

ALCANZANDO A TODOS NUESTROS VECINOS: WELS HISPANIC MINISTRY AS
MODEL FOR CONGREGATIONAL INTERCULTURAL INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communities are increasing in our nation's cities and neighborhoods and are finding their way into WELS churches. How has WELS served them? This thesis looks at how WELS churches have served intercultural communities in their churches and offers a model for any future congregation looking at integrating intercultural communities into their churches. This thesis surveys relevant church planting and intercultural ministry resources to detect common themes. This thesis also assesses the traditional counsel that WELS churches have received from Synod Administrators and provides case studies of churches that are currently serving intercultural communities. Finally, this thesis offers potential applications and questions that a church will want to ask if they find themselves with the opportunity to serve an intercultural community in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Just as Emily and her family are about to head out of the church to catch lunch with their friends, the church doors swing open, and the Martinez family begins to file in. Emily and her boys say “Hola!” as they pass and will do so again each Sunday for the rest of their time at that church. Both families share so much in common: a similar destination every Sunday morning, a faith that connects them to a faith community not just in this city but invisibly throughout the world, and a pastor who looks them both in the eye and could speak a word exactly to them in their time of need. Still, so much seems to separate them. Language, race, worship times, worship styles. *Can they ever truly worship with each other?*

A church blessed with the opportunity to serve multiple cultural groups has to make a crucial decision: *how do we serve all of our people?* Especially as it concerns WELS churches serving their intercultural communities, it appears as though they have opted to form into two churches while still operating under one roof. There are plenty of reasons this could be: distinct cultures, different expectations for ministry, different language, different.... everything. Is there a better way to integrate these distinct cultural communities within a single congregation, or will it always be akin to the “8:00 a.m. churchgoers” and the “10:45 a.m. crowd” that speaks another language and worships in a completely separate way? Is the best path forward for a church to attempt to bring two cultural groups together and unite them towards a common ministry, or is it better to let the two churches forge their own course under the same roof? Is there a church that does this *well?*

This thesis seeks to investigate how WELS churches have integrated intercultural communities into their churches. Using Hispanic Ministry within WELS churches as a model for

intercultural integration, this thesis has the goal of providing a general “how-to” on creating and integrating these communities in a church, from start to finish. An appropriate caution should be mentioned here: It is often our first inclination to want to develop a prescriptive “how-to” set of guidelines and models to fashion an implementation plan for integration.¹ A “one size fits all” approach, however, is not possible. Rather, I contend that it is better to identify key factors that should be considered as a church evaluates the potential of an integrated intercultural community. The following is a presentation of themes a church wishing to integrate an intercultural ministry into their church would do well to consider.

This thesis will search the Scriptures to identify how frequently intercultural communities are depicted in the New Testament church. This thesis will also survey relevant church planting and intercultural ministry books, guides, and research to determine common themes. In addition, this thesis will consider the counsel and advice given by Wisconsin Synod leaders to congregations interested in serving an intercultural community. Using a Case Study Structure,² this thesis will investigate how WELS churches have integrated intercultural communities into their church and ministry. Finally, this thesis will seek to provide potential applications to a church that is considering serving an intercultural community.

¹ Albert R Rodríguez, “Transcultural Latino Evangelism: An Emerging New Paradigm,” *Angl. Theol. Rev.* 101.4 (2019): 681.

² A Case Study Structure in empirical inquiries that investigate phenomena in their real-life context. Multiple methods of data collection are used, as it involves an in-depth study of a phenomenon. Yin R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

BIBLICAL BASIS

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to highlight how great a need there is to go to Nineveh, the city, or another culture. However, there is a need to explain that this is the norm in Scripture. It took a confession from Cornelius for Peter to realize “how true it is that God does not show favoritism (Ac 10:34).”³ God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the saving truth (1 Tim 2:4) and through faith in Christ the Holy Spirit unites us with our God and Savior. While cultural and ethnic differences frequently generate much distinction from an earthly perspective, it isn’t necessarily so from God’s perspective. It is noteworthy that God’s people are not identified first and foremost by their national or ethnic culture, but rather by their belonging to God’s kingdom. They are his children (Jn 1:12; Rom 8:15; 1 John 3:1-2)!

A multicultural setting is not something new or novel. This has not only been the story of the American church for 200 years, but it has also been the story of the world since Genesis and will continue until Christ comes again in his glory. One could claim that intercultural communities started in earnest when the nations decided that they wanted to demonstrate their might and abilities at the Tower of Babel, resulting in God scrambling their languages and therefore who they did life with (Gen 11). Tracing through the story of the development of the church in Acts demonstrates the reality and ongoing fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19). If we take the picture in Revelation 7 seriously, intercultural ministry is something that does not appear to be ending any time soon, and, describes eternity!

This does not mean that it has always been easy. One only has to look at the church in Corinth to see cultural nuances causing congregational strife. Acts 6 shows us our first sign of

³ All Bible references are taken from NIV2011 unless otherwise noted.

cultural tension among a growing group of Christians when Hellenistic Jews began complaining about their widows being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (Ac 6:1). And yet these congregations worked together for the gospel. Paul encourages his brothers in Corinth and his ministry partner, Timothy, to use culture to connect to the gospel (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:7-8), but he also condemns other cultural practices that conflict with the gospel message (1 Cor 10:14-22). Not every cultural practice can be allowed to stand.

An interesting attribute of many of the central figures in the Bible is that many of them were blessed to be the beneficiaries of being bicultural. Consider Paul, for example. In becoming all things to all people (Gal 5:6; 1 Cor 9:22) Paul never ceased being Paul. Paul was not a “moral chameleon.”⁴ As Paul sought to gain a hearing for the gospel, he was not an advocate for adapting or compromising the Christian faith but rather displayed a willingness on the part of the church to be open to change and to adapt its traditions and practices to reach the unchurched. Paul sought to bring “the world in here.”⁵ In his own rich experience as a cross-cultural missionary, Paul knew how sharing the gospel could never be a “one-way street.”⁶ As Paul built “cultural capital” in each society he entered, he earned the right to be heard outside of his own strict religious network.⁷ Paul used his Jewish culture and Roman citizenship in certain instances when it was advantageous, and also looked to get to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

⁴ Wendland, Paul. “Cross Cultural Ministry – Don’t Lose The Message”. Waco, NE, 2006. 2.

⁵ Malphurs, Audrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004. 309.

⁶ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message,” 13.

⁷ Paulino, Domingo A., "Implementation of an Integration Process for Baptized and Transferred Members Into the Durham Spanish SDA Church Through the Adoption of Shared Values, Mission, and Vision" (2010).

but “never getting there the same way.”⁸ Similarly, the accounts of Moses, Esther, and David, among others, demonstrate the advantages they had in being bicultural.⁹ In fact, people without a cosmopolitan background found it difficult to minister cross-culturally.

Jesus himself demonstrated a missiology that transcended one singular class, culture, and ethnicity. Insisting that he had to go through Samaria (John 4:4), Jesus cuts through every cultural tension and division to ask a woman for a drink of water and give her the gospel that she so desperately needed to hear (John 4:7-26). Jesus called a tax collector to be one of his disciples (Matt 9:9) and ate with those tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:11). Christ’s attitude towards culture wasn’t one of total acceptance, nor was he against culture, nor was he interested in becoming “Christ of the culture” in his first-century context.¹⁰ When the time had fully come, God sent his Son to take on what I am so that I might become what I am not.¹¹ The good news is for all nations (Matt 28:18-20), and Christ would rather please God than any single culture or people, even if that means challenging the culture’s “norms of acceptability” (Lu 14:15-24; 15:1-2).¹²

⁸ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*. Milwaukee: WELS Outreach Resources, 1997, 88.

⁹ Hannah Rasmussen probes at the role bicultural people play in the Missio Dei in her article “The role of bicultural people in the Missio Dei: Creating a model from bicultural Bible characters.” She surveys the examples of Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Esther, and Paul and how they encountered multiple cultures before the age of 18 and later ministered in cross-cultural and hybrid settings. These people also identified with more than one culture and experienced rejection from at least one culture because they are seen as different. One could include the examples of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Timothy, and Rahab into the mix as well.

¹⁰ Conde Frazier, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 138. Here, I am using culture in a broad sense. The tax collectors were culturally Jews.

¹¹ This thought is adapted from Martin Luther’s quote “Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not” and Galatians 4:4-5.

¹² Rodriguez, Daniel A. “Hispanic Ministry Where Language Is No Barrier”, 440.

David Hesselgrave notes that it would be “foolhardy” to disregard early church planting in the book of Acts.¹³ Tracing through the Book of Acts, we see that the church largely consisted of Hebrew members (Ac 1–5), then grew to include Hebrew and Hellenistic Members (Ac 6), and ballooned to include Hebrew, Hellenistic, and Gentile Members (Ac 10). Paul, using much of his cultural experience, contextualized the gospel in evangelistic settings. While the New Testament routinely highlights tensions arising from the social differences that exist in cultures and as long as the church exists in the world, it continually emphasizes the importance of holding out a gospel that is truly cross-cultural (Ac 6:1; 10:28; 11:20-22; 1 Peter 2:18; Rom 10:12,13; Gal 3:28; Phile 16; Jam 2:1-4; 1 Tim 6:17-18).

While there are differences that can be used to divide, there are definite commonalities that all humans share. Every human being has a knowledge of God based on creation (Rom 1:20). Every human being has God’s law written in their heart (Rom 2:14-15). Every human being sins against God’s law (Rom 3:10-11). Every human being is born sinful, spiritually dead and blind because of inherited sin (Rom 8:6-7; Eph 2:1-2; Ps 51:5). Every human being faces death because of sin (Rom 6:23). Yet, in his great mercy, every human being has, in Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice for sin (Jo 1:29; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 Jo 2:2). God desires and invites every human being to enjoy reconciliation with him through Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:3-6; Rom 10:12-13). Cutting through all of the cultural differences our world produces, our common destiny because of our sin is eternal suffering in hell. If not for the mercy of our Savior God, every culture and every person would face that same condemnation. But in God’s great love for the world, he sent

¹³ Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2000, 44. Hesselgrave also thinks it would be “unthinkable” to discount the past 2000 years of church practice.

his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).¹⁴

Wisconsin Synod Lutherans were no strangers to the challenges presented by cross-cultural realities in the early years of their church body. Wisconsin Synod Lutherans would be reminded of the challenges that faithful believers faced transitioning from life and language in Germany to the frontier and new ventures of America. We could harken as far back as Martin Luther and his desire to have translations that German people could read, sermons that Germans could understand, and instituting worship life that involved God's people as principles for intercultural work.¹⁵ Paul Wendland reminds us that our Lutheran Heritage informs this work of communicating as clearly as we can to this new culture "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3).¹⁶ Preaching and teaching in a cross-cultural context will force us back into the Scriptures.

Intercultural work is not new or novel. It bleeds through the entirety of Scripture and proclaims the truth that the gospel is for everyone. Our Lutheran heritage even informs our motivation to pursue intercultural ministry. The Bible informs us that there are no limits on who this gospel message is for.

¹⁴ These groups and suggestions were taken from Prof. Allen Sorum's book *Change*, 81-82. There he also notes that human beings are biologically similar... every race and every ethnic group needs food to eat and air to breath. All these needs must be met. How they are met is part of culture. Secondly, human beings are psychologically similar. People need meaning and purpose in life, freedom safety, love, a sense of belonging and a sense of worth. Third, humans share sociocultural orientation. People need to feel that they are part of a group, that they belong to others who are like the. Finally, humans share spiritual characteristics. Every human has spiritual needs and will try in a variety of ways to meet those needs.

¹⁵ Sorum, *Change*, 85.

¹⁶ Paul Wendland, "Don't Lose the Message", 5.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a tremendous amount of literature on how to plant churches interculturally and work in intercultural settings. However, there is not a substantial amount of literature on how to integrate an intercultural community into an existing church. Therefore, this literature review will survey a wide variety of sources touching on themes such as church planting, culture, forming intercultural groups and communities, and their different challenges concerning intercultural integration. I have organized them into the following categories: Church Growth Movement and Principles, Target Culture and Community Outreach, Ethnocentrism and Cultural Exegesis, Working with and within a Culture, Establishing the Church, and Pastoral Leadership.

Church Growth Movement and Principles

There is an understanding that initiating multicultural ministry is attempting to start something completely new in a church, so it would be wise to survey the literature that speaks to this.¹⁷ A major movement in the development of creating Christian churches came from the Church Growth Movement started by Donald A. McGavran. The movement came under heavy criticism for being overly pragmatic, theologically shallow, and methodologically reductionistic.¹⁸ George Patterson, while not using the language of movement, focused on “planting a church that was inherently reproducible” and essentially aimed for much of the same thing.¹⁹ Much of the

¹⁷ I consider it better to understand initiating intercultural ministry as a “new” ministry effort/direction than a “new effort of an existing outreach program.”

¹⁸ Ott, Craig, and Gene Wilson. *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. 71.

¹⁹ Farah, Warrick. “The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology.” *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 4 (2022): 349–61. 350.

literature in the Church Growth Movement suggests having a strategic master plan that researches context, has a God-sized goal, studies the Book of Acts, and a general “what is it going to take” attitude to reach a people group.²⁰ In Church Growth’s emphasis on a “market niche,” American churches have become increasingly mono-ethnic²¹ and an observation is made that the church will not reach everybody but will initially attract those who are culturally similar to the people who make up that core group.²²

While this thesis cannot examine all of the principles of the Church Growth Movement (or endorse all of its intentions), some common themes have emerged from the movement that have generated overarching principles to use when attempting to start and integrate new churches. One of these themes would be that a church should be self-supporting. John L. Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary to China, experimented with new approaches to evangelism and church planting and taught that churches should be entirely self-supporting and led by unpaid lay workers.²³ Roland Allen, a renowned missiologist, noted that “if the church is to be indigenous it must spring up in the soil from the very first seeds planted.”²⁴ Allen also taught that churches should be self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing.²⁵

²⁰ Farah, “The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology,” 352.

²¹ Conde-Frazier, Elizabeth, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett. *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004. 9.

²² Malphurs, Audrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004. 320.

²³ This is step one of his “Nevius Plan.” Noted above is step one. Step two would suggest that only church methods and means for which local believers could take responsibility should be used. Third, believers were to be carefully instructed in Bible classes. Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*, 69.

²⁴ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 70.

²⁵ Farah, “The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology,” 350. Of note for this thesis: These are the same terms used by the WELS Board for World Missions in their handbook.

Another theme is that these churches should be healthy and reproducible. Ideally, you would like a church to have a short gestation period so that they don't become so inward-focused and fail to reproduce.²⁶ Reproducibility goes beyond mere equipping in several ways but takes into account that the methods used to pioneer a church plant must be easily reproducible among local believers and their various educational, financial, and spiritual abilities.²⁷ Nonreproducible methods, such as using short-term mission teams, English as a Second Language (ESL) camps, or large expensive campaigns may be employed initially to jump-start a movement, but they should be removed without delay in favor of a more grassroots form of ministry.²⁸ A rule of thumb then becomes, "If you can't teach local leaders to do it, and they couldn't teach others to do it, you probably shouldn't do it either."²⁹

Target Culture / Community Outreach

Churches that decide to integrate intercultural communities are wise to survey and assess which culture or community they are trying to reach. Craig Ott and Gene Wilson report that "as a church planting team identifies one or two segments of the community or people they believe to be the most receptive to the gospel, they should try to spend a significant amount of time with people from that group."³⁰ Incarnational Ministry, which frames the incarnate Christ as an

²⁶ A "short gestation period" means that a church takes a brief time to develop as a church.

²⁷ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 81.

²⁸ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 81–82.

²⁹ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 83.

³⁰ The suggestion hovers around 50 percent. Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 202–203.

example of coming into a new culture prepared to learn from and identify totally with the ones he has come to reach, has been suggested as a method to accomplish this.³¹ However, Incarnational Ministry tends to conflate the unique incarnation of Jesus with our process of learning a process. “Jesus was not an anthropologist,” and did not compile notes at home.³² Another danger associated with the Incarnational approach is that the one seeking to become culturally incarnate to serve others might take upon himself or herself an unhealthy “messiah complex.”³³ Despite these cautions, the approach to being in, among, and living within a culture to reach them is helpful.

Living and being a part of a culture creates unique opportunities to serve. David Hesselgrave in his book *Planting Churches Cross Culturally* notes that several distinct types of cross-cultural barriers must be crossed for ministry to happen.³⁴ No matter the gap between cultures, some advocates note that one needs to create moments to be in that culture. Often, that first step is shown in hospitality.³⁵ How someone ministers and interacts with diverse people in their community will either attract or repel them from wanting to have a relationship with them.³⁶

³¹ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G., and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986. Xii.

³² Lingenfelter, Sherwood G., and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, xii

³³ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 123.

³⁴ Hesselgrave describes that there are three different types of cross-cultural barriers a “missionary-evangelist” (ME) could face. He includes an example of a Swede converting another Swede to the gospel. No cultural barrier has been crossed (ME-1). He then describes a Swede moving to Los Angeles in the hopes of converting Latinos, which would include more cultural barriers being crossed (ME-2). A third example describes a Swede moving to Venezuela, learning a completely new culture and language and hopes to convert Latinos in Venezuela (ME-3). There is some cross between these categories, as any person moving to Los Angeles and learning Spanish and the Hispanic culture would also be working through ME-3 barriers. Hesselgrave, David J. *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2000, 28–29.

³⁵ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 171.

³⁶ Glenn Fluegge, Joel Rockemann, and Carlos Velazquez, “Integrating Theology & Mission in the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center (CMC),” *Lutheran Mission Matters* 31.1 (2023): 113.

Being hospitable creates a place where they are connected to one another. Creating hospitable environments allows intercultural missionaries to perform the best form of pre-evangelism: friendship.³⁷ Though one's intentions may be genuine and sincere, living in a culture can also produce conflict. Conflict is an inevitable part of encounters with other cultures and the fear of conflict is often a detractor to engaging with others at deeper levels.³⁸ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier describes a cross-cultural encounter as a risk, "it is a place for the collision of two worlds – for the multiplicity of views. It is where various streams meet. It is the bringing together of a variety of sources that might not often be placed together."³⁹

After a church has determined whom they would like to reach, they are wise to study the culture they are attempting to reach and work in. We study the culture of a people to contextualize the Scriptural message in terms of that culture so that it means to them what God wants it to mean to them.⁴⁰ Christians take the worldviews of other people seriously because they want to understand the people they serve to effectively share with them the good news of the gospel.⁴¹ A minister of the gospel cannot communicate without concerning himself with the culture, as communication "is inextricable from culture."⁴²

³⁷ Mueller, Stephen. "Beginning Cross-Cultural Outreach (With Special Reference to Hispanics)", 1998. 1. "Pre-evangelism often consists of living in the same culture as the evangelism prospect for one's entire life and then spending thirty minutes "getting to know" the person on a more personal level and then presenting the message of sin and grace."

³⁸ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 188.

³⁹ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 176.

⁴⁰ Mueller, "Beginning Cross Cultural Outreach", 6.

⁴¹ Hiebert, Paul G. *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008, 69.

⁴² Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 136.

Recently, missiologists have pointed out that in light of the trio of globalization, urbanization, and migration, the complexity of mission contexts has “baffled many of them.” It is then no surprise that this may be a challenge for a church as it considers intercultural ministry.⁴³ The difference between world fields and the urban fields of North America has been quickly disappearing,⁴⁴ and a rule of thumb for the cross-cultural church planter is the time you need to spend as a student of culture is directly proportionate to the cultural distance between your upbringing and that of the people you are trying to reach. The greater that distance, the more Christ’s humility, love, and patience will be required in your life and the lives of local believers.⁴⁵

Most church planters work within their own culture, speak the language, and “feel at home.”⁴⁶ Many church planters may assume that they will serve in the ministry in the future within the culture they are most familiar with and using the language they grew up with.⁴⁷ Yet even when one is working within one’s native culture, communicating the gospel still presents a challenge.⁴⁸ Culture is never completely adopted from one generation to the next and only serves as a “potential guide” and “tends to be shared.”⁴⁹ There isn’t a “pure” or “native” group of

⁴³ Lee, Peter T. “Using Cultural Hybridity as an Analytic Lens for Missiological Research.” *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 1 (2022): 49.

⁴⁴ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*. Milwaukee: WELS Outreach Resources, 1997, 59.

⁴⁵ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 188.

⁴⁶ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 186.

⁴⁷ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 50.

⁴⁸ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 186.

⁴⁹ Steffen, Tom A., and Lois McKinney Douglas. *Encountering Missionary Life and Work: Preparing for Intercultural Ministry*. Encountering Mission. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. 194.

people; instead, all cultures are mixed, blended, or hybridized, whether the members are aware or not.⁵⁰ It is important to understand the worldviews people have that are based on their experiences, assumptions, and logic. A phenomenological description of their world is not enough.⁵¹ An intercultural missionary will learn what it means to live as a certain people group in a way that goes deeper than a basic “honor/shame” or “guilt/innocence” culture.⁵² Often, the social or cultural boundaries constructed are arbitrary and these borderlines tend to shift depending on situation advantages.⁵³ An intercultural missionary will also learn that certain doctrines may resonate more powerfully within some cultures than they do in others.⁵⁴ The application of God’s word need not be everywhere the same.⁵⁵

There is a line between a biblical worldview and the current culture as we live it today and the culture that we wish to reach and communicate God’s truths. An intercultural missionary must be thoughtful to discern the difference. The gospel always becomes incarnate in a given culture, but it never does so uncritically.⁵⁶ Every culture’s worldview, “no matter how beautiful,

⁵⁰ Lee, Peter T. “Using Cultural Hybridity as an Analytic Lens for Missiological Research.”, 56.

⁵¹ Hiebert, Paul G. *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 69. Phenomenology studies the consciously experienced, without theories and as far away from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions as possible.

⁵² While theology has contributed fundamentally and fruitfully to the honor/shame issue, the culture concept on which honor and shame equally depends is an Achilles’ heel. In part by the popularization of books such as *3-D Gospel*, people then are able to flatten culture and make culture easy and convenient to think about. Proponents of these approaches seek to fit others and their cultures into their own understanding of the world. (Merz, Johannes. “The Culture Problem: How the Honor/Shame Issue Got the Wrong End of the Anthropological Stick.” *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 2 (2020): 128) This does not mean that *3-D Gospel* is not a fine book for beginning exposure into these cultural dynamics.

⁵³ Lee, Peter T. “Using Cultural Hybridity as an Analytic Lens for Missiological Research.”, 56.

⁵⁴ Wendland, Paul. “Cross Cultural Ministry – Don’t Lose The Message,” Waco, NE, 2006. 4.

⁵⁵ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message”, 4.

⁵⁶ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 137.

symbolic, flamboyant, or impassioned, falls short of and is directly opposed to the worldview taught by Scripture.”⁵⁷ Unbelieving individuals learn, adjust, and pass on a culture that adheres to the “basic principles of this world” (Col 2:20). Elizabeth Conde-Frazier notes that Evangelicals historically have been concerned that cultural influences do not challenge or dilute the authority of Christ and his Word, but we cannot ensure this by avoiding culture and isolating ourselves from it.⁵⁸ When the gospel truly penetrates a culture, it becomes encultured in that setting.⁵⁹ Our goal in Christian preaching is to transform the worldview of the hearer and must address the worldview of a believer. This kind of preaching avoids the pitfalls of empty moralizing but forces a sinner to evaluate his inner thoughts and motives.⁶⁰ Christian worldview and culture will alienate Christians from aspects of their own culture, and Christians must constantly evaluate everything in their culture in light of God’s Word.⁶¹

To know the culture that you are trying to serve, one must exegete his own and be committed to a cultural self-understanding. Belonging to a certain culture and ministering to people who share the same culture can blind you to how culture affects our perspective.⁶² As Sherwood Lingenfelter describes, “our cultural prison is a comfortable place to be,” and most people choose to belong only to groups whose members have standards and values similar to

⁵⁷ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*. 77.

⁵⁸ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 167.

⁵⁹ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 135.

⁶⁰ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures* 77.

⁶¹ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 84.

⁶² Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 128.

their own.⁶³ Many Western missionaries proceed to go into a mission field assuming that their view of how the world works is how that mission field or church ought to work as well. Any cross-cultural worker must be aware of their own conceptions and biases, which expands to their self-reliance and their connection to worship styles.⁶⁴ Without a commitment to cultural self-understanding, one will be seen as trying to remove splinters from the eyes of others while remaining ignorant of the large amounts of lumber hampering his or her own vision.⁶⁵ This calls for regular cultural evaluation.⁶⁶ Each person entering a cross-cultural experience has an agenda.⁶⁷ The message and the messenger go hand in hand, and to perform in a cross-cultural context, there are role strains.⁶⁸ A majority culture person who is already powerful in the eyes of the minority must be very intentional in responding in ways that communicate respect and listening.⁶⁹

⁶³ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G., and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, 108.

⁶⁴ Scott Henrich, in his thesis “Race and the Lutheran Pastor,” noted that an unexpected theme that arose from his interviews with black and African American members was a white pastor’s connection to white worship. It became clear that white pastors strongly signal white worship to the black community, even though none of his interview questions mentioned worship. (Henrich, Scott. “Race and the Lutheran Pastor.” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2018. 27).

⁶⁵ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 128.

⁶⁶ Malphurs, Audrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 317.

⁶⁷ Ndung’u John Brown Ikenye, “The Development of a Bicultural Personality for Christian Ministries,” *Angl. Theol. Rev.* 83.4 (2001): 804.

⁶⁸ Ndung’u John Brown Ikenye, “The Development of a Bicultural Personality for Christian Ministries,” 805.

⁶⁹ Ndung’u John Brown Ikenye, “The Development of a Bicultural Personality for Christian Ministries,” 802.

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Exegesis

While exegeting your own culture, it's vital to recognize that each person has their own ethnocentricity to defeat. Simply put, ethnocentrism is the assumption that our ways are always better.⁷⁰ It's a mentality that claims that "our ways are always right, our comfort is what matters most, and our rights are most significant." An ethnocentric attitude is impossible to disguise and can easily take its toll on a missionary who thinks that they are "living in this 'inferior' culture."⁷¹ An ethnocentric attitude emerges even from our lack of interest in other cultures.⁷² For white pastors especially, overcoming "whiteness" can itself be a task, despite attempts at making religious identity more important than ethnic identity. It cannot simply be ignored and poses obstacles to congregational unity that pastors and leaders view as a challenge to solve.⁷³

Another important aspect of exegeting your own culture is recognizing how much you do not understand about your own culture and the culture of someone else. Glenn E. Singleton notices the struggle that "Many white Americans have been raised to believe that it is racist to notice race – that it is virtuous to be colorblind, so to speak. Thus, many white educators view talking about race as inappropriate, particularly while in mixed racial company."⁷⁴ Ndung'u John Brown Ikenye notes that "The beginning of crossing-over into another culture is to accept with

⁷⁰ Wendland, "Don't Lose the Message", 4.

⁷¹ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 68–69.

⁷² Wendland, Don't Lose the Message, 10. "An ethnocentric attitude is observable among us, I believe, in more subtle ways as well. We WELSians have a tendency to hold ourselves aloof from others. Some of it may come from a self-satisfied lack of curiosity about other cultures."

⁷³ Aida I Ramos, Mark T Mulder, and Gerardo Marti, "The Strategic Practice of 'Fiesta' in a Latino Protestant Church: Religious Racialization and the Performance of Ethnic Identity," *J. Sci. Study Relig.* 59.1 (2020): 165.

⁷⁴ Scott Henrich, "Race and the Lutheran Pastor", 29. Quotation from Glenn E. Singleton, *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, Corwin Press, 2014, 129.

humility what one does not know.”⁷⁵ Going in thinking that you have all the answers to why one culture does things a certain way will cause more conflict.⁷⁶ When we begin by acknowledging just how little we truly know, that puts us in a position to “begin to acquire wisdom.”⁷⁷ Our words really are not what makes us acceptable to others, but it is our character that draws or turns away individuals and communicates.⁷⁸

Working *with* and *within* a culture

After a church has determined which culture it wants to reach with the gospel, it must learn to work with it and work within it. At some level, there must be some language skills developed. It is vital that leaders in a congregational cross-cultural effort acquire “some kind of ability in the language.”⁷⁹ For the gospel to be the driving force, it must be expressed in a language that conveys its “full, powerful meaning,”⁸⁰ and can be the first tool added to someone’s cultural repertoire.⁸¹ Marjorie Collins writes “Obviously, the best way to remove a language barrier is to remove it by learning the language.”⁸²

⁷⁵ Ndung’u John Brown Ikenye, “The Development of a Bicultural Personality for Christian Ministries,” 808.

⁷⁶ Voss, Joel. “Establishing Elders in Cross-Cultural Communities.” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2012. 25.

⁷⁷ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 133.

⁷⁸ Collins, Marjorie A. *Manual for Today’s Missionary: From Recruitment to Retirement*. Missionary Candidate Aid Series. Pasadena: W. Carey Library, 1986. 184.

⁷⁹ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message”, 11–12.

⁸⁰ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 74.

⁸¹ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G., and Marvin K. Mayers. *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 17.

⁸² Collins, Marjorie A. *Manual for Today’s Missionary*, 160.

Some language ability is necessary, but it need not be all-encompassing. After learning about the culture, a church will understand the depth of language abilities needed to adequately reach its targeted intercultural community. Often, the inclusion of both languages is a way of signaling that the church is a place of welcome for all involved.⁸³ Culture and language overlap tremendously when it comes to intercultural ministry, but it may be a misconception to lump them together. In his landmark study of Catholic parishes with Hispanic Ministry, Hosffman Ospino discovered that while many parish leaders assumed that Spanish was the main referent, many of the people served were functionally bilingual, and many parishes already were bilingual.⁸⁴ The overwhelming majority of Hispanic ministries in the U.S. rely almost exclusively on Spanish and, therefore, by default primarily target first-generation Latinos (i.e., immigrants) and leave out a majority of Hispanics in the United States.⁸⁵ Jacob Shepherd, writing about trends in Spanish language capability among immigrant children, documents how there is an increased ability of second and third-generation Hispanics in the English language and that English may actually be a preference.⁸⁶ The assumption of a “Spanish-speaking church model” continues to dominate the landscape of Hispanic ministries but may not be as successful when targeting U.S.-born, English-dominant Latinos.⁸⁷ Rather than focusing on the tip of the

⁸³ Brett C Hoover and Jennifer Owens-Jofré, “From the Margins to the Center: Reorienting Theologies of Ministry to the Hispanic/Latine Catholic Pastoral Landscape,” *Perspect. Relig. Stud.* 49.4 (2022): 376.

⁸⁴ Brett C Hoover and Jennifer Owens-Jofré, “From the Margins to the Center,” 375. The study involved Catholic churches that provided Hispanic and English-speaking ministry.

⁸⁵ Daniel A Rodríguez, “Hispanic Ministry Where Language Is No Barrier: Church Growth among U.S.-Born, English-Dominant Latinos,” *Missiology* 38.4 (2010): 433.

⁸⁶ Jacob Shepherd, *Trends in Spanish Language Capabilities*, 7–9.

⁸⁷ Daniel A Rodríguez, “Hispanic Ministry Where Language Is No Barrier”, 432.

iceberg “immigrants,” it may be wise for a church considering intercultural ministry to consider the greater iceberg existing underneath.⁸⁸

Consistently emphasized when considering intercultural church ministry is establishing trust within an intercultural community. Sorum notes that this is “often the most important and most difficult task that takes the longest in a cross-cultural situation,”⁸⁹ but is the first characteristic of leading within a relational community.⁹⁰ It’s a “surefire way for a host culture to tune out the message of a missionary if they do not trust them.”⁹¹ Just as a friendship is built on trust and takes time to develop and maintain, anyone who is willing to invest in someone else invests in them because they trust that person.⁹² Often, the best way to gain trust within a host culture is to find a “person of peace” or an entry point into the community.⁹³ Community gatekeepers influence others in less formal ways and their opinion shapes and holds moral authority in a community even if they do not hold an official position of authority.⁹⁴ These types of people will vary from culture to culture. Tom Steffan, author of *Encountering Missionary Life*

⁸⁸ Rodríguez offers an illustration of the current dilemma within Latino Ministry of the Episcopal Church, comparing their focus to being primarily on the “tip” of the iceberg, with the tip being immigrants coming into America, which represents a one-third foreign-born segment of the US Latino population. Underneath the surface, where 65% of the Latino US Population lies and are mostly bilingual if not English dominant by the third-and-fourth generation, is not considered as well as it should. (Albert R Rodríguez, “Transcultural Latino Evangelism: An Emerging New Paradigm,” 678).

⁸⁹ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 69.

⁹⁰ Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross Culturally*, 16.

⁹¹ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 70.

⁹² Steffen, Tom A., and Lois McKinney Douglas. *Preparing for Intercultural Ministry*, 165.

⁹³ This may be a person who serves as a bridge or a gateway into a community or social network. Jerry Trousdale writes that “people of peace are God’s pre-positioned agents to bridge the gospel to their family, their friends, or their workplace.” Farah, “The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology.” 355).

⁹⁴ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 202-203.

and Work: Preparing for Intercultural Ministry, notes that “They have the power to allow others to enter the community legitimately, and bypassing these individuals may forfeit any opportunities you have with a group.”⁹⁵

Establishing the Church

When an intercultural community has been targeted and reached, it becomes necessary to take steps toward establishing a church of believers. Essential in this task is making it contextually appropriate and culturally relevant. If the Christian missionary going to other cultures does not examine his delivery and contextualization of his message, Stephen Mueller warns that “he will find himself preaching in Tokyo as he would in Toledo.”⁹⁶ New Testament studies have increasingly examined the way in which churches of the New Testament era engaged culture in ways that were both contextually appropriate and counterculturally biblical.⁹⁷ Contextualization⁹⁸ of the gospel message comprises the entire life of the church, from its liturgy to its preaching to its discipleship and its evangelism. One notable example of contextualization can be found in Luther’s teaching on justification, that the gospel was not something that people “observed” others doing but was now an event of God’s promising that was “really present” in

⁹⁵ Steffen, Tom A., and Lois McKinney Douglas. *Preparing for Intercultural Ministry*, 166.

⁹⁶ Mueller, “Beginning Cross Cultural Outreach”, 6.

⁹⁷ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 67.

⁹⁸ “That discipline which deals with the essential nature of the gospel, its cross-cultural communication, and the development and fostering of local theologies and indigenous church forms.” (Implementation and Integration Process in Durham, 42).

their participation in the life of faith.⁹⁹ Paul Wendland considers the importance of contextualizing the gospel message and ponders,

“How can I preach to the African American in the central city without addressing issues of poverty or racism or marriage or teen pregnancy? How can I evangelize Mormons (who have a strong cultural aversion to the cross) without talking about that aversion? How can I console a Zambian who is afraid of the power of witches without meeting that fear head on? How can I preach to middle-class Americans without speaking about the dangers of materialism and worldly wealth?¹⁰⁰

If a cross-cultural missionary is striving to start a new church, he must be very flexible in developing worship styles together with the new converts of the host culture.¹⁰¹ Sorum contends that an appropriate flexibility is required in considering “the worship style, the way we organize a congregation, and the genre of music sung in worship as we gather in members from another culture.”¹⁰² Using principles of public worship, basic principles, and components of our liturgical heritage, one must be willing to adapt their worship life and style that “ultimately looks, sounds

⁹⁹ Starcher, Richard, Philip Huber, J. Nelson Jennings, Benjamin Hartley, Stan Nussbaum, and William Burrows. “Perspectives on the Missiological Legacy of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.” *Missiology: An International Review* 45, no. 4 (2017): 378. Advocates can be seen in contemporary preachers as well. Tin Keller, Pastor at Redeemer in Manhattan, New York until 2017, emphasized the importance of contextualization and the need to adapt our posture, approach, and practices in response to a community’s needs. He writes, “Contextualization is not – as is often argued – “giving people what they want to hear.” Rather, it is giving people the Bible’s answers, which they may not at all want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them. Sound contextualization means translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself. The great missionary task is to express the gospel message to a new culture in a way that avoids making the message unnecessarily alien to that culture, yet without removing or obscuring the scandal and offense of biblical truth. A contextualized gospel is marked by clarity and attractiveness and yet it still challenges sinners’ self-sufficiency and calls them to repentance. It adapts and connects to the culture, yet at the same time challenges and confronts it. If we fail to adapt to the culture or if we fail to challenge the culture—if we under- or overcontextualize—our ministry will be unfruitful because we have failed to contextualize well.” (Keller, *Center Church*, 89).

¹⁰⁰ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message”, 12.

¹⁰¹ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 91.

¹⁰² Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 34.

and feels like it belongs in and to the host culture.”¹⁰³ Sorum also notes that “The danger would be that we take our current liturgy and worship style and transplant it into a multicultural congregation.”¹⁰⁴ Preaching, at its best, is not only attentive to universal human concerns and human needs and issues but addresses “cultures, ”subcultures,” and lifestyles that untie and differentiate them from other groups. Preaching to another culture encourages the preacher to recognize that some of “the universals” that they assumed in preaching may not be universals at all and that he preaches to a group that is “like no other.”¹⁰⁵

Often overlooked in the process of integrating an intercultural community into an existing church is the current culture of that very existing church. George Lindbeck argues that Christianity has its own sort of “culture” and “language.”¹⁰⁶ However, that does not mean that congregations exist in a vacuum. They are situated “inextricably in a culture.”¹⁰⁷ While every church exists within a culture – the world out there – every church also has its own unique culture – the world in here.¹⁰⁸ Church culture develops from its context, its history, its locale, its size and style of congregation, and its leadership in clergy and laypersons.¹⁰⁹ No two congregations are likely to be the same though many may share similarities. Leadership tools and

¹⁰³ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 91–92.

¹⁰⁴ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 94.

¹⁰⁵ Paulino, Domingo A., "Implementation of an Integration Process for Baptized and Transferred Members Into the Durham Spanish SDA Church Through the Adoption of Shared Values, Mission, and Vision" (2010). Professional Dissertations DMin, 77–78.

¹⁰⁶ Lindbeck, “The Story-Shaped Church: Critical Exegesis and Theological Interpretation (1987). Cited in Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation.*, 84.

¹⁰⁷ Paulino, Domingo A., "Implementation of an Integration Process,” 74.

¹⁰⁸ Malphurs, Audrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 309.

¹⁰⁹ Paulino, Domingo A., "Implementation of an Integration Process”, 74.

methodologies that are appropriate and effective in one congregation are not necessarily acceptable or functional in another congregational setting.¹¹⁰

One difficulty that emerges from an established church attempting to add another ministry is that it upsets the current church culture. “The way we do things around here” is shifted.¹¹¹ It takes extraordinary spiritual maturity for people to change something that they do not see as broken, especially when the church has a doctrinally rich history. A church’s culture can affect a church’s efforts at integration in other ways if it allows dissenting voices to intercultural integration to exist within the church.¹¹² Congregational leaders can ignore the hidden life of the congregation to their peril, and the detriment of the congregation.¹¹³

Research has shown that churches that have effectively accomplished starting multicultural ministry have strong church buy-in to the mission and a clear vision for the mission. Before any changes can be made, the current members of an existing church need to understand the biblical mandates for outreach.¹¹⁴ An effective multicultural ministry stems from an effective vision cast by leadership within the church. The vision for the church must be impactful not only for the church planter but also for the people involved.¹¹⁵ A survey of thriving

¹¹⁰ Paulino, Domingo A., "Implementation of an Integration Process", 139.

¹¹¹ Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 309.

¹¹² In one particularly disappointing example, Henry Zorn chronicles a difficult conversation with a dear member who said to him, “Pastor, I have a solution for the immigration problem. Why don’t we just send all 12 million of them back to where they came from?” That member would also make it clear that he would leave the church if they participated “in any form of hiding illegal immigrants.” (Zorn, H. *A pastoral theology of immigration: Parish ministry at the intersection of Bible and newspaper*. *Dialog*. 2021;60., 305).

¹¹³ Paulino, Domingo A., "Implementation of an Integration Process, 50.

¹¹⁴ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 71.

¹¹⁵ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008., 16.

Hispanic congregations notes that clarity of values and mission were a common factor¹¹⁶ and that both lay leaders and congregants were able to communicate to varying degrees the vision of the church and their part within it.¹¹⁷ Audrey Malphurs details that a vision provides, “energy, creates cause, fosters risk-taking, legitimizes leadership, energizes leadership, sustains ministry, motivates giving.”¹¹⁸ Drawing an analogy from the world of professional hockey, Malphurs also describes the “Gretzky Factor,” who believed that it is “not as important to know where the puck is now as it is to know where it will be.”¹¹⁹ As Yogi Berra quipped, “You have to know where you’re going, otherwise you might end up somewhere else.”¹²⁰

Stemming from the discussion of a church’s mission and values is a necessary recognition that the ministry belongs to the local church. One encouragement is to avoid excessive influence from the majority cultural group of the local church because the local church and its ministry ultimately belong to local believers under Christ.¹²¹ Aubrey Malphurs proposes that “Apostolic planters will move on from the church, and if they impose their preferred model without the voice of the emerging community, they should not be surprised when that community sheds their idea to adopt a design that seems more natural or promising. If the design is “owned”

¹¹⁶ Grusendorf, Steve. “Investigating the Nature of Thriving Hispanic Congregations within a U.S. Evangelical Denomination.” *Journal of Sociology and Christianity* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2022). 35.

¹¹⁷ Grusendorf, Steve. “Investigating the Nature of Thriving Hispanic Congregations”, 38.

¹¹⁸ Malphurs, Aubrey. *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005. 146–149.

¹¹⁹ Malphurs, Aubrey. *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 181. Wayne Gretzky is a former professional ice hockey player nicknamed “the Great One.” He has been called the greatest ice hockey player by many sportswriters and fans and as of this writing was the all-time leader in goals scored, assists and points in NHL history.

¹²⁰ Malphurs, Aubrey. *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 120.

¹²¹ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 112.

by the local leadership team, however, it is more likely to follow indigenous lines, draw local people, grow, and reproduce.”¹²²

A key step when establishing trust within an intercultural community is knowing when to let go of control. The risk of letting go is great. We risk the process not going to our design or outright failing.¹²³ Releasing control is a significant act of faith and trust, both in God to guide the process and in the persons released for ministry, but Sherwood Lingenfelter pushes that “it is the most essential act in empowering others to achieve a compelling vision of faith.”¹²⁴ Desiring to relinquish control and having local leaders to give that control to, however, are two separate agenda items. A challenge of growing churches is how to select leaders at the highest level, such as elders.¹²⁵ Part of the problem is that there are often few midlevel opportunities to develop leadership skills and evidence potential suitability for high levels of leadership.¹²⁶ But every church planter realizes that if the church is to grow, local workers and leaders must emerge.¹²⁷ So, appointing elders and training leaders is a top priority. Sorum reminds us that “the pulpit does not get into an individual’s home.”¹²⁸ Elders from another culture help the pastor lead according to the needs of that culture and open lines of communication between members of both culture groups better.¹²⁹

¹²² Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 112.

¹²³ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 129.

¹²⁴ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 129.

¹²⁵ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 276.

¹²⁶ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 276.

¹²⁷ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 277.

¹²⁸ Sorum, E. Allen. *Change: Mission & Ministry across Cultures*, 58.

¹²⁹ Voss, Joel. “Establishing Elders in Cross-Cultural Communities”, 4.

Pastoral Leadership

Sherwood Lingenfelter notes that “leading cross-culturally is inspiring people who come from two or more cultural traditions to participate with you in building a community of trust and then to follow you and be empowered by you to achieve a compelling vision of faith.”¹³⁰ It’s safe to say that a pastor’s leadership abilities play a role in integrating an intercultural community into a church. A pastor’s ability to lead by stepping out ahead, calling others to follow him, and empowering them to follow you impacts his ministry.¹³¹ So does his sensitivity to culture. “A pastor who knows one culture knows no culture.”¹³² While most models of missions assume a monocultural person encountering another monocultural environment when they begin mission work, in a globalizing world more people grow up with sustained engagement in multiple cultural settings before their formal ministry begins and an adeptness within culture and the ability to use a bicultural personality becomes more vital.¹³³ There is also a recognition that truly culturally sensitive ministry does not hesitate to admit that not all that comes from a culture or cultures is good.¹³⁴ While it is possible to overstudy the given culture you are going to minister to,¹³⁵ any cultural outsider, no matter how long he has studied the culture, will always be an

¹³⁰ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 30.

¹³¹ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally*, 18–19.

¹³² Meaning that a person who has grown up and only knows and understands one particular culture actually doesn’t know a culture. This is another way to say that one particular way of life isn’t the only way. Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 176.

¹³³ Rasmussen, Hannah. “The Role of Bicultural People in the Missio Dei: Creating a Model from Bicultural Bible Characters.” *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 1 (2022). 79.

¹³⁴ Brett C Hoover and Jennifer Owens-Jofré, “From the Margins to the Center”, 376.

¹³⁵ Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 144–145.

outsider to some degree.¹³⁶ The relationships then that are built in multicultural contexts cannot be fake but must be authentic, not seen as some sort of quid pro quo but real.¹³⁷

Some final recommendations should be noted. The entire process of integrating intercultural communities will take time and will take a considerable amount of work. It is also wise to realize that a church may never fully integrate and that it may not be the best course of action for a congregation.¹³⁸ A final note of encouragement would be to admit the fear and risk that goes into integrating an intercultural community. There is always the worry that as we reach out, “we might lose ourselves, our doctrinal integrity and manipulate Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.”¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message”, 12.

¹³⁷ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message”, 11.

¹³⁸ An example of this can be found in Harry Woolston Bp Shipps, “Multiculturalism and Bilingualism in Spanish Harlem,” *Angl. Episcop. Hist.* 76.1 (2007): 143–47.

¹³⁹ Wendland, “Don’t Lose the Message”, 1.

TRADITIONAL COUNSEL IN WELS

As important to the discussion of intercultural ministry in the Wisconsin Synod is the traditional counsel and recommendations from men in the position to do so. During the 1940s, there was a renewed emphasis in mission work across the Wisconsin Synod. In 1948, Venus Winters began the first cross-cultural mission work in the United States for the Synod, starting the first Spanish intercultural ministry in Tucson, Arizona. Since then, the Lord has blessed WELS by raising workers who assist churches who wish to take on this important work. The purpose of this next section is to learn what WELS has counseled its missionaries to do when assigned or called to serve this area.

One of the ways that the WELS provides counsel to those undertaking intercultural ministry is by putting them into regular contact with a Mission Counselor. One of these men is Mission Counselor Tim Flunker.¹⁴⁰ When a church identifies that they have an intercultural community they would like to reach, especially with a Hispanic ministry, Pastor Flunker is often the first to hear about it. Pastor Flunker will meet with these potential churches to discuss what the opportunities are in a given area. According to Pastor Flunker, a church that works in an area that has an 8-15% minority population near them has an opportunity to start an intercultural community.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Pastor Tim Flunker served in Flower Mound, Texas for six years; Mexico City, Mexico for three years and Green Bay, Wisconsin for six years, where he began working as a consultant in ethnic minority ministries. In 2009, the Board for Home Missions called Pastor Flunker to be their Hispanic Outreach Consultant. Since then, Tim has worked to help congregations throughout the United States both begin and enhance their outreach and ministry to Hispanics.

¹⁴¹ Pastor Tim Flunker Interview.

When Pastor Flunker assesses the potential for a church that would like to start a Spanish ministry, he will look to uncover the potential community that the church would like to reach and do an onsite meeting and an awareness session for the church. During these meetings, he often asks questions like: what is the bigger barrier: language or culture? Are the issues similar to the issues that Jesus faced, or are the cultural issues Wisconsin imported?

For the churches that are blessed to start a Spanish ministry, Pastor Flunker can assist them in the process of raising the church from its infancy to gaining a stronger footing. Pastor Flunker helps them, particularly in two areas. One area is assisting the Spanish-speaking group and the pastor to have as simplified an approach as possible for their context. Another area is helping that group to grow in leadership and stewardship concerns. Pastor Flunker observes that, often, Hispanics come from the Catholic Church which has provided leadership that tells you everything that you need to do and provides everything for the church financially. Growing in leadership means taking the time to create a council and teach responsibility to others who aren't used to it. In this process, financial stewardship is also stressed and discussed, and a goal is often put forward to begin to assist in the building up of offerings towards the Pastor's salary.

A key decision that a church must make when considering intercultural ministry is whether to keep their church as one group in two languages or become two distinct congregations that come together occasionally. Pastor Flunker encourages congregations to be one church that has one culture in two languages. Pastor Flunker will encourage the church to be united in this effort and create a church culture that is biblical and has a heart for reaching the lost. When it comes to what language to worship in, Pastor Flunker advises having services in two languages, and that is best served by one bilingual man. Pastor Flunker thinks that this best serves the congregation because the pastor can be a unifying factor for the church and the pastor

is someone who understands both cultural groups. The pastor can have a “foot in both cultures” and have better communication with his members.¹⁴²

Much of Pastor Flunker’s communication with congregations comes through the pastors at these churches. Pastor Flunker noted that in the Wisconsin Synod, serving in a church this side of the border, a pastor doesn’t have to have perfect Spanish. He does have to be bilingual, though.¹⁴³ As he is advising pastors, Pastor Flunker points out that a church’s outreach efforts to an intercultural community might not need to be in that culture’s core language. There are bilingual BIC courses and Bible studies available to pastors who might need them. Pastor Flunker also reminds the church that not every Hispanic member may speak Spanish, a growing trend in Hispanic congregations and generations throughout the country.¹⁴⁴

In Pastor Flunker’s experience, the pastor plays an integral role in integrating these communities. For the Spanish group, the pastor is the only leader, and his leadership is essential for success. Within the general laity of the majority culture, though, Flunker sees that the influence the pastor can have in integrating intercultural communities across services “isn’t as great as you would think.”¹⁴⁵ Pastor Flunker sees excellent value in having lay members, male and female, who can engage the ethnic minority. This can be done using ESL, EIO, or any bilingual event.¹⁴⁶ These members don’t have to be bilingual; they just have to be understanding.

¹⁴² Pastor Flunker Interview.

¹⁴³ Pastor Flunker Interview.

¹⁴⁴ Jacob Shepherd details this trend in his Senior Thesis, “Trends in Spanish Language Capability Among Immigrant Children: Effects on Evangelism.”

¹⁴⁵ Pastor Flunker Interview.

¹⁴⁶ English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Outreach Opportunities (EIO) are popular outreach methods utilized in a number of WELS Churches. These could be one-on-one opportunities to help someone

The Anglo leadership needs to be well-informed of the steps that it will take to serve an intercultural group, and they must be able to be flexible enough to know “what is sacred and what is not.” Pastor Flunker encourages a “dialogue for compromise” within congregations.¹⁴⁷ He even cautions that it might not be best to show your love by immediately saying “Let’s do this.”¹⁴⁸ It could be inconvenient for the congregation and hurt the overall process of integrating these communities. One notable area that is worth considering is the leadership structure. The possibility of integrating intercultural leadership may provide a valuable step forward. Yet when asked if he advises for this, Flunker panned, “Not at all.”¹⁴⁹ Rather, he suggests that a group focus on evangelism initially and bring the gospel into everything they do. He also suggests fostering Biblical, Means of Grace Christianity. Finally, within the leadership team at the church, Flunker pushes for the minority group to identify one or two men whom they respect as leaders and put them in a position to serve as Elders to the Spanish group.¹⁵⁰ Otherwise, “it’s oil and water.”¹⁵¹

One of the best ways that Pastor Flunker sees to integrate communities together is to gather the groups together and plan the year of worship together. Gathering Spanish leaders and other representatives from the church to gather and plan the year together is intentional

improve their English skills and through the process create a space for a personal relationship. It is not intended to be used exclusively for Hispanic outreach.

¹⁴⁷ Pastor Flunker Interview.

¹⁴⁸ Pastor Flunker Interview.

¹⁴⁹ Pastor Flunker Interview.

¹⁵⁰ Pastor Flunker Interview. On point #3, Joel Voss wrote about the potential benefits of appointing Cross-Cultural Elders in a church in his thesis “Establishing Elders in Cross-Cultural Communities,” available on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File.

¹⁵¹ Pastor Flunker Interview.

integration at its finest. Pastor Flunker is not the only voice on these issues. Other good practices have been established within WELS. While there is not a specific “how-to” manual provided by the Wisconsin Synod on how to integrate intercultural communities into their churches, men called to serve in Home Missions and World Missions do receive some cultural training. Through the work of members of the Multi-Cultural Ministry Committee and Prof. Allen Sorum’s book *Change*, Wisconsin Synod pastors have had resources available to them to help identify a path toward reaching out and integrating an intercultural community into their church. Other examples of “how-to” examples can be found in Ryan Cortright’s paper “The History of Spanish Language Ministry at Grace Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia” detailing how they took the steps necessary to start their blossoming Spanish-speaking ministry.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Ryan Cortright, “The History of Spanish Language Ministry at Grace Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia” 2009. Seminary Essay File.

CASE STUDIES

This thesis has considered the Biblical Basis for the integration of intercultural communities into Christian churches, assessed available literature on the subject, and examined traditional guidance from WELS. Exploring how WELS churches have integrated intercultural communities into their churches demands interviewing churches with intercultural ministries to hear about their experiences. Below are three case studies on congregations that have Hispanic ministries in WELS: Palabra de Vida in Detroit, Michigan, Christ Lutheran Church in Denver, Colorado, and Faith Lutheran Church in Anchorage, Alaska. Each of these congregations was chosen because they are actively ministering to an intercultural community, specifically in Spanish.

PALABRA DE VIDA – DETROIT, MI

When Pastor Jahnke was handed an old CD-ROM with the demographics showing that at least 70% of the population in Southwest Detroit was Hispanic, he knew that was all he needed to gain a hearing with the District Mission Board.¹⁵³ Pastor Jahnke received these statistics from a community leader of an urban neighborhood initiative, and he bought in right away. With the help of Pastor Guy Purdue's ability in Spanish and John Beeskow's mission-minded personality and love for the gospel, they pushed to get a church going in Spanish in Detroit. Palabra de Vida was started in Paul the Apostle's church, a WELS church in Detroit. After a few years of meetings to figure out logistics, Palabra de Vida called Dan Schmidt to be Pastor in 2008. Initially, the arrangement was that Pastor Schmidt would do everything in Spanish and

¹⁵³ Pastor Kolander Interview.

everything in English would be done at Paul the Apostle. It was never in the plan from the beginning for these two groups to merge, thus the distinct names for each group. Each group would have their own Bible studies and separate worship services while using Paul the Apostle's building. This did not come without some friction in figuring out how both groups would worship on Sunday when each group could use a building, and what sort of relationship the two congregations have with each other.¹⁵⁴ From Pastor Kolander's recollection, "they were never conjoined. Melding an existing congregation together? They never really had anything to do with each other. It was almost like two ships in the night. Palabra did its own thing. Paul the Apostle did its own thing."¹⁵⁵

As Paul the Apostle's membership began to decline, Palabra de Vida's grew slowly from a brand-new ministry to Pastor Schmidt asking for more help in 2013. Somewhere between 2012-2013, Palabra de Vida bought the building from Paul the Apostle. After receiving a PSI¹⁵⁶ Graduate from Peru, Ismael Sialer, Palabra de Vida began to grow. In 2014, Pastor Schmidt took a call out of Detroit and Ismael was the sole pastor from 2014-2016. In 2016, Pastor Ryan Kolander was assigned to serve as Pastor at Palabra de Vida.

Pastor Kolander was counseled to continue in the ministry's current structure when he was assigned. It was already a bilingual mission at Palabra de Vida. Pastor Jahnke continued to serve Paul the Apostle and worshipped on Saturday nights. Pastor Kolander's group stretched both languages, English and Spanish. Instead of Pastor Kolander feeling like he had the task of

¹⁵⁴ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 5:40–6:17.

¹⁵⁵ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 2:46–3:06.

¹⁵⁶ Pastor Studies Institute. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute provides pre-seminary and seminary training to North American students from a variety of countries and cultures.

mixing the two congregations together, it was a case of a Hispanic congregation welcoming him as a “white guy.”¹⁵⁷ Considering he served alongside a Peruvian pastor, the congregation had to try and gain an understanding of both of those two pastors in how they interacted with each other, how they would work together, and how the congregation would understand them individually. “That was a huge, huge challenge just to buy in. Forming trust with people took a long, long time... It was more like buying into me. How are these two pastors going to work together from a congregation’s point of view.”¹⁵⁸

Pastor Kolander reminiscences on the dynamic going on at the time:

“Just the dynamic of having two pastors there and one being an upper-class Peruvian man. He was a businessman, very successful in what he did. And then me, this young guy coming out of Seminary, and so pastoral worlds coming together and trying to figure out how to navigate. Who leads on this or how? Who visits the people and avoids the whole thing in 1 Corinthians 1,2,3 where Paul is like hey, who is Apollos? What is Paul? So, trying to work together to figure that out and lead the people that way.”¹⁵⁹

Commenting further, Pastor Kolander remembers, “It’s not just him, a white guy going into a congregation with mainly brown and black folks. That was nothing compared to like the layers of societal differences and cultural differences.” Pastor Kolander did sense that race played a factor in his ability to integrate into the congregation.

“Yes, for sure, 100%. And to make matters worse, Trump was elected in 2016. And so, I think he had said, like, Mexicans are evil or something like that and that got blown up. You can’t unhear that once you hear it as a Latino person. So, I kind of represented evil white Trump people. Not that I was, but that is who I was to someone. That was my very first year.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 18:49.

¹⁵⁸ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 16:42–17:33.

¹⁵⁹ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 20:22–21:09.

¹⁶⁰ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 23:32–24:02.

Language, which is typically a barrier for the incoming pastor to an intercultural community, turned out to be a challenge but in an unexpected way.

“My Spanish was better than many of the people who were maybe lower education. So, I couldn’t use all the words that I knew. That was tough. Even conversing with people, how do you connect? How do you talk to somebody who just eked out of living in a different country, crossed the border treacherously, has been persecuted in the US, and is living in fear of being deported every day by people who look like me, what do you talk about? You know, when you’re sitting at a table trying to eat tacos like, what do you talk about?”¹⁶¹

Despite some of these difficulties, Pastor Kolander noted that the best way to make a connection was to show his genuineness in all his interactions.

“But on the other hand, how do you overcome? I found just treating people with the utmost respect and kindness and going out of your way to help them and show them you’re on their side. You have no ulterior motives. You’re purely there to serve them and help them in whatever way they need. Those were some of the ways that allowed me to connect with people, but it just took time.”¹⁶²

As the congregation was learning how to interact with the new pastoral team, Pastor Kolander was left to determine the best course of action for serving these groups. Part of solving that puzzle, Kolander thinks, is “undoing the curse of the Tower of Babel.”

“The big challenge was, as I saw it, essentially trying to undo the curse of the Tower of Babel. It marvels me of all the ways God could have split up people, he chose to make them speak different languages and the next day they were like ‘We can’t do this. We are out of here. We are going to leave this project, drop our hammers.’ It’s fascinating to me. You can actually feel that dividing nature of speaking different languages. Then the day of Pentecost comes around and then Jesus is like “Get this gospel to the nations.”¹⁶³

“We’re working with those two tensions. In real-time, all these people speak two different languages, literally, and that creates a mega amount of suspicion. But then obviously you want to make sure everyone’s getting the gospel and it would be easier if we were just

¹⁶¹ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 19:07–19:53.

¹⁶² Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 23:52–24:24.

¹⁶³ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 25:37–26:13.

one church rather than Pastor Ryan going house to house with all those people who can't get along with each other."¹⁶⁴

Learning how to deal with these tensions led to Pastor Kolander shifting how he led his leadership team and how he pastored an intercultural flock. Pastor Kolander shifted from being “Pastor does everything, gets as many people as he could and connects,” to shepherding and equipping and transitioning from a vertical ministry to a horizontal ministry. That meant equipping a leadership team, equipping different teams who would do the ministry and expand the ministry better and quicker than Kolander could do alone.

“Doing the little thing of, like, letting them use their talents and gifts and not just have them sit around. “Force multiplying leadership” is a term that's helped me. It is not just investing your time into just doing things but investing your time into people. And then those people by force multiply the ministry much, much greater than what one person could do because of their gifts.”¹⁶⁵

Because they started from scratch, Palabra de Vida could reach out to the community and have the church almost perfectly reflect their community. This has allowed their leadership team to reflect the community around them. Their goal was to get to seven men, with a majority being Hispanic men on that team. Pastor Kolander was very intentional about getting all seven of those men involved in the ministry in a very visible way. One such way was to have the men serve as lectors and read the readings during the worship service every Sunday. Every week, each of the four Hispanic leaders would take a turn reading the lessons in worship. Pastor Kolander is insightful on how his leadership and decisions affected the church:

“By the time I was nearing the end of my time there, people trusted me, even though I'm a white guy because we had history. It would have been culturally easy for me to bring in people who are kind of like me, who think like me, who have training like me, whatever. It would have probably been fine because people trusted me. ‘People who are like Pastor

¹⁶⁴ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 26:15–26:37.

¹⁶⁵ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 30:21–31:03.

are probably OK people, right?’ But I really wanted a lot of people who are doing stuff to be from the church.”¹⁶⁶

As intentional as Kolander was to make this move, he was always conscious about what it communicated to the church. His goal was to “open up the whole church and make sure everybody could participate.”

“It’s not the minority guiding a majority or vice versa. Ultimately, I tried to make sure that people didn’t judge anybody based on culture or language or whatever. It doesn’t matter if it’s 10 white guys in here or 10 Hispanic guys. It doesn’t matter. That being said, to have people who could speak Spanish, for example, coordinating kids’ ministry and events and helping coordinate fellowship helped. And then people who have Latino roots, too.”¹⁶⁷

Starting from zero meant that Palabra de Vida had to create a system of leadership that worked for them and their context. Until about 2019, Palabra de Vida did not have a church constitution or church bylaws. With the help of Pastor Flunker, Palabra de Vida set up and made a simplified document to work from. Pastor Kolander saw this as a necessary step for his group.

“[If] we would have to follow the Michigan bylaws, the constitution from how it’s written and the model copy, that would not have functioned in our setting. He [Pastor Flunker] was able to make it very simplified.”¹⁶⁸

“Just culturally speaking, I shouldn’t say it was better, but maybe easier to manage. I think the complicated structure would be a little overwhelming. Every community is different, but at least in Southwest Detroit, people are a little more action-based. ‘Should this fence be fixed?’ It isn’t like we have to look at a vision plan. It’s ‘we should fix this fence.’”¹⁶⁹

Throughout his ministry at Palabra de Vida, Pastor Kolander never felt the need to change the name of the church to reflect the community that was gathering in their building. For a while,

¹⁶⁶ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 34:38–35:15.

¹⁶⁷ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 35:20–35:46.

¹⁶⁸ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 37:18–37:44.

¹⁶⁹ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 38:32–38:46.

Pastor Kolander tried to get “Word of Life”¹⁷⁰ to catch on in English, but it never did. It didn’t need to. “We were reaching so many people that they were just going to people. I wasn’t so much worrying about branding. It was just, like, we have all these people coming in.”¹⁷¹ Palabra de Vida gained a reputation in the community for what they were doing in their community, especially through their compassion ministries.¹⁷² Pastor Kolander felt that church branding did matter, but it was more important to know how the community perceived them.

As a way to bring the two cultural groups together, Pastor Kolander saw some key factors as being key to integrating intercultural communities into his church. The first is simply demonstrating Christian living personally and treating all people you know equally. Then, in conversation when people are speaking different languages some person says, ‘Hey this person was talking smack about me,’ intentionally saying “No they weren’t. This is what they said.” so that there’s not a lingering “what did they say about me I don’t understand.” Pastor Kolander felt it was crucial to be “really intentional about nipping that stuff in the bud and being very clear and transparent.”¹⁷³

Another factor would be to unite people of different language backgrounds by speaking the language each person understands. Pastor Kolander saw an advantage of a bilingual person who could bring together people in conversations after church and speak a language they

¹⁷⁰ A translation of “Palabra de Vida” from Spanish to English.

¹⁷¹ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 42:43–43:17.

¹⁷² For a taste of the types of things that Pastor Kolander learned from his experience with compassion ministries, he presented at the 2022 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium on Compassion Ministries. His paper, “*Cultivating the Culture of Compassion: The Opportunity is Ours*,” can be accessed on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File.

¹⁷³ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 27:14–27:18.

understand and see that “hey, this is just a normal person. They’re not talking about some weird thing I don’t understand.”¹⁷⁴ One way to instigate these types of reactions is finding reasons for people to be around each other. Pastor Kolander employed bilingual services with friendship meals immediately following the worship service. The goal was to get everyone together, everyone to worship together, and then eat, with each person bringing something to share. Palabra de Vida also had plenty of opportunities to assist with outreach events on campus, whether that be through Valentine’s Day dinners, events for the family, or clothing drives. “Stuff like that, just to get a lot of volunteers just literally working shoulder to shoulder with people. They might not speak the same language, but they recognize each other later on like, ‘Oh, you were at the cleanup day, or you were at the Valentine’s Day dinner.’” Pastor Kolander noted that an intentional fellowship team made a stark difference. He remembers a few members of his church who came from a Venezuelan background and a native Detroiter, two completely divergent backgrounds, who did not get along initially. At first, they would provide snacks and coffee for the English and Spanish groups, respectively, but over time they began to provide for both groups. “Those little things like that can force connection. That ended up being a beautiful thing and helped navigate the whole division that language and culture can kind of create naturally.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 27:47–28:01.

¹⁷⁵ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 28:35–29:17.

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH – DENVER, CO

When the WELS churches in Denver looked around, they realized that they had planted all around the suburbs, but nothing in the middle of the city. So, with the help of a couple of mission-minded volunteers, these churches started doing outreach events in metropolitan Denver and found enough success to consider renting a location to do outreach more regularly. Local pastors would come in and do Bible studies and focus on teaching English to immigrants and their children. Through a connection to a local school in Denver, three blocks from where the church currently stands, the church could use the school building for VBS and Easter for kids to spread the gospel to the community. The Lord blessed these efforts to reach out to these families and their children and these churches decided that they would call a graduate from the Seminary to come and be a Pastor on site. In the Spring of 2005, Pastor Paul Biedenbender was assigned to pastor this new church.¹⁷⁶ Later that December, their group grew, both in the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking groups.

It was fully understood that this new church would serve in both the English and Spanish languages from the beginning, with Spanish “probably being the big driver here where most of our prospects are going to come from initially and in English will be something that will have to do just because there are English speakers here as well.”¹⁷⁷ With the church having found success reaching out to their community they knew that, when they called a pastor, he would need to be

¹⁷⁶ When Pastor Biedenbender was assigned, it was to be part time at the mission and part time at Lord or Life with Pastor Mark Birkholz. They served as associates, but there was always the understanding that “if you spend more time at the mission, that’s great. We’re not here to make sure we get our 50% out of you for our purposes here at Lord or Life, it’s [that] we want this mission to go, and Lord of Life is willing to kick in and help out.” “Preach once a month there and fill in and do little things here and there, but there was... support from that congregation and there were still volunteers from the other congregations very much involved and getting this going and wanting to see it happen.” Pastor Paul Biedenbender Interview, 11:25–12:12.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 10:32–10:48.

capable of working in Spanish and communicating with the local businesses, corner stores, restaurants, and everything else in the neighborhood. With the mission field in front of them, Paul Biedenbender noted that he didn't receive any specific training, but was fortunate to have opportunities to do some ethnographic work for congregations during his years of seminary training in the Milwaukee area, New York, and Miami and help from Pastor E. Allen Sorum's book *Change*. "Kind of see what works. See what sticks. You know, just be a pastor, and then all of a sudden, you meet a few families and then network through members."

It was also fully understood that Iglesia Luterana Cristo¹⁷⁸ was going to be their own ministry and be their own congregation and Christ was going to be their own congregation. Christ Lutheran has also never felt tension by advertising to the community in English and Spanish.

"If there has been any confusion, I think it's always been a good confusion that it lets people ask questions. What is that? What is Lutheran and are you Catholic? Are you Christian? We don't say either one of those names. So, which one is it? If it has caused confusion, it's always led to a good conversation."¹⁷⁹

Pastor Biedenbender did note that "I don't know if a whole lot of thought went into that and it's like, well here, we'll put both names on there and it's always been the understanding that we're one church. Here's our name in both languages so that you can come and are welcome and we're capable of serving you here."¹⁸⁰

Pastor Biedenbender hasn't felt like he has ever had to push the congregation to buy into the idea of reaching out interculturally. "It's not like it has had to take a lot of pushing or

¹⁷⁸ Christ Lutheran Church translated into Spanish.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 12:48–13:17.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 13:47–14:10.

convincing on our end to say we need to do this and it's going to be hard and different. It's just the way of life in our neighborhood, I guess. And it's just a good reflection of our community.”

At the time of this writing, Pastor Biedenbender also commented that there have been some tensions recently that have come up with adapting to serving a shifting community.

“We've had a lot of Venezuelans coming in lately, and there's been a little bit of tension with that. There are just different circumstances and access that they have coming in that others who came in a few years ago didn't have. And there's a little bit of 'hey, that's not fair!' and being able to figure all of that out and have those important conversations that we can get over ourselves and serve others.”¹⁸¹

A blessing for Christ is that they have been able to reflect the Denver metro area as they have grown.

“A lot of WELS churches around Denver, there are always people moving to Denver constantly. So, they're talking about, 'Oh yeah, this transfer family from Wisconsin or Minnesota or Michigan and some people who are mature, solid Christians.' We don't get any transfers from other WELS churches very often. Every once in a while, it'll be, you know, a young professional living in the downtown area that will get connected with us. That leans into kind of what our church makeup is and loves the diversity.”¹⁸²

In reaching out to new Christians, Christ has discovered that finding leaders overall has been a challenge. There has been “lots of involvement, but little leadership.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 15:27-16:00. In 2023, a large wave of migrants from Venezuela and other South American countries began seeking asylum in large North American cities to find work and food. Especially concerning migrants from Venezuela, the situation in Venezuela became untenable for many families with ongoing political and humanitarian crises. Christ Lutheran applied and received a matching grant from WELS Christian Aid and Relief to assist in reaching out with compassion to Venezuelan migrants coming into Denver. This allowed the church to hear more and more “gut-wrenching stories about the journey from Venezuela to Denver. In our conversations, several have turned to food – missing some traditional and sentimental dishes from their home country that they haven't had in months, even over a year. We're going to tap into the power of culture around food and open our church kitchen after church on Sunday to several women who are excited to mass produce Venezuelan arepas. They are so excited to have access to be able to cook and share food with our congregation as a chance to say thank you while also inviting many of their Venezuelan contacts to connect with each other over some familiar food.” <https://www.facebook.com/WELSChristianAidAndRelief/posts/community-care-and-compassion-update-on-october-24-we-approved-a-ccc-matching-gr/762458022588937/>

¹⁸² Paul Biedenbender Interview, 16:44–17:29.

¹⁸³ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 21:13.

“The leaders we currently have are awesome. The most consistent ones are the ones with a WELS background and are familiar with [a WELS leadership structure].¹⁸⁴ The mobility of people in and out of the city all the time, we are excited that they are here and two years later they’re moving to a different place and we miss them.”¹⁸⁵

For many Christians coming out of Roman Catholicism, leadership is the church. Pastor Biedenbender has noticed that, for Hispanics then, this can translate into “just letting Pastor do it, or we’ll just let the other people do it” and they are ok with that instead of “really taking seriously that encouragement to step up and be involved and let your voice be heard and take some ownership. This is your church! This isn’t Pastor Paul’s church. This is your church.”¹⁸⁶ Pastor Biedenbender mentioned that “if I set something up and organize it, all people are ready to jump in and do all they can to help it and support it and be involved in it. But as far as anyone making decisions and being seen as the leader alongside the pastor, we struggle to identify it and train to keep them around.”¹⁸⁷

Pastor Biedenbender noted that developing leaders could be something he could have done a better job of doing.

“One thing I’ve learned to do is push them out of the nest a little more. I did a lot of, ‘I want this more than you do’ early in my ministry and can still slip into that. There is that pastoral care and outreach in faithful follow-up that you want to do but maybe I did a little too much coddling along the way.”¹⁸⁸

“[I could have] maybe been more intentional from the get-go to say, you know, the personal ownership of your faith and our ministry as a church. Having people involved is

¹⁸⁴ A “typical” WELS Leadership structure, as this author understands it, would be a church with a leadership team consisting of a Pastor, Church President, Secretary, Treasurer, and a team of Elders serving the church.

¹⁸⁵ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 18:56–20:16.

¹⁸⁶ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 20:23–21:01.

¹⁸⁷ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 21:21–21:51.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 23:09–23:44.

one of the greatest blessings we have but, sometimes as a pastor, you think, how much would be going on if I didn't do that part, could somebody else do it?"¹⁸⁹

Pastor Biedenbender doesn't find that he pastors his members in English any differently than he does in Spanish. "Probably the same across the board. Pastoring is just understanding.

Everybody's circumstances are different, and yeah, even among Hispanics and in Spanish it's going to be different from individual case to case. But whether English or Spanish, asking God to guide me with the wisdom and insight to help apply God's word to what they have going on."¹⁹⁰

Pastor Paul Biedenbender has noticed that, while race has played a role in his ministry, it has,

"Never been a big deal with our members, but then you know when they introduce you to their friends, family, neighbors at a party, something like that, and it's like, 'oh, there's a giant white guy'¹⁹¹ here now, and he's the only one here.' There are lots of parties where I'm the only white guy, and then, again, it's a beneficial thing because, 'who is that guy? Oh, you have a pastor who comes to the birthday party and family gatherings and things like that?' It's led to some more opportunities and conversations."¹⁹²

A strength that Pastor Biedenbender sees is that the congregation, and the surrounding Denver area, have a heart to reach out. "We have a message that gives life here and wants to share it, people have the desire, the heart is there, the strength is there, but the how to do it isn't as clear. The weakness is just that ongoing training, like, how can we do this? How can we do Spanish ministry at our church without anybody knowing Spanish and now some tools are being put into

¹⁸⁹ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 30:27–31:21.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 25:42– 26:20.

¹⁹¹ Referring to his height.

¹⁹² Paul Biedenbender Interview, 27:51–28:53.

place.”¹⁹³ Still, Biedenbender encourages churches thinking about the possibility of doing something like this in the future to,

“Not be scared or intimidated by it. The Seminary prepares us to be pastors, not sociologists, and that’s the cool thing in all this is that you just get to be a pastor. You don’t have to know all the answers. And part of that, being a pastor, is listening to people, learning about them, learning from them, and you know that’s where trust and relationships were built. There is more when you don’t know something than when you do know something. . . . More blessings have come out of me saying ‘I don’t know’ than saying ‘I do know’ and just leaning into that. It’s ok to say, ‘I don’t know.’ And that’s where, you know, you’ll figure things out.”¹⁹⁴

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH – ANCHORAGE, AK

The spirit of mission work in the WELS was infectious during the 1960s and a window opened for mission expansion into Alaska. In August of 1967, Pastor Dave Zietlow was called to be pastor of the exploratory mission in Anchorage, Alaska with a straightforward emphasis: start a mission, preach the Gospel.¹⁹⁵ The Lord blessed those efforts and continued to guide the work of Faith Lutheran Church into the 21st century from a fledging group with humble beginnings to a church that celebrated their 50th anniversary recently with three languages accounted for at the service.

The impetus for the Spanish-speaking ministry came from James Lillo, a man who ran an electrician’s business and saw opportunities to reach out to Hispanics. Lillo, without knowing any Spanish, helped form a group of Hispanics that began to meet together and would watch

¹⁹³ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 34:29–34:49.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Biedenbender Interview, 35:12–36:19.

¹⁹⁵ Jacob Zietlow, “Breaking and Entering Senior Thesis,” 12. For more on the initial steps taken to establish a church in Anchorage, Alaska, read Zietlow’s fine paper on the Seminary Essay file.

videos from another congregation.¹⁹⁶ Once a month, a pastor would fly into Alaska to do an in-person worship service. James Lillo had a heart for the Spanish ministry and fully funded this ministry himself. “The ministry, the Spanish-speaking ministry in particular, was funded by an individual who just said we’re going to do this whether the congregation wants to or not.”¹⁹⁷ The congregation saw that there was a need for Spanish ministry but also realized the linguistic barriers presented to this “pet ministry” that was growing and finding success. Still, the support for the Spanish-speaking ministry wasn’t always solid.¹⁹⁸ There were some differences of understanding about what the mission would entail, and there were some that envisioned a Spanish-speaking arm of the ministry should be fully funded within a pre-determined number of years, and a difference in understanding between some of the English-speaking members of the purpose of the ministry.¹⁹⁹

Pastor Christopher Ewings was originally called to serve the Spanish-speaking group at Faith in 2012. After a few years, he was called to lead the English-speaking group. Ewings learned pretty quickly that there were different expectations that each group had for their pastor:

“I realized very quickly the ministry model changed for success. To which group do I fail because there’s just too much work to do? If you’re doing the English and Spanish-speaking ministry, you need to preach two different sermons on a Sunday. We had two different Bible studies. I never would have tried to use something that I used in English in Spanish either because it’s too much work to put it together, even just the logistics of

¹⁹⁶ While potentially an unwise practice, James Lillo would tell people that he would “give them a job if they came to his church.” Pastor Ewings recalls a story about James Lillo, who didn’t know a word of Spanish, teaching (more accurately, reading) an entire BIC course to a group of Hispanics in Spanish.

¹⁹⁷ Pastor Christopher Ewings Interview, 28:47–29:04.

¹⁹⁸ Though called in 2012 to be Pastor at Faith, Pastor Ewing’s history with the congregation dates back to 2004 when he was privileged to work as a Summer Ministry Assistant. He recalls being at two meetings where, “the Spanish speaking ministry would have closed had they chose to vote that way, and there was one when it came withing just a couple of votes, so not everybody was on board.” Pastor Ewings Interview, 9:28–9:47.

¹⁹⁹ Pastor Ewings remarks, “is it to go out and make disciples of all nations? Is it to fund the church? How do we make all these components fit together?” 10:16–10:47.

typing it out and putting it into a publication format. More than anything, the spiritual maturity level, they're just light years of difference in the milk versus the meat. So that was my ministry model in 2015, which group will I fail this week? That was always my goal of well, ok, this is why I'm failing the Hispanics this week because I can't be there for them because I need to make up this, I go to this meeting, [I] do that."²⁰⁰

When he got there, Pastor Ewings tried a couple of different things to get the ministry off the ground.

“When I first got here, in order to welcome the Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters, there was a service that took place where they called it simple worship and they took the English liturgy and dumbed it way down. Everything was the most basic English that you could imagine. [It] didn't use the Apostles Creed because it was too advanced, so everything was super dumbed down. And while that was a clever idea, it didn't go over great because even the dumbed-down English was too difficult for our grandma who can't say 'bathroom' [in English] When I came here, we flipped the script and, instead of doing a service where we invited the Hispanics to come to English church, we invited the English speakers to come to Spanish church and we did a simplified Spanish service. Everything was always printed completely bilingually, and I think we had a great amount of participation because there was a greater amount of academic ability in the English-speaking world to capture Spanish and understand. But at the same time, you could tell this is never going to take off. We're not ever going to have a church where every single service on every single Sunday is done bilingually in a dumbed-down version.”²⁰¹

Pastor Ewings recognized quickly that there are different expectations that come from serving the two cultural groups he's blessed to serve. Ewings observes:

“It is really difficult to figure out how you reach that echelon of English-speaking people in addition to teaching every week a group of people that need to hear just the very basics of the Bible. As the sole pastor, doing things in two congregations with different levels of Bible study, different styles of sermons.”

“You're not going to preach the same way to Hispanics as you will to English speakers. That was a real challenge... Here's what I noticed about doing English and Spanish ministry. What do English speakers want? They want an awesome sermon. They want an awesome Bible study. They want to be involved. They want to be engaged. They want to leave church on Sunday thinking, like, 'Wow, man, I really learned something.' So, you have to put in your 20 hours a week on your sermon to make it top-notch. Hispanics have no idea if you spend 20 minutes or 20 hours on your sermon because they don't know what a good sermon is. What do they want? They want a pastor who's going to be a part

²⁰⁰ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 47:40–48:40.

²⁰¹ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 22:40–24:40.

of their life. When they invite you to their kitchen dinner parties on Friday night, can you be there? And they just expect that you'll be a part of their family life. But when it comes to high levels of preaching and teaching, they don't care because they have no idea what good Bible studies should be like and what good sermons should be like. Whatever you give them is great. Contrast that now again with English ministry; rarely do you find English speakers that are like 'Oh yeah, you want to come to my house?' Hispanics want your time with them but don't really care about your prep time and the English speakers want your time spent prepping stuff and don't really care about your time with them."²⁰²

Pastor Ewings knows his experience may be unique but does see overlap in many areas.

"I don't think that's 100% true both ways, because there are some in either camp, but I think that's a pretty clear distinction of what the challenge of doing a bilingual ministry is. Two different targets that in my mind are not completely compatible for a single pastor to aim at. But again, it's a blessing to try and work through those challenges every single day. That's just the challenge of being a pastor trying to integrate congregations."²⁰³

Adding to the dynamic at Faith in Anchorage is the added blessing of serving the Hmong community. Faith Hmong started in 2008 when a group of four WELS families moved from Clovis, CA to Anchorage. Before then, there was no WELS presence in the area, so they joined a different church. After a year and a half, they wanted to come back to WELS, and their group had expanded to include more families. They met Pastor James Oldfield at Faith who would meet with them once a month to give them God's word. At that time, the Board for Home Missions decided that there was a need to call someone to serve the Hmong group at Faith. After Pastor Pao Moua graduated from the PSI program in 2009, he was assigned to serve in Anchorage. Pastor Moua knew from the start that they "were a part of Faith but at the same time a congregation by itself too."²⁰⁴ Upon coming to Anchorage, Pastor Moua served Faith as a Pastor and as a tent minister.

²⁰² Pastor Christopher Ewings Interview, 18:54–20:10.

²⁰³ Pastor Christopher Ewings Interview, 20:11–20:44.

²⁰⁴ Pastor Moua Interview, 2:06–2:26.

With three cultural groups working out of the same facility, one would assume that tensions would arise either on Sunday or throughout the week. If there are any, Pastor Moua hasn't heard about them.

“Not that I know of unless Faith is good at hiding stuff. They [Faith Anglo] have been a great blessing. Faith Hmong wouldn't be here without the love and support of Faith Anglo congregation. You know, definitely, there has to be a lot of openness and there's got to be a lot of communication. The Hmong folks, we like to use the Fellowship area, or we have a lot of fellowship events. We have a lot of gatherings and stuff like that and there's never been a time where we would intersect. It's always open communication. It's like, you know, 'Hey, I'm looking at this date, is there anything going on?' They've been really open about it. Faith Hmong has been appreciative of that.”²⁰⁵

The Sunday schedule at Faith works with Bible Study at 9 am and worship at 10 am in English.

At noon, there is worship in Spanish. At 3 pm, the Hmong group starts worship.

“We space it out enough, and the good thing about that is our group likes to mingle around and do a lot of fellowship, and then come Sunday, the church is being used all day. We'll worship, we'll have Bible study, [and] after that we'll have a meal and stuff like that. We'll stay till 7, or 8 at night. We never sat down when I first got there and said, 'Hey, this is the time frame' and everything like that.”²⁰⁶

Though the church is used from morning to night on Sundays, there is not a lot of crossover between the groups.

“There is not a lot of crossing over. We try to be intentional with that. You know, in years past we've always had a picnic during the summertime. But the one thing that we always try to do every year is an all-church Thanksgiving service. We try to do at least two or three events where all three congregations would gather and meet with one another also to interact with one another too.”²⁰⁷

Pastor Ewings sees some challenges in trying to get English speakers to come together with the Spanish-speaking congregation.

²⁰⁵ Pastor Moua Interview, 10:12–11:14.

²⁰⁶ Pastor Moua Interview, 12:42–13:48.

²⁰⁷ Pastor Moua Interview, 14:37–15:22.

“We can come together, and we can sing some songs and have basic conversations and we can eat some food together. But trying to do something like has been suggested, a bilingual Bible study, where you have people who don’t speak Spanish getting together with people who don’t speak English and trying to make that work, it is a brilliant idea, but in my opinion impossible in practice.”²⁰⁸

Pastor Ewings notes that there are differences between the language preferences among his

Hispanic group that play a factor in integrating intercultural communities.

“Just trying to figure out how do you mesh ministries like this where you have so many different groups of people. We have the full spectrum, you know, four groups of Hispanics that come to Anchorage, AK; the Hispanics that aren’t fluent at all in English, no matter how hard they try, they will never [learn English]. Hispanics who prefer Spanish to English but can find their way in English, then the Hispanics who prefer their way in English but are also fluent in Spanish, and then the group of children who hate the fact they’re known as Hispanic because they’re just Americans and they don’t want to speak Spanish. And some of them can’t speak Spanish”²⁰⁹

Good discussions on language preferences can also be seen in the Faith Hmong community.

Pastor Moua comments,

“We’ve never had any kind of in-depth talk and say, you know, Pastor, we’ve got to switch over [to English]. I’ve had a few younger folks say, ‘How can I incorporate English into the worship service for them to be able to understand it a little bit more. For the past five years, the bulletin has always been printed and there are parts of it that are in Hmong, but the readings have always been printed in English so that way the ones who can’t read Hmong will get the word of God in English.’”²¹⁰

“At the same time, a lot of families, especially the mom and dad, still appreciate Hmong. They still want that Hmong. And, you know, for the kids to be able to hear it, to interact with it, there’s only, from my experience, only a few kids that say, ‘We want everything to be flipped straight to English.’ ... I think that, when they get a little older from my experience, they tend to want to come back and say ‘We appreciate this Hmong language. We appreciate it. We want to learn a little bit more.’ ... There’s never been a real push that says we have got to transition over, but there has been. It’s good for us to keep talking about it, keep teaching it, and at the same time, try to bridge that gap. How can we incorporate all that?”²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Pastor Christopher Ewings Interview, 11:12–11:52.

²⁰⁹ Pastor Christopher Ewings Interview, 11:52–12:36.

²¹⁰ Pastor Moua Interview, 21:03–21:51.

²¹¹ Pastor Moua Interview, 22:30–23:32.

In terms of leadership, Pastor Ewings experimented with various forms of leadership teams.

“I set up a Spanish-speaking church council that was quite a bit different than I think whatever any other church would do. Instead of trying to find your President, your Vice President, your Secretary, and your Treasurer, I learned pretty quickly when you get a group of Hispanics together and you want to make decisions, all the Hispanics are looking to you as the Pastor to just tell them what to do. Like, there’s no point in voting because it’s just like, well, what do you think we should do Pastor? You’re the Pastor. Just tell us how we’re supposed to vote because that is what we are going to do. That isn’t the way things typically work on an English-speaking council.”

“What we did instead was find out what people’s innate gifts and abilities were and give them positions in the church that could reflect those gifts. Instead of having a church president, we had something like a Deacon of Encouragement. A Deacon of Fellowship, a Deaconess of Prayer. We would have people use these different gifts.”

“We didn’t have these formal positions, where if you try to do that in an English-speaking ministry, while those are neat ideas to add some ancillary positions, you’ve got to have your church President, Vice President, and Secretary and Treasurer. You just got to do that. It’s a different way of viewing leadership. How do you integrate those two styles? The culture is so different. It’s really messy.”

Faith Hmong has their own leadership group that experimented with having a President and council members, but they’ve experienced manpower issues where they were not able to hold a traditional council group. They do have a Church President but have designated two other guys who “look over and help out. We don’t have, per se, all the Council members, but we do have a group that meets and makes tough decisions. I don’t want to call it a council, but a committee.”²¹²

One neat thing for Pastor Ewings is his previous relationship with the congregation he currently serves.²¹³ Before becoming a pastor, Ewings also had the blessing of serving as a court interpreter while an exchange student in Venezuela and learned to speak Spanish at a “very, very

²¹² Pastor Moua Interview, 30:02–30:53.

²¹³ Pastor Ewings served various summers working with the Spanish speakers at Faith as a Summer Ministry Assistant, starting in 2004.

high level.”²¹⁴ While that made things easier for him to integrate himself into the congregation,

Pastor Ewings notes,

“I am still, no matter what, I am always the white guy, and I always will be the white guy. While no doubt my Spanish-speaking congregation loves me, they absolutely do, I’m still floored by the way that these people support their pastor and their ministry and me personally. Just awesome people. But I’m a white guy. It doesn’t matter how good of Spanish you speak, there are things about their culture that I learn every day, things I will never know.”²¹⁵

Pastor Moua is a Hmong pastor serving a Hmong community, which allows him to understand some of the intricacies that come with serving that specific people group. As he has grown as a pastor, he has earned their respect.

“There’s a fine line, especially in this culture, that there’s got to be respect where it’s needed, but at the same time, I’m thankful for these members. A lot of these guys here, these leaders here, I’m a lot younger than them, but they also respect me as a position of their pastor. They give me their respect. At the same time, there is that line that I just got to walk finally that shows respect and at the same time trying to lead them.”²¹⁶

For Pastor Moua, being Hmong has been a benefit to his flock.

“At the end of the day, I think that the Hmong group appreciates me being there as a Hmong pastor for them to understand that – I don’t want to come up sounding racist or anything like that - but you know, it says you’re one of us. You’ve gone through what we’ve gone through. You understand where we’re coming from, and you know it. I think they appreciate that.”²¹⁷

Pastor Ewings thinks that, from the very beginning, you have to have realistic expectations and objectives as to what the goal of your ministry is.

“I have found it much more effective in all of the ministry I’ve ever done. The best advice that I had was ‘Go meet people.’ Teach them the Bible and have them invite their friends to hear the Bible. The year that we started doing small group Bible studies in

²¹⁴ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 46:17.

²¹⁵ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 46:31–47:03.

²¹⁶ Pastor Moua Interview, 25:42–26:19.

²¹⁷ Pastor Moua Interview, 28:16–28:50.

Spanish, we had more than 200 people attend a Bible study that year. We've never had anything quite like that.”

“But I found that honestly, the concept to be the most effective where we found the greatest success in the Spanish-speaking ministry was taking people who were members and saying, hey, we have a class called Meorando La Vida and it's our membership class and people when they're done are like, ‘Dude, this class really makes life better. Like I have a better relationship with God. I feel just like a better person because I've learned the truth that this course teaches.’ Then you got that person who goes and tells their friends like, ‘Hey, so my pastor is coming over to my house and he's teaching this class that changed my life. I'm going to heaven, and I didn't know that before. I want you to come and just get to know my pastor.’²¹⁸

Pastor Moua encourages any church considering intercultural integration, or intercultural ministry in general, is that,

“The congregation has to buy in on that. ... I know some members say, you know, this is my church, and this is the way it has always been. It can be a little discomfoting at first. But, at the end of the day, if we can get all our members that say, you know, whether you are black, white, green, yell, you know, we're all children, we've got to reach out to the different group in the different community and let the members understand that and be accepting of that.”²¹⁹

“Ask questions like what you're doing right now. Ask questions. Understand it. Go in there. Preach God's word. Preach the gospel. But at the same time, don't go in there saying, ‘I'm gonna try to convert these folks.’ That will never work. But when you go in there and say, ‘the thing is, I want to teach you Christ and get to know who you are and share who you are with us. I think that would be safe to say whether you're serving the Hispanic, the Samoan, or the Sudanese. Teach God's word truthfully, but at the same time share who you are and also accept them. The ethnic group of who they are and be willing to try something new.’²²⁰

Part of those realistic expectations involve financial considerations. “If you want to build a ministry where the Hispanics are going to fund their church, you know, 100% of the pay of the

²¹⁸ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 34:10–35:00.

²¹⁹ Pastor Moua Interview, 40:38–41:21.

²²⁰ Pastor Moua Interview, 45:52–46:53.

pastor, find me a church today that's doing that...If you've got a group of English speakers that have that idea, I'd say it's completely unrealistic."²²¹

"Or if you're expecting to do a bilingual Bible study with people who speak English only and people who speak Spanish only, it's a great idea, but in theory only. It will not work in practice to edify either group."²²²

"Find ways that ministry can be dynamically and not culturally sensitive enough. Understanding enough to have those objectives and expectations real and clear. Every group is going to need to figure out what that looks like in their own context."

"My goal has always been to train up my members to do more and more in the ministry so that this is not only the Pastor's ministry. When we have a meeting to get together and we say, like, 'What do you guys want to do for worship? Should we add some contemporary Christian songs to Spanish worship?' And instead of saying, 'I don't know, Pastor, what do you think we should do? If you say yes, we'll say yes. If you say no, we'll say no way."²²³

Pastor Ewings encourages anyone interested in integrating intercultural communities to let God "leave us absolutely astounded when he just says watch what I can do, that he would use a white guy like you, Lord willing, someday, to lead people with brown skin, not just to join your church, but to join together with those saints and angels around the throne in heaven someday. So, watch him and be amazed, brother, at what our God can do."²²⁴ Pastor Moua reports glowingly about the Faith congregation, especially to him specifically:

"The love that Faith Anglo congregation gives to Faith Hmong is tremendous... When I came up here with my family, we only had three kids from Minnesota and when we came up with three kids, the parsonage wasn't being used at that time. Faith let us live in the Parsonage at that time and, you know, they've been a tremendous help. For the first two years, I did tent ministry to help with the ministry here, and there were some challenges and all I can say is, you know, without Faith's help and acceptance of this ministry, Faith Hmong wouldn't be here."²²⁵

²²¹ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 35:35–36:30.

²²² Pastor Christopher Ewings, 36:12–36:30.

²²³ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 38:59–36:17.

²²⁴ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 51:03–51:36.

²²⁵ Pastor Moua Interview, 3:48–4:43.

Still, Pastor Ewings offers some words of caution to the pastor potentially entering this kind of work.

“In the time that I spent as a bilingual pastor, and to this day, you will always hear me strongly advocate against the congregation that wants to do ministry with one person in two languages. I think you could probably pull it off. Unless there’s a school, I still don’t think it’s wise. Even if you’re just doing in-reach and outreach ministry. To have one guy doing ministry [in] two languages, if there’s a school, you’re going to do, you might actually die from trying to work that hard if you’re going to be faithful to Jesus in all those areas of the ministry. With that said, give it your all man.”²²⁶

Serving with two other pastors, Pastor Moua offers this advice to his brother pastors too:

“We’ve got some God-fearing, loving people that are wanting to go out and are wanting to reach out of the barrier. You know, I tell brother Chris [Ewings] and Nate [Wagenknecht]²²⁷ this all the time, you know, serving your own culture is hard enough as it is, and then you know, to learn a different language and need to serve them, and, whether they speak bad or good about you, you just got to go way out of your comfort zone. That’s one thing I appreciate about our Synod and for our churches [is] that we’re starting to have a lot more young men that are willing to do that, willing to step out [of] their comfort zone and willing to put their neck out and say, you know, ‘I want to learn from you.’ One of the things I am seeing nowadays too is a lot of brothers are being more open. ‘This is the tradition that I’ve grown up in my church and it might not always be the same as in this new congregation or church. That’s something I’ve seen over the years that says, ‘hey, let me be open to that and see what the most folks like.’”²²⁸

²²⁶ Pastor Christopher Ewings, 53:04–53:21.

²²⁷ Pastor Nathan Wagenknecht was called to serve as a second pastor to assist both the English and Hispanic ministries in 2018.

²²⁸ Pastor Moua Interview, 36:19–37:42.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Each case study offers a unique perspective into the real process of doing intercultural ministry in Wisconsin Synod churches. Each offers suggestions that any church considering intercultural ministry, not just Spanish ministry, can use in their planning process. Each congregation received help from a Mission Counselor in some fashion in the initial stages of planning what an intercultural ministry could look like in their context. One notable similarity among all of these congregations is that each ministry was kept distinct from the other and that was often the plan from the beginning. These distinctions were defined and, while it was understood that each congregation would be under the full umbrella of the church, they would operate on their own. Two of these congregations emerged from existing congregations that saw an opportunity to serve interculturally, while one was a mission plant that recognized that Spanish ministry may take precedence.

In each congregation, there was an implicit “why” for why they were doing intercultural ministry, and often that vision didn’t have to be communicated to the members of the congregation. This speaks to the church culture at each congregation, that they understand why they were doing intercultural ministry and that there was a constant evaluation of the “why” of what they were doing. Each congregation made concerted efforts to bring the congregations together, either through various volunteer opportunities provided by the church or through the use of bilingual (or in some cases, trilingual) worship services.

The impact of pastoral leadership cannot be overstated. Three of the pastors interviewed were bilingual and could speak to the congregations they served in English and Spanish. Pastor Moua is also bilingual, speaking English and Hmong with his group. None of these pastors received specific training on how to integrate an intercultural community into their church. For

the pastors serving Spanish-speaking members, each is considered to be excellent in their abilities to communicate in both English and Spanish. Each of those pastors was also considered to be the leader of their Hispanic group. Each of those pastors is also a white pastor serving interculturally, and while they did notice that that was an element in how they pastored their people, it ultimately was not a detriment to their ability to serve these people and created good opportunities for growth and service. Each of these pastors had also been at their congregation for a significant amount of time and they believed that this had positively affected their ministry and created more support for their decisions.

All three of these congregations did not exclusively use a traditional WELS structure for church leadership, and each congregation thought that their group would not have been served the best trying to fit that leadership model onto their group. All three congregations were, in certain respects, trying to move from a vertical, “top-down” ministry approach to a more horizontal ministry and create opportunities for their people to take ownership of the ministries at the church. Two of the three churches noted that the ability to find leaders within these intercultural ministries was easier said than done.

APPLICATION FOR FUTURE INTEGRATION OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN WELS CHURCHES

Sherwood Lingenfelter writes that he has come to the understanding that “I am completely dependent on God’s people around me, people who have diverse gifts and are capable of contributing, adding value, critiquing, and expanding the competencies and gifts that the Lord has given to me.”²²⁹ It is only by God’s grace that we have been able to have the opportunities given to us. As faithful ministers to the gospel, we are constantly prone to assessing and evaluating how we serve the people we are privileged to serve. The following are some potential applications for WELS churches considering intercultural ministry and some potential questions to ask.

Employing World Mission Aspects vs. North American Aspects

Any church seeking to start intercultural ministry has to employ certain world mission aspects in its efforts. However, a church should be hesitant to adopt every missionary method for doing church in world missions settings compared to their North American context. Hannah Rasmussen notes that,

“Most models of missions assume a monocultural person encounters another monocultural environment when they begin mission work and eventually becomes bicultural. People from square-head land lose a few corners adapting to round-head land (Elmer, 2002: 65-67), or missionaries and national colleagues create a new fusion and keep a foot in their original culture, forming a bridge for communicating the gospel (Hiebert, 1994: 147-158).”²³⁰

²²⁹ Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross Culturally*, 23.

²³⁰ Rasmussen, *The Role of Bicultural People*, 79.

What works in Waukesha, Wisconsin may not work in Racine, Wisconsin, even if the locations and/or ministries are perceived to be similar. The same can be said for what works at a church reaching Hispanics in Medellin, Colombia compared to Tucson, Arizona. Pastor Flunker does not believe that the indigeneity principles that have come through World Missions methods serve well for a North American church.²³¹ Research has also uncovered that immigrants who move into the United States, particularly on the Hispanic side, have a remarkable adaptability rate and integrate into society remarkably well. Each congregation will need to assess their cultural context to find the best solution for their group, but every principle need not be adopted.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Who exactly is the Hispanic person that we are trying to reach? Are they a first-generation immigrant or have they been in the United States for an extended period?
- 2) Do our outreach methods reflect those that have worked in South America and Europe or North America?

Recognize the Risk/Reward Dynamic

People fear what they do not know. For congregations and pastors coming from a primarily monocultural system in WELS, the idea of entering into a completely new way of thinking, cultural beliefs, and characteristics can be extremely daunting. Recognizing the risk that is serving God's people, in general, is a necessary step in forging a path forward into intercultural ministry and integrating the two groups. Having genuine conversations about the

²³¹ Such as self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. While that may be a wise approach on the mission field, there are certain characteristics and expectations that a North American church has to have.

changes that will take place is imperative to success. Rather than something that comes off as scary and something to be avoided, this can be something transformational to a church and its mission.

We can remind ourselves of what Pastor Kolander said: “We are in this reality where we are trying to undo what God used to divide the world. You’re working upstream and as long as sin exists, it is going to be impossible to perfectly do it. Don’t get frustrated with that. Why can’t we just have a perfectly united bilingual congregation? It’s really, really hard.”²³²

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Does our congregation understand what it means to undertake gospel ministry to and with another culture?
- 2) Have we had open and honest conversations about the changes that will inevitably take place?
- 3) Are we prepared and willing to accept many of these changes that come up?
- 4) Are there risks or potential pitfalls unique to our context that we can work through ahead of time?

Pastoral Leadership

It cannot be overstated how important the leadership of a pastor is in this type of ministry. Sherwood Lingenfelter shares that “leading cross-culturally is inspiring people who come from two or more cultural traditions to participate with you in building a community of trust and then

²³² Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 55:17–55:25.

to follow you and be empowered by you to achieve a compelling vision of faith.”²³³ To achieve this, a pastor will need to learn from the cultural differences that are present in the leader’s specific ministry setting. This can only happen when a pastor is willing to spend a significant amount of time with his members from all cultures. Pastors often serve as the bridge between cultural groups, as a unifying force for the groups, and as a common person to rally to when in need of direction. When a pastor invests in his community and stays for a significant period, that provides you ample opportunity to demonstrate that love covers a multitude of sins. Pastor Kolander commented:

“If you stick there with a person, you get to know them, you do something out of the ordinary for them that no other person should do, but especially as the pastor, you can buy a lot of grace with people who are of a different background from you. And then if you get members to do that kind of stuff and plug in with people intentionally and do things that are just totally above and beyond what any person should do, like, that’s how the Christian church blew up in the first three centuries. That’s, I think, how we do it now too.”²³⁴

The pastor will want to make sure that they are seen with the entire staff at a church and that members have consistent and frequent opportunities to be seen and introduced to each other.

The pastor as an effective vision caster and leader is someone who leads change and doesn’t simply introduce change. The pastor will want to consider the opportunities available to the church, the strategy to reach out and how to roll out the ministry past just being a nice idea. This may scare people. A pastor’s ability to lead includes confronting their own ethnocentrism and ego and motivating a church towards integration. The pastoral leadership aspect also

²³³ Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross Culturally*, 58.

²³⁴ Pastor Ryan Kolander Interview, 55:39–56:05.

involves recognizing when there are people who are being divisive and dealing with them more directly. Pastor Kolander remarked that, in a cross-cultural setting,

“There are so many ways that people can be divisive. Language, skin color, race, even mocking food that another person brings, referring to people as “those people,” as if we are two different sorts of humans who coexist under the same roof rather than being in church. It can be so damaging. It’s just amplified by worldly things that people divide over, which are race, language, and culture. We’re undoing that because we’re uniting around Christ.”²³⁵

Pastor Kolander saw this several times and wondered “How patient are you with somebody and try to work with them to restore them and be like, ‘Hey, just don’t talk this way. And when you do say something like that again, you’re out of here because you’re cutting off 30 people from our church and they know it.”²³⁶ Pastor Kolander also sees a difference between “it being a weakness thing and when they are being a malignant tumor.”²³⁷

It may be worth considering that a majority of WELS ministers are white. A temptation can be to say race and culture are unimportant. An encouragement would be to avoid “color blindness.” Elizabeth Conde-Frazier retorts that “we *do* see the color of those we meet; it usually is one of the first and most striking things we notice about a person. And when we do not notice a neighbor’s color, we have some response or reaction to that fact alone. There is simply no use denying these things.”²³⁸ This is something to keep in mind with how a pastor deals with someone of another race or culture, but also a reality to recognize within themselves. This can

²³⁵ Kolander Interview, 46:29–46:59.

²³⁶ Kolander Interview, 47:10–47:53.

²³⁷ Kolander Interview, 47:54–48:02. We want to be patient with people as we start the process of integrating intercultural communities. There may come a time, however, when a person’s words, actions and attitudes no longer resemble someone unintentionally causing harm and someone persistently continuing in trying to drive a wedge between people and groups.

²³⁸ Conde-Frazier, *A Many Colored Kingdom*, 146.

also be a consideration for a church as it determines whether they believe it is best served by one man with a foot in both cultures or a person of a certain cultural/racial identity.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Is our pastor (or pastors) bought into the vision of an intercultural church?
- 2) Does our pastor understand the role he will play in integrating these two communities?
- 3) Is a pastor willing to make compromises and sacrifices that are necessary for the sake of these congregations?
- 4) Can our pastor put aside his ethnocentrism and admit humility when he does not know something culturally?
- 5) Does our pastor have permission to speak candidly to those members who are not endorsing the vision and mission that the church is setting?

Leadership Considerations

Churches looking to integrate intercultural communities will want to consider the best structure for leadership for their group. As seen from the case studies, each church did not use a standard WELS leadership style for their intercultural groups. Churches would be wise to open opportunities for leadership within their intercultural communities and within the church they attend. Concerning Hispanic ministry, recent population projections see a Latino growth trend coming, and churches may find themselves with fewer Anglo members and more Latinos among their congregation.²³⁹

²³⁹ Eguizabal, Orbelina. "Spiritual Formation of Believers among Latino Protestant Churches in the United States." *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 15, no. 3 (2018): 202.

Creating opportunities for intercultural groups to take ownership of their church is worth considering. Establishing projects together will give church leaders a sense of participation and ownership in their church community. As with each successful organization, identifying and training leaders will become essential for an intercultural group. Valuing the role that bicultural young people play in the church should be encouraged and developed for future leadership within the church and inside of the intercultural community. A healthy recognition should be observed that each culture and congregant shows their leaders respect in different ways and to expect a specific pattern from a dynamic and evolving group of people may not be wise.

One underrated aspect of giving leadership to others is that that means the leader will not have control over what they are used to. This has been cited as a reason not to empower others, especially those who “lack qualification.”²⁴⁰ How many first-year Pastors are qualified to serve God’s flock? How many with 30 years of experience? Mentoring involves a time commitment and will require allowing failure and opportunities for success. Jesus did not hesitate to confront James and John about their ambitions to be first (Mk 10:35-45), but he also did not hesitate to release the ministry of the keys and gospel proclamation to the twelve after his Ascension into heaven. Still, appointing leaders “only for the sake of representation” may not communicate effective stewardship of gifts, talents, and abilities.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Could a person who does not understand our structure or style of leadership serve at this church?

²⁴⁰ Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross Culturally*, 125.

- 2) Do we have a system in place that identifies future leaders of our church (from both intercultural groups) and gives them opportunities to gain experience in their leadership roles?
- 3) Is our church capable and ready to allow someone else to take control of a ministry that has been done one way for a significant period?
- 4) Is our church capable of learning along with a new leader and developing their spiritual gifts and leadership skills?

Congregational Motivation and Expectations

Quoting immigration stats will not inspire a *Missio Dei* mindset.²⁴¹ Proper motivation is key for a congregation that desires to set its course toward intercultural ministry. The congregation as a whole must see this as their gospel mission. Development of a church culture that is eager and open to the possibility of integrating a new cultural group takes time and will come with its own set of challenges. This kind of church culture also will avoid treating the intercultural ministry as the “pet project” that they are doing and allow them the respect that they have as sinners and saints in the community of believers. Pastor Kolander ponders,

“How would you feel if you walked into a church of 1,000 people in Nigeria? You would feel out of place and very cognizant of that. Create a culture where they are welcomed, not smothered, but not one where they are completely ignored either. Be intentional about creating a comfortability for people to be around and training people to do that.”

Congregations will want to be conscious of this potential outcome. One way to ensure that a congregation doesn’t become the “othered” group is to ensure that the budget for resources for this group is growing as much as the English-speaking group, and if they need specific

²⁴¹ Wendland, *Don’t Lose the Message*, 3.

resources and funds for an event unique to their group, resource it. If God chooses to bless that ministry, they may have the opportunity to expand and outgrow their current facilities.

Each congregation in the case studies surveyed noted that proper expectations were needed to accomplish the goal of intercultural integration. A congregation will have to wrestle with whether it is worth the challenge of changing a congregation and its current DNA to include an intercultural ministry or whether it would be better to design a new mission model for cultural success. A congregation will also need to wrestle with whether one pastor who could potentially serve bilingually would be a better fit for the congregation (and if such a person even exists for the intercultural community they would like to reach) or calling a pastor to serve that people group specifically.

Appropriate expectations are essential for an intercultural ministry to survive and thrive and have to be agreed upon and articulated at the beginning of the integration and outreach process. A church thinking of this type of ministry will need to think of it as if it were a church planting situation that requires considerable time and resources to launch initially. Expecting a new intercultural church to be self-sufficient instantly or even within five years is optimistic thinking. An intercultural endeavor is a significant and time-dependent process. A crucial step for the congregation to take is figuring out what it will take to do this ministry to the best of their ability. Determining whether it is a minor shift in philosophy or a major shift, whether translation will need to be a part of their initial services or not, or if being one church in two languages is a big barrier for the current members involved. There will also need to be expectations for the newly integrated intercultural ministry as well.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Does our congregation have reasonable expectations for what this ministry can or should be?
- 2) Is our congregation capable of funding this ministry for an extended period?
- 3) Do we have a church culture in place that would bristle at change or embrace learning along with them?
- 4) Do we have the resources available to us to serve the type of intercultural ministry we have in mind, and do it well?
- 5) What is our motivation for starting this ministry – to appear diverse? Because of a changing neighborhood? Church survival? To seek the lost?
- 6) Is our church leadership of the same mindset for how this ministry will develop?

Appropriate Flexibility

Integration of intercultural communities into WELS churches will have to wrestle with how flexible they can be in certain areas of church life. Just as the pastor is concerned about finding areas for a new member coming from BIC classes to link into, a church will want to be actively pursuing areas to assimilate and integrate their intercultural group.²⁴² One area in particular is worship life. Western Christianity assumes that many of its customs are spiritual absolutes even though they are never mandated in Scripture.²⁴³ Our Lutheran heritage and

²⁴² “When a church is small, newcomers are easily identified and assimilated, but as the church grows, such assimilation becomes more difficult.” (Ott, Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 274). When a ministry launches and a church is small, interactions are face-to-face, decisions are more consensus, leadership is transparent and there is momentum and energy behind it. When a group isn’t that big, it is a lot easier to pick out the new guys and plug them in where they need to be.

²⁴³ Implementation and Integration in Durham, 39.

worship principles inform much of our worship life.²⁴⁴ An existing congregation that is trying to create a multicultural ministry, especially in situations with other languages, will need to be willing to change worship patterns appropriately. While worship patterns cannot be a barrier to the gospel, doctrinal content and purity are paramount, and Word and Sacrament provide the beating heart to worship.²⁴⁵ Cross-cultural ministry is contextual and replicating one church's system may not be the right move for another congregation. Pastor Moua encourages every church considering intercultural ministry to be open and flexible with their congregation's patterns of life and "eat the salmon head" when needed.²⁴⁶

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Is our congregation capable of worshipping in a way that is different than what we have done previously?
- 2) Where could we incorporate elements of their cultural group into our worship life?
- 3) Is our church comfortable with allowing certain cultural concepts to stand that may run against what we are used to?

²⁴⁴ Timothy Maschke sees four E's in Worship: Encounter, Education, Evangelism, and Expression (Maschke, Timothy H. *Gathered Guests: A Guide To Worship In The Lutheran Church*. 2nd ed. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014). Lutheran worship views these four principles in balance with each other. Christian Freedom also prevails. The common encouragement for beginning Seminarians is echoed here: What we teach, say, and do has a profound impact on people. We make our decisions informed by the Word of God out of love for the neighbor.

²⁴⁵ Paul Wendland, "Don't Lose the Message", 5.

²⁴⁶ Pastor Moua Interview. "Eat the salmon head" would mean to be willing to try new things, even if they go outside of your comfortability and experiences. Eating the salmon head is completely normal for Pastor Moua, but it may not be for another person. "We catch a lot of salmon up here, and I tell them that a filet is like second or third choice for me. I prefer the head. That's just me, but for someone to say 'let me take a bite,' that's a good idea of doing cross-cultural work."

- 4) Can our church develop something that is uniquely ours compared to copying someone else's template of ministry?

Language Considerations

Effective intercultural ministry is not completely dependent on the language proficiency of the pastor or congregation, but it is not something that can be pushed off and ignored.

Commenting on Hispanic ministry, Pastor Kolander observes this:

“You can get by with college-level Spanish or whatever, and that’s good. As you grow over time, be intentional about just practicing pronunciation, and listening to how people say things and the little phrases they use. Build up the proficiency to move their heart. They aren’t focused on the language; they are focused on the gospel. Don’t be intimidated or scared because “I’m not a Spanish guy.”

Effective cross-cultural communication involves much more than language alone, but a difference in language unquestionably increases the gap of misunderstanding between cultures and can create social distances.²⁴⁷ An effort to learn the language of the intercultural community you are serving may be possible or not depending on the gifts of the pastor leading the church or the bilingual abilities of the intercultural community present.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) Does our congregation have the language capabilities to serve this intercultural group of people? If not, does this intercultural group have the ability to communicate with us?
- 2) Are we willing to invest in our pastor or church leader’s education in the language of an intercultural group?

²⁴⁷ Gabayehu, Yaffet. “An Assessment of Cultural Differences Among Pastors for Effective Pastoral Leadership.” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2021. 20.

- 3) Is there another person in our congregation who would have language gifts in the intercultural community we are trying to reach that we could use in our integration process?

Within Hispanic Ministries

The Hispanic population is the largest demographic that WELS serves.²⁴⁸ Given that these case studies are taken from churches with Hispanic ministries, some applications and takeaways have already been commented upon. Some other suggestions arise: there is a misconception that Spanish ministry needs to be completely done in Spanish and that Hispanics prefer this.²⁴⁹ This likely stems from the misconception that every Hispanic that we try and reach is an “immigrant” brand new to America.²⁵⁰ Daniel Rodriguez reports that the “success of ‘multi-lingual’ and ‘multi-generational’ churches reveals that a commitment to serve, evangelize, and disciple U.S.-born Latinos obliges church leaders to embrace more contextually appropriate

²⁴⁸ Henrich, “Race and the Lutheran Pastor,” 43.

²⁴⁹ Rodriguez, *Transcultural Latino Evangelism*, 676–677.

²⁵⁰ “Ironically, Latino congregations, in providing these necessary comfort zones to immigrant Latinos looking for the familiar or attempting to worship with other Latinos of their own language, culture, or nationality, do not normally consider the native-born Latinos as targets for evangelism. For one, there is a vast world of difference between the first-generation immigrant Latinos and the later generations, particularly the third and fourth generations, not only in language, but also in sociocultural dynamics, acculturation levels, and worldview and perception. Later-generational Latinos, LGLs as this article will refer to them, include the second, third, fourth-plus generations of Latinos born and acculturated into the US milieu who are predisposed to bilingualism, or are English dominant. Second, the reality of the Latino world in the US is that it is complex, diverse, multicultural, multilingual, multigenerational, and multiracial, which makes defining what a Latino is in these United States a challenge. Nevertheless, there are a few emerging Latino congregations.” (Rodriguez, *Transcultural Latino Evangelism*, 677).

ministry models for English-dominant Latinos, who often feel out of place or even unwelcome in churches that are exclusively Spanish-speaking.”²⁵¹ Rodriguez also notes that,

“Equally surprising to many outside observers is the fact that traditionally White, English-dominant churches have also failed to attract the growing number of U.S.-born Hispanics. Though they usually prefer to speak English and have an affinity for things “American,” many second-and-later generation Hispanics nonetheless “perceive” that they are treated as second-class citizens in the country of their birth and are often treated as “outsiders” in the churches of the dominant group.”²⁵²

Often, many Latinos find themselves “living within the hybrid.”²⁵³ In thriving Hispanic congregations, though, ethnicity was not the primary identity through which people connected. They overwhelmingly connected through their Christian beliefs, not their ethnic identity.²⁵⁴

An instructive example comes from the Episcopal Church. Albert Rodriguez, writing about transcultural Latino evangelism, notes that Spanish-speaking Latino ministry will remain the “bread and butter” ministry in the Episcopal Church for the foreseeable future.²⁵⁵ This may be because, in Rodriguez’s view, Latino ministry within the Episcopal Church, “was not designed, nor was it ever envisioned, to realistically reach out to US-born, acculturated Latinos/as who are more at home speaking English, or speaking a polyglot of Spanish and English that switches back and forth in a microsecond, or speaking Spanglish.”²⁵⁶ Latinos also

²⁵¹ Rodriguez, “Where Language Is No Barrier”, 432.

²⁵² Rodriguez, “Where Language Is No Barrier”, 437.

²⁵³ Rodríguez, *Transcultural Latino Evangelism*, 673.

²⁵⁴ Grusendorf, “Thriving Hispanic Congregations”, 43.

²⁵⁵ Rodriguez, *Transcultural Latino Evangelism*, 677.

²⁵⁶ Rodriguez, *Transcultural Latino Evangelism*, 679.

know very little about the Episcopal Church, which could inform us about the work we have to do to introduce Lutheranism to this part of the world.

ESL classes or EIO classes are often the primary outreach method used to interact with Latinos.²⁵⁷ An appropriate expectation should be made on these classes, upon the fruits of this ministry and the education provided to students. Pastor Chris Ewings remembers hearing about a church on the south side of Milwaukee that was providing ESL classes to teach Hispanics English so that they could come to church in English. He remembers feeling awkward trying to teach people to worship in a language that wasn't the language of the heart and also felt that the "bait and switch" feel of inviting someone to learn English and, at the end of the session, invite them to pray and have a Bible study and shoehorn them into something.²⁵⁸ Paul Wendland cautions that we can't look to form this relationship as "some kind of quid pro quo."²⁵⁹ These kinds of tactics are used within the Church of Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses to force membership into the church and our implicit messaging could be the same.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) What is our congregation's perception of the Hispanic members in our area?
- 2) Do all our outreach events have to have a Spanish-speaking element, or are we more effective in trying to serve that group in English?
- 3) Are the differences we are running up against cultural or language-based?
- 4) Do our goals in starting an ESL or EIO opportunity align with the mission of the church?

²⁵⁷ And were endorsed by Pastor Tim Flunker earlier in this thesis on page 32.

²⁵⁸ Pastor Chris Ewings, 14:44-15:05.

²⁵⁹ Wendland, Don't Lose the Message, 13.

Do We Change the Current Congregation’s Existing DNA or Start a New Mission Designed for Cultural Success?

Before changing a congregation, those who take congregational culture seriously must understand their church’s particular context and story. This will include assessing the history of their church and what role that plays to the current members and their identity. For a church considering going on a path that the church has never traversed before, this will need considerable thought. In a doctrinally rich and functional machine like a WELS church, this is not always the easiest change to introduce and consider. The tight-knit nature of a monoculturally dominant congregation has appeal, particularly to those that share the same background and as the dominant group.²⁶⁰

New Testament Christians identified with the group because they saw that they believed the same thing that they did. Christian activity and faith identification bridge many, many gaps. It is a fact that interest in and presence of racial and ethnic diversity in congregations systematically rises in more densely populated, urban areas.²⁶¹ Externally, changing neighborhoods often push congregations to reconsider their identity.²⁶² It is hard to say to a church ‘We should be multicultural’ when the community around it isn’t. Every church will have to weigh these pitfalls and blessings according to their church’s context and the congregational

²⁶⁰ Calvillo, *Diverging Latinidades in Latinx Churches*, 425. This article applies this logic towards Hispanics and their potential preference towards other Hispanic-dominant ministries. I believe that this statement has strong application within WELS churches as well.

²⁶¹ Kevin D. Dougherty and Kimberly R. Huyser, “Racially Diverse Congregations: Organizational Identity and the Accommodation of Differences,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (2008): 24.

²⁶² Dougherty and Huyser, “Racially Diverse Congregations”, 29.

aptitude towards intercultural integration and how much teaching and education it will take to embark on this journey. No matter the situation, one never leaves an environment untouched. There is always an impact made and an adjustment required for you to be there or for someone to enter.

Some questions to ask might be:

- 1) What steps do we need to take to position ourselves to change this congregation's DNA?
Is it possible to change the congregation's DNA?
- 2) How long will that process take?
- 3) Is this effort something that reflects our neighborhood and desire to reach the lost, or is it something that we would prefer to be a part of our ministry?
- 4) Is our congregation prepared for the potential risks that accompany changing the status quo at our church?
- 5) What happens if it fails?

WEAKNESSES TO THIS THESIS

The suggestions made in this thesis are based on the research and interview process conducted in the allotted time for a thesis of this length. Other areas of research were not fully able to be explored. Only three churches were studied for this thesis. While an interview with the pastoral leadership of each congregation was conducted, an attempt was made to reach out to members of the congregation, but not every congregation was able to be reached for comment during the data collection phase. To avoid unbalanced research for one church over another, none of those interviews and conclusions were included. The three churches interviewed also involved ministry in English and Spanish, primarily. Other churches in WELS do Spanish-speaking ministry well and have ministries that cross other cultures.²⁶³ Exploration into those churches would provide a deeper level of understanding of the intricacies of integrating intercultural communities into WELS churches.

Cultural context is constantly changing, not just in specific ministries, but throughout the world as well. The intercultural DNA of the world is in flux and requires a constant evaluation of ourselves and the world we live in. What has been reported in this thesis could change within five years. Just as you would in any other ministry at the church, you naturally will want to constantly evaluate how the ministry is operating and where it currently is, zooming in and out

²⁶³ Churches such as Divine Savior in Doral, Florida or Christ the Lord in Houston, Texas could serve as other examples of intercultural ministries to learn from. Steve Mueller, Pastor at Divine Savior Lutheran Church at the writing of this thesis, has been cited throughout this thesis and has considerable experience especially working with Hispanics. St. Peter Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin has incorporated bilingual worship as a mainstay for their Spanish ministry along with an English service that incorporates Karen gospel readings.

constantly to understand the realities of the people living within your church and how your church responds to it. It is always evolving!

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to explore how WELS churches have integrated intercultural communities into their churches. This thesis intended to create a document that any church interested in and exploring the possibility of starting an intercultural community could learn from the experience of others and observe the potential pitfalls and struggles of three congregations well into the process of integrating and ministering to intercultural communities. This thesis is a benefit of learning about the potential unique challenges to serving intercultural communities within the Wisconsin Synod. I entered with presuppositions that a church would hope to involve intercultural leaders in their leadership teams and have a church that is in perfect harmony with one another. Based on the research conducted and Case Studies done, a conclusion that can be made is that WELS churches have integrated intercultural communities imperfectly. To find a church that is completely bilingual and merged completely may not be possible across any denomination. To find churches that have shared the gospel through cultures and created communities of believers that gather around the Word and Sacrament each Sunday can be answered enthusiastically. God has graciously raised up men and women who see the world before them as sinners who need to hear about the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and have undertaken the blessings and challenges of serving cultures that differ from theirs. My prayer is that a reader reaching this point will feel encouraged, equipped, and impelled towards the noble task of herding God's flock no matter the demographic lines.

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APPENDIX A. PASTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These are the standard questions used in the interview process with Pastor Biedenbender, Ewings, Kolander, and Moua.

1. Tell me the story of _____
2. How did you discover that serving an intercultural community was a need?
3. Did you do a demographic study of the area before you decided to pursue this ministry opportunity?
4. Who was the main driver in starting these discussions towards a new ministry opportunity? Was it a person, a community need, or something else?
5. Tell me about how the church bought into this mission.
6. How much of a role did a Mission Counselor play in helping this idea go from infancy to fruition?
7. Tell me about the process your church took to start integrating these intercultural communities.
8. Talk about the role changes you made as a Pastor while integrating these communities, whether as a leader, shepherd, etc.

9. How did you navigate the language/cultural barriers of mixing two intercultural groups?
 - a. Did you integrate intercultural leaders into your church's leadership committees (ex. Elders, council, etc.)?

10. Do you see areas where things could have been done better?

11. Where do you see current weaknesses in how we integrate communities into our congregations? Are there strengths?

12. What do you think someone like me should understand about your experiences with integrating an intercultural community into your church?

APPENDIX B. MISSION COUNSELOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These are the standard interview questions used in the interview with Pastor Tim Flunker.

1. How do you determine whether a church has the possibility of starting a Spanish ministry? *Or* do you push those prospects to TELL, Academia Cristo, One LA, etc.?
2. How do you, as a Mission Counselor, assist a church that decides that they would like to start a Spanish ministry?
3. How do you, as Mission Counselor, counsel a Spanish group from their infancy in the church into being integrated fully?
4. Do you suggest that a church try and keep their church as one church, two languages, or two distinct congregations that come together occasionally?
5. How have you, as Mission Counselor, changed (if at all) how you've counseled Spanish ministries?
6. How do you, as Mission Counselor, advise Pastors in these inter-cultural settings?
7. How important of a role does the Pastor play in integrating these communities? Church Leadership? General Laity?
8. Do you advise churches to integrate intercultural leaders into Church Leadership initially, or at all?

9. Where do you see current weaknesses in how we integrate Hispanic communities into our congregation? Strengths?