministry is limited only by imagination." When Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples, the only limitation he put on the "how" of ministry was the necessity of using his Word and Sacraments <sup>Faithfully and correctly</sup>. In them alone lies the power to change the heart. If Jesus used crisis situations like sickness and death to display his divine power and open up doors to preach God's salvation, why shouldn't we follow his lead and use every opportunity to share the gospel while we seek to carry each others burdens? Pray that God continue to bless this ministry and others like it in the years ahead.

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# *Topics to be TAUGHT*

## *NEW BEGINNINGS-A Home for Mothers*

### *I. Spiritual Nurturing*

*Bible History*  
*Catechism*  
*Prayer*  
*Sharing Jesus*  
*Devotions*  
*Living for Christ*

### *II. Academic/Vocational*

*Careers*  
*Computer Skills*  
*GED Tutoring*

### *III. Parenting*

*Adoption Options*  
*Birthing*  
*Breast Feeding*  
*CPR and Safety*  
*Child Development*  
*Day Care*  
*Death*  
*Discipline*  
*Health Issues*  
*Infant Care*  
*Legal Issues*  
*Nurturing*  
*Pre-natal*  
*Sexuality*  
*Single-parenting*

### *IV. Family Relations*

*Dealing w/child's father*  
*Dealing w/parents*  
*Dealing w/grandparents*  
*Dealing w/siblings*  
*Dealing w/relatives*

### *V. Housing*

*Cooking*  
*Sewing*  
*Leisure Crafts*  
*Housekeeping*  
*Dwelling Maintenance*

### *VI. Social Skills Development*

*Listening*  
*Speaking*  
*Interaction*  
*Clothing and Manners*

### *VII. Personal Growth*

*Anger*  
*Co-dependency*  
*Confrontation*  
*Depression*  
*Drugs*  
*Exercise*  
*Fear*  
*Grief*  
*Grooming*  
*Guilt*  
*Post Abortion Syndrome*  
*Self-esteem*  
*Sexuality*  
*Stress*

### *VIII. Financial*

*Budgeting*  
*Credit*  
*Savings and Checking*