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“THE COLORED PROBLEM:” MILWAUKEE’S WHITE PROTESTANT
CHURCHES RESPOND TO THE SECOND GREAT MIGRATION

by

Peter Borg

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

“THE COLORED PROBLEM:” MILWAUKEE’S WHITE PROTESTANT CHURCHES RESPOND TO THE SECOND GREAT MIGRATION

Peter Borg

Marquette University, 2020

In 1963 Dr. King observed that America was most segregated on Sunday mornings when its churches were filled with worshippers. My dissertation investigates the response of Milwaukee’s white urban Protestant churches to the Second Great Migration, which led to tremendous growth in the city’s African American population. The difficulty caused by many white members living in the suburbs while still attending church in racially transitioning city neighborhoods was compounded in some cases by the negative influence exerted by denominational history and polity. While those realities were often far more significant than theology in determining how individual congregations reacted to the first instances of racial diversity in their midst, churches that viewed demographic transition solely as a spiritual opportunity were the ones able to successfully become integrated congregations.

My project is a case study of three churches; each represents one of three responses by white Protestant congregations in the city. Some relocated to the suburbs. Others primarily studied the problem academically and consequently developed and hosted programs to meet tangible physical needs but did not see African Americans as worthy equals in church membership. These congregations eventually closed. A few churches, however, motivated by their belief that all humans were in need of the salvation only Jesus could provide, sought to build relationships with their new neighbors. Those churches became racially integrated and remain so today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	“THE COLORED PROBLEM”.....	29
III.	THE COMPROMISE PROBLEM.....	101
IV.	AN INTEGRATED SOLUTION.....	191
V.	CONCLUSION.....	251
VI.	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	263

INTRODUCTION

I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America. I definitely think the Christian church should be integrated, and any church that stands against integration and that has a segregated body is standing against the spirit and the teachings of Jesus Christ, and it fails to be a true witness.

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther
King, Jr.

On April 17, 1960 the Dr. King was a guest on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television program *Meet the Press*. It was the first of his five appearances on the show. He was interviewed by four distinguished journalists that episode: Frank Van Der Linden of the *Nashville Banner*, May Craig from the *Portland (Maine) Press Herald*, Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times*, and Lawrence E. Spivak, a “regular member” of the show’s panel. Van Der Linden served as a White House correspondent for major newspapers, as had Craig for the Gannett newspaper syndicate. Lewis was a Pulitzer Prize winner who typically covered the Supreme Court and Spivak started the radio version of *Meet the Press* in 1945 and joined the television broadcast when it began two years later. As would be expected from a group of battle-tested reporters, the four pulled no punches when interviewing King. Their exchanges covered the appropriateness of sit-in strikes, the responsibility of the federal government to protect all citizens, the morality of breaking laws, and the propriety of intermarriage. King’s quote above was in response to the following question from Mr. Van Der Linden: “Well sir, you said integration is the law of the land, and it’s morally right, whereas segregation is morally wrong, and the president should do something about it. Do you mean the president should issue an order that the schools and churches and the stores

should all be integrated?” Though likely asked without much consideration of the issue at the local level, it was a query that resonated with one journalist in Milwaukee.¹

In February 1963 James M. Johnston, religion editor for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, began a Lenten series titled “Churches in Transition.” The front-page advertisement for the series began with a simple question, “Are Milwaukee churches deserting the inner cities for residential suburban areas?” Regarding the congregations about which he was planning to write, Johnston noted that many had undertaken property improvements in order to best “bolster the spiritual, moral and mental health of those living in the inner city.” At the outset, Johnston intended to write about no less than 20 congregations, with the first article scheduled to be published on February 27, Ash Wednesday. The project must have been viewed a success as Johnston ended up telling the stories of 34 churches and extending the series end date from August 13 all the way to October 19. The articles provide valuable insight into the challenges facing churches who chose to stay – not all had or would – as well as their beliefs for why doing so was the correct response to the city’s rapidly changing neighborhoods.²

The churches included in the series were anything but uniform. They included five Catholic churches and congregations from eight different Protestant denominations: Presbyterian, Episcopal, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical and United Brethren, Church of Christ, and three Lutheran Synods – the Wisconsin, the Missouri,

¹ *Meet the Press* on NBC; Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 3: Under God, Indivisible, 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 387. Although popularized by King, the notion that Americans were most separate from one another when attending Sunday morning services at one of the nation’s churches was originally made by another astute observer of life in the United States, Liston Pope, who served as the Dean of Yale Divinity School from 1949 to 1962; On Pope’s career see C. Sylvester Greene, “Liston Pope,” *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, Volume 5*, ed. William S. Powell, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp 124-5.

² James M. Johnston, “Churches in Core,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 26, 1963, 1.

and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Furthermore, though all were located in areas of the city Johnston rightly identified as undergoing change, the types of change and the challenges brought by it were not the same. Rather, while not identified by Johnston as an organizing principle, the churches were from four different areas in the city. Eight churches were in Downtown Milwaukee, having been built early enough in the nineteenth century when many people still lived in single-family homes in that section of the city. Those eight congregations now faced the reality that those houses and their residents had been replaced by multistory buildings filled with commercial and business tenants. Six congregations were on the “lower Eastside,” a formerly high-end residential area once filled with mansions. Located to the east and north of downtown, the area’s residential dwellings now included many apartment buildings with younger and less wealthy residents than had lived in the area in previous generations. Two southside congregations were having to navigate a new language barrier as the neighborhood just south of downtown was becoming home to the Milwaukee’s Spanish-speaking population. Fully one half of the churches in Johnston’s series were located in what was then known as “the inner core” and all faced the same challenge. Namely, how to respond as the neighborhoods around their churches, which had previously only included white people, were now home to a growing contingent of black residents. Some of the areas had already “turned over” into majority African American, while with the others it seemed only a matter of time until the racial transition occurred. With the slight modification of only considering Protestant congregations, this query became the question that drove the research for this project.³

³ James M. Johnston, “Churches in Core,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 26, 1963 – October 19, 1963.

The inner core Protestant congregations from Johnston's series shared a number of characteristics and challenges. Over the previous ten years membership at many of the churches had decreased. Johnston noted, and historians have suggested, that this was almost always the result of young white families moving out of the neighborhood as black residents moved in. Friedens United Church of Christ, 1234 W. Juneau Avenue, had lost thirty percent of its members since 1953, while 500 people stopped attending Memorial Lutheran, cutting membership in half for the congregation which met at 2727 N. 4th Street. The Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, 3509 N. 15th Street, had experienced a "significant drop" in membership since 1957. Declining membership at some congregations led to church mergers. Central Methodist Church at 639 N. 25th Street was comprised of "four small congregations in the inner city trying to do together what they could not do alone." Most of the articles also contained statistics regarding the percentage of the members who lived at some distance from the church. For instance, less than twenty percent of the members at Grand Avenue Congregational Church lived within two miles of 2133 W. Wisconsin Ave. Likewise, two-thirds of Cross Lutheran's members lived over a mile away from 1821 N. 16th Street. Johnston's inclusion of these figures recognized that in previous generations these congregations drew their membership from their neighborhood. The fact that the many members of these churches no longer lived nearby caused many of the congregations in the series to consider following their members to the suburbs⁴

⁴ *Ibid.* Cemented into an exterior wall at Central Methodist's building are the cornerstones from Methodist congregations that initially tried to coordinate with one another. When each of those congregations eventually shut down and the buildings were sold, the denomination removed the cornerstone denoting the year each building was built and transitioned it into the building of its successor. Today the cornerstones at Central United Methodist Church appear like headstones in a graveyard of churches.

As white residents and church members fled racially transitioning neighborhoods in Milwaukee, their churches wrestled with whether or not to stay where they had been for generations or, alternatively, sell their building and relocate closer to their members' new homes. The fact that some of those members continued to drive in from the suburbs on Sunday mornings, thereby helping to sustain the church budget, made gave them an actual choice even if it also complicated the decision-making process. Rev. Harvey W. Wanegrin noted that "we could not exist without the loyalty of our members who pass up many churches closer to their homes as they come to Bethlehem Church on Sunday mornings." When questioned about the decision to commute back into the city for weekly worship services, many cited deep family ties to these congregations. One man at Resurrection Lutheran noted that his wife had been baptized and confirmed at their church. Another member there shared that his wife's parents belonged to the congregation and that he and his wife had been members for a long time. Yet despite multiple generations of individual families maintaining membership at their "family church," many of the churches naturally thought about leaving. St. Andrew's Episcopal at 2038 N. 33rd Street considered leaving in 1951. Increased giving by the remaining members allowed them to raise enough to maintain the building and stay in the neighborhood. Resurrection Lutheran debated moving in 1958, but instead followed the pastor's desire to keep the parsonage in the neighborhood and spent \$70,000 on renovations to it and the church building. Cross Lutheran's investigation was highly practical. A 1957 congregational survey revealed that one third of members wanted to relocate, a third desired to stay, and a third had no opinion. Accordingly, the church held "trial" Sunday services for three and a half months at the Greater Milwaukee Lutheran

High School at N. 97th and West Grantosa Boulevard, six and a half miles northwest of their current location. Attendance declined so significantly at those offsite services that the proposed relocation to that neighborhood was “scuttled.” In 1961 and 1962 some members at Friedens UCC urged the pastor to move the church. He and influential lay leaders convinced most of the congregation “not to desert the inner city and its problems.”⁵

The decision to stay naturally led these congregations to consider how to construct their ministry programs to meet new neighbors as well determine how to meet these neighbors’ needs. Epiphany Lutheran, 2600 N. 2nd Street, and Redeemer Lutheran, 1905 W. Wisconsin Avenue, both conducted neighborhood canvasses, where members went door-to-door in the area to meet residents and invite them to visit if they were not affiliated with another church. The Lutheran Church of the Incarnation distributed leaflets to all nearby households. Not only did they proclaim Incarnation to be a neighborhood church that made no distinction regarding economic status or race, but they apologized for “slowness in the past to go out of our way to show an eagerness to welcome newcomers to the neighborhood.” Many churches sought to engage the youth in the neighborhoods around their church with programs such as summer vacation Bible school, scout troops, and youth groups. Others offered health programs or professional childcare services. St. Andrew’s Episcopal gave space in its building to the Milwaukee Health Department for a baby clinic. Grand Avenue Congregational Church had a licensed day nursery. Multiple congregations joined Cooperation Westside, a conglomerate of churches and other organizations whose mission was to stop neighborhood blight by

⁵ *Ibid.*

encouraging and facilitating property upkeep as well as working to “discourage ‘panic home selling’ which sometimes struck when a neighborhood when Negroes move in.” Slowly, all these efforts began to yield results.

Every story in the series related how each of the churches in the inner core was progressing toward their goal of welcoming African Americans into their congregations. Success varied. Some churches had managed to integrate their youth programs, while others had black adults regularly attending, but none who had become members. Others, however, not only had African American members, but also had interracial leadership. Whatever the progress, each church began at the same place – educating their white members. In response to some of Memorial Lutheran’s members being vocally against integration, the pastor, Rev. John P. Dexter, led a period of “intense Bible study.” He noted that they “tried to follow Scriptural mandates in everything we did.” At Bethlehem Lutheran pastor Wanegrin led small group discussions about integration prior to the arrival of non-whites in the area. Tellingly, as congregations consistently made it known to their new neighbors that they were welcome, other changes occurred in addition to some visiting or joining the congregation. Cross Lutheran’s pastor, Helmut H. Schauland, offered the following. “Until we actively identified ourselves with people of the neighborhood, we had trouble with vandalism – broken windows, etc. We have very little of that now.” Other articles note that pastors of these inner core Protestant churches were keen observers of their church’s new neighbors.⁶

Contrary to ubiquitous fears that the widespread arrival of black residents to a neighborhood would inevitably lead to property blight and potential crime, pastors at the

⁶ *Ibid.*

churches in the series told a different story. Memorial Lutheran's Dexter offered a more accurate assessment than many whites may have assumed at the time. "The fact that the Negroes live in this blighted area is not their fault. The houses were old and declining in value before the Negroes moved in." Other pastors provide similar insight. The Rev. Wesley H. Gallup, pastor at Epiphany Lutheran, noted that the "Negroes" attending Epiphany appear to be "substantial citizens" and that the area around the church is a "fine Negro neighborhood." Lutheran Church of the Incarnation's pastor, the Rev. Charles W. Luhn, agreed. "I personally think the Negroes who have moved in have improved their property. They spend money on their houses." That Johnston recognized the need to provide his white readers insight into Milwaukee's black residents was natural given that only two decades earlier the city's black population could best be described as numerically very small and largely out-of-sight to the city's white residents.⁷

According to the 1940 United States census, Milwaukee was the thirteenth largest city in the country, with a population of 587,472. It was, however, home to less black residents than all but three of the country's twenty-five largest cities. The 9,295 non-white citizens, of which African Americans comprised 95%, accounted for only 1.6% of the city's population. Although small, the city's black contingent had been steadily growing over the previous few decades. It doubled between 1910 and 1920, tripled the following decade, and in the 1930s grew by almost another twenty percent. But despite such an increase, this tiny sliver of the population was so small that it was effectively prevented from having any political power or economic clout. These challenges were exacerbated by the fact that blacks were residentially corralled. They constituted a

⁷ *Ibid.*

majority in only three of Milwaukee's 123 census tracts in 1940 and registered double-digits in percentage of residents in only two more. All five of these tracts were adjacent to one another in an area slightly northwest of downtown Milwaukee. Although none of the congregations featured in Johnston's "Churches in Transition" series were located in that area, two of the churches in this study were in a census tract adjacent to it.⁸

The growth in Milwaukee's black population from 1910 through 1940 was indicative of a trend that was occurring throughout the country. A series of economic events during World War I led to the beginning of a massive internal migration of black southerners to industrial centers of the Northeast and Midwest. Agriculture, the main vocational option available to African Americans in the South, was devastated in 1915 and 1916 by a boll weevil epidemic that severely damaged the region's cotton crops and sent daily wages spiraling to less than 75 cents. Furthermore, widespread flooding during the summer of 1915 left many African Americans in the South homeless. These twin calamities coincided with the arrival of labor agents from northern factories. A decline in foreign immigration led to a shortage of workers and many rightly viewed black southerners as a willing and able, but untapped, labor pool. The promise of economic opportunity in the North was well received by people who had watched their rights steadily diminish from a highpoint of serving in elective offices throughout local, state, and national government during Reconstruction, to disfranchisement, routine injustice in

⁸ United States Census, Sixteenth, 1940; Bayrd M. Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948), 471. As for the lack of black political power, it was not until 1956 that a black person was elected to the Milwaukee Common Council. Vel Phillips actually accomplished two firsts, as she was also the first woman on the Common Council, a fact that earned her the derisive title of "Madam Alderman."

courtrooms, the rise of Jim Crow segregation, and the ever-present threat of the lynch-mob.⁹

The unprecedented size of this exodus, combined with the resulting social and cultural changes it caused, have led historians to name it the Great Migration. Estimates vary as to how many African Americans left the states of the former Confederacy from 1915 to 1920, with approximations ranging from 330,000 to nearly one million. Regardless of the exact numbers, the migrants changed the shape of northern cities by drastically increasing the number of black residents in them. New York City added over sixty thousand black residents, Philadelphia fifty thousand, and St. Louis became home to nearly thirty thousand new black inhabitants. But in terms of the percentage growth of black residents, changes in those three cities paled in comparison to what occurred elsewhere. Chicago's black population grew by 148%, Cleveland's by 308%, and in Detroit the arrival of new black residents resulted in 611% increase in that population's proportion of the city's citizens. Only the Great Depression slowed the movement of African Americans from the South to industrial cities in the North, and increasingly, the West. The slowdown was temporary, though, as the nation's entrance into World War II once again caused the country's factories to hum. As white men left those factories in large numbers to serve in the military, African Americans from the South once again moved north to find work. The result is known as the Second Great Migration.¹⁰

While the First Great Migration did not lead to substantial numerical growth in Milwaukee's African American population when compared to other northern industrial

⁹ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 340-345,

¹⁰ *Ibid*; United States Department of Commerce.

cities, the Second Great Migration helped the city to “catch up,” especially in terms of the percentage of black residents as part of the city’s total population. By 1950, the 21,772 black residents accounted for 3.4 percent of the Milwaukee’s population and were a 247% increase over the number of African American citizens living in the city in 1940. The increase continued throughout the 1950s. The 1960 census revealed that the 62,458 African Americans who in Milwaukee made up 8.4 percent of the city’s residents. In 1970 that number increased to 105,088, which was 14.7 percent of the city’s population. While this continual growth in the decades comprising the Second Great Migration led to many changes in the city, the geographical expansion of the area where African Americans had historically been forced to live is perhaps the most consequential. Whether moving east, north, or west, they arrived on blocks and in neighborhoods that had never before been home to a non-white person. Protestant churches, which had for generations served as places of worship and friendship for the white people living in the area surrounding each church, were forced to address a previously unimaginable reality, the presence of black neighbors potentially showing up at Sunday morning services.¹¹

There are both practical and professional justifications for the decision to limit the scope of this project to Protestant congregations during the years 1940-1980. Historians widely agree that the Second Great Migration occurred between 1940 and 1970. This study concludes ten years later because 1980 was a significant year in the histories of two of the churches highlighted in it. The comparatively late growth of the African American population in Milwaukee when compared to other northern industrial cities benefits the study. The widespread adoption of longer mortgage terms, a process that began with 15-

¹¹ United States Census, Seventeenth, 1950; United States Census, Eighteenth, 1960; United States Census, Nineteenth, 1970.

year mortgages during the New Deal and eventually doubled to 30 years by the mid 1950s, gave white Americans of modest financial means more residential mobility than they had ever had. Accordingly, many Protestant church members in Milwaukee could choose to respond to the initial presence of African Americans in their neighborhood by purchasing a home in an all-white area, typically at least a few miles from the church. This option was not nearly as prevalent during the years of the First Great Migration, 1910-1930. Protestant churches themselves are extraordinarily valuable subjects for historical study because each one owned the building in which they operated and worshipped. A congregational vote was the mechanism by which all decisions were made. Therefore, Protestant churches that had previously only had white members in a neighborhood that had also only been home to white residents had full autonomy to react to the arrival of African Americans without influence or coercion from anyone else. If they decided to leave, they did not need anyone's approval. Even for those congregations that were part of denominations with official governing bodies – Lutheran or Presbyterian synods, Methodist jurisdictions, to name a few – those organizations did not have the authority to compel an individual congregation to stay. If a congregation decided to stay and either “weather the storm” by still focusing their programs on white members no longer living nearby or additionally to attempt to welcome black Christians into their fellowship, pastoral and lay leadership of each church could advise each congregation, but the voting members of the congregation had full autonomy to make that decision and all others that followed. The absolute authority vested in individual Protestant congregations to determine their own futures was a stark contrast to the top-down

authority of the Catholic archdiocese, which owned every Catholic church and alone had the power to close an individual congregation.¹²

* * *

Earlier in the twentieth century American Protestant churches utilized their autonomy to wrestle with how to approach and resolve the social and economic ills brought about by industrialization and urbanization. In 1873 Washington Gladden attempted to use his pastorate in Springfield, Massachusetts to bring together the city's factory owners, who happened to be members of his church, with the region's unemployed workingmen to assist them in finding jobs. Seemingly little in this effort to help the unemployed could have been considered troubling in a religious sense. In fact, many other churches also attempted to help the downtrodden. The cumulative effect of similar responses by other churches eventually came to be known as the Social Gospel. It was described by Shailer Matthews, one of its most ardent devotees, as "the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions...as well as to individuals." Nothing in that description would seem to naturally lead to theological rifts within and between churches and denominations. However, that was the end result. The anti-modernist movement, as known as fundamentalism, began as opposition to the doctrinal liberalism eventually embraced by many Social Gospel practitioners. The resulting theological wrangling came

¹² Philip Wogman, "Focus on the Central Jurisdiction," *The Christian Century*, 80, no. 43, October 23, 1963. Wogman notes that some have suggested that Protestantism will be "one of the final bastions of racial segregation in America." This is not because Protestants are especially prejudiced, but rather due to the "high degree of democracy and intimate fellowship within their local churches."

to dominate American Protestantism from that time through the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. Its ripples were evident throughout the century.¹³

The Social Gospel was not an official movement with elected officers and agreed upon objectives, but rather a series of individuals and churches working in a variety of contexts through both religious and secular entities. Although it eventually came to be considered modernist, in its heyday it couldn't simply be labeled as liberal because not all liberals were involved nor were all the active participants liberal. Due to their willingness to collaborate with anyone engaged in pressing reform efforts, the activities promoted by leaders of the Social Gospel resulted in the breaking down of the walls that had previously kept secular and sacred spheres apart. Historians of the movement stress that such efforts were not just a reaction to the unique challenges faced by laborers and racial minorities in the nation's urban industrial centers. Rather, Ronald C. White, Jr. and Ralph E. Luker assert that it was the antebellum tradition of Protestant church involvement in voluntary societies that provided the impetus for the Social Gospel. Luker believes that the Social Gospel, whose primary antecedent in his opinion was the home missions movement, was really meant to be a declaration of religious tenets and ideals that could help hold society together. White points to the "influence of abolitionist and anti-slavery ideas and strategies" as having influenced many proponents of the Social Gospel.¹⁴

Walter Rauschenbusch, pastor of the Second German Baptist Church in New York City's Hell's Kitchen neighborhood from 1885-1896, is widely regarded as the

¹³ Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990.) xvii – xiv; Harvie M. Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church: A Historical Overview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1994) 92.

¹⁴ White, *Liberty*, xvii – xiv; Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 1-6.

most important figure of the Social Gospel. His observation that “Hell’s Kitchen is not a safe place for saved souls” highlights the separation he recognized between people and the environments in which they were forced to live. Rauschenbusch and other proponents of the Social Gospel were quick to point out, for example, that poverty was the real problem, not those trapped by it. They believed that the solution to any “social crisis” was having “faith enough to believe that all human life can be filled with divine purpose.” But in attempting to apply Christianity to the systems that often allowed humans to become collateral damage, Rauschenbusch and many other Social Gospel adherents embraced a watered-down theological trend known as New Theology in part because they desired that their beliefs be embraced by intelligent moderns at the nation’s colleges and universities. New Theology, which promoted a German strain of Biblical criticism that analyzed the Bible as a historical text rather than the divinely inspired word of God, first began to infiltrate American Protestant seminaries following the Civil War. It didn’t take long before its ideas were influencing the sermons preached from Protestant pulpits throughout the country. One result of this was local churches choosing to embrace either the modernist or fundamentalist viewpoint with the firm conviction that the other side was in serious error.¹⁵

Outside of studying the Social Gospel, historians have rarely investigated the response of white Protestants to rapidly changing neighborhoods in industrial cities in twentieth century. Although his work focuses on Catholicism, John T. McGreevy

¹⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, as quoted in White, *Liberty*, xxii; Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 355; Margaret Bendroth, “Religious Conservatism and Fundamentalism” in *The Columbia Guide to Religion in America*, eds. Paul Harvey and Edward J. Blum. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) 309. White, *Liberty*, xxi. Rauschenbusch authored nine books, most of which served to provide the theological underpinnings of the Social Gospel.

declares the oversight to be pervasive. As he notes in *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North*, “historians of modern America give matters of faith and belief only fleeting attention.” Instead, they tend to focus on other factors that contribute to human identity such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Furthermore, McGreevy contends that while churches as institutions may sometimes be considered as worth studying, “the emphasis is on organization, not on how theological traditions help believers interpret their surroundings.” James F. Findlay, Jr.’s *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* is one of just a few histories that address the activities of white Protestants relying on their faith to inform their actions in regard to issues of race. Yet Findlay’s approach to the topic does not address it at the local level, as McGreevy did with Catholic parishes. Rather, he focuses his attention on the National Council of Churches (NCC), an ecumenical group made up of over thirty Protestant denominations, in the years leading up to their June 1963 establishment of a Commission on Race and Religion. That commission was the vehicle by which the NCC would become engaged in “direct action” in the fight for racial justice. Thus, Findlay naturally does not investigate the actions taken by individual congregations when presented with an opportunity to “love your neighbor as yourself” when that neighbor was of another race.¹⁶

McGreevy and other historians of Catholicism in America have, however, examined how local parish churches as well as metropolitan archdioceses responded to

¹⁶ John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1-5, 197-205. Due in large part to Father James Groppi’s leadership in the fight for civil rights in Milwaukee, McGreevy considers Milwaukee the “site of the most sustained Catholic encounter with racial issues.” James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-7. Throughout the book Findlay notes the tensions that arose within the NCC as it attempted to balance demands by white southern members and African American denominations.

the arrival of African Americans in their neighborhoods and cities. Especially for Catholics, church and neighborhood were intimately, and uniquely, intertwined, with the result being the creation of a distinct subculture in urban America. When asked where they lived, a Catholic was more likely to answer with the name of their parish than an address or intersection. McGreevy noted that “neighborhoods still existed whose functional identity – for the majority, if not each resident – derived from religious structures.” Furthermore, those religious structures were established by and continued to exist to exclusively serve members from a particular European country. In describing Chicago’s one square mile Bridgeport neighborhood in *What Parish Are You From? A Chicago Irish Community & Race Relations*, Eileen McMahon counted four Irish parishes and nine other national churches. In the decades following WWII, two events challenged the continued existence of what had been, until that point, a fairly unmalleable urban working-class existence from one generation to the next. Not only were many Catholics, for the first time ever, able to afford to move to the suburbs, but that opportunity coincided with the geographic expansion of African American neighborhoods in northern cities into previously very homogenous ethnic Catholic enclaves. This mobility changed, and complicated, relational barriers between Catholics. While divisions between Catholics of different European ethnicities began to breakdown following the war, those Catholics left in the “old neighborhoods” in the city bore the brunt of blame for racist responses as African Americans moved in. Their suburban counterparts likely held similar views, but circumstances often allowed them to keep such beliefs to themselves.¹⁷

¹⁷ McGreevy, *Boundaries*, 197; Eileen M. McMahon, *What Parish Are You From? A Chicago Irish Community & Race Relations* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995) 116-125; The

This municipal divide was not the only split within Catholicism as individual parishes and regional archdioceses attempted to rely on their faith as they weighed the options available to them as African Americans arrived in their parishes. It was a complicated issue. Although McGreevy pointed to a 1970 study that found that Catholic churches were more likely than Protestant ones to be integrated, he also claimed, on the basis of the hostility white ethnic Catholics in urban neighborhoods showed toward black Catholics moving in, that “skin color mattered more than income or culture” in terms of the unacceptability of new neighbors. McMahon found that in Chicago many white Catholics, who enjoyed the freedom to move to a nicer area as their income rose, denied African Americans that same right and some even resorted to violence when other methods to keep their neighborhood white only failed to do so. Both in spite of and because of such attitudes groups such as the Catholic Interracial Council (CIC) formed in urban parishes in cities across the country with the goal of shaping Catholic opinion and therefore helping in the fight to end racial discrimination in housing, education, employment, and health care. Yet even these groups had to work across a variety of racial viewpoints within their parishes and cities. In Milwaukee, however, it was not the CIC that highlighted differences of opinion among Catholics in the city and metropolitan area. Instead, the civil rights leadership of the “most famous and best-known priest in the history of the archdiocese” was the lightning rod that brought differing attitudes about race, as well as the activities appropriate for a man of the cloth, to the forefront.¹⁸

spirit behind the urban/suburban split among Catholics is recognizable in a stalling tactic utilized by Milwaukee Mayor Henry Maier when pressed about the need for an open housing law in the city. He refused to push for such a measure until nearby suburban municipalities also passed such laws. The strategy bought him time until his hand was forced by the nationally publicized open housing marches that took place in Milwaukee in 1967-68.

¹⁸ McGreevy, *Boundaries*, 175-207; McMahon, *Parish*, 115-129; Steven Avella, *Confidence & Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014), 101.

Photographs of two men grace the cover of Steven Avella's *Confidence and Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977*. On the left is William Cousins, Milwaukee's archbishop in the years covered by the book. On the right, is Father James Groppi, who was arrested more than a dozen times fighting for civil rights while serving as an assistant pastor at St. Boniface Church, which by the 1950s was in a predominantly African American neighborhood in Milwaukee. His courageous leadership of the NAACP youth council's fight for equal rights during the mid to late 1960s, most famously leading 200 consecutive nights of public marches demanding the passage of open housing laws in the city, "put Milwaukee and its Catholic Community on the front pages of the nation," according to Avella. It also surely caused innumerable headaches for his archbishop, who theologically and in principle agreed with Groppi's stances, yet was dismayed by his methods and was consistently having to defend his decisions to allow Groppi and other priests to continue agitating for the rights of African Americans in the city. Catholics in Milwaukee, however, had a long history of outreach to the city's black citizens. While St. Galls and Holy Name parishes were the first to offer ministries for African Americans, the 1908 establishment of St. Benedict the Moor Church heralded the archdiocese's most concerted and fruitful effort and both serving and converting African Americans in Milwaukee. Extensions of the church both eventually included a boarding school and a hospital, not only for black patients, but also black doctors and nurses. Although the existence of St. Ben's initially allowed for other Catholic churches in the area to remain segregated, by the 1930s African Americans began attending other congregations. As they did, those churches began to experience declining numbers in both membership and giving. White flight from Milwaukee's inner core left St. Boniface,

where Groppi served, and other parishes in predominantly black neighborhoods, in need to financial support from the archdiocese. Avella points out that Groppi understood his nationally publicized civil rights activism to be “care for the flock of Christ.” Other Catholics in the area, however, especially in light of the fact that It might be their money flowing from the archdiocese to St. Boniface, were not so charitable in their perspective. Both Groppi and Cousins received innumerable letters from Catholic lay people and priests, in the area and across the country, expressing displeasure and outright dismay at his championing the rights of African Americans. At the very least, Groppi’s civil rights activity forced Catholics of all opinions to begin thinking about how their faith might influence their perspective on the issue. Alternatively, written attempts by Protestant to engage their constituency with the faith-based necessity of civil rights activism were not nearly so effective.¹⁹

The existence of earlier monographs that investigate intersections of race and faith in America’s cities in the decades following WWII demonstrates that some Protestant academics recognized the importance of the topic at the time. None of the following authors, however, were historians. First published in 1947, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* by Carl F. H. Henry charged evangelical Protestantism in the United States with having no active, vigorous cooperation in working to stop “admitted social evils” of which “racial hatred and intolerance” was prominently mentioned. Gibson Winter’s 1961 *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* contended that white Protestants were “in the vanguard” of the nationwide move to the suburbs because

¹⁹ Avella, *Confidence*, 85-156; McGreevy, *Boundaries*, 196-207.

many were the beneficiaries of the financial rewards accrued by those who switched from manual, or “dirty” work, to nonmanual, or “clean” work. This significantly challenged the ability of white Protestants to support desegregation because Protestant congregations were the “confirmation of the economic-social identity of the middle class” and provided “a sense of continuity in a changing world.” Gibson therefore asserted that “the Protestant congregation is not a ‘chummy fellowship’ which can afford intimacy with Negroes.” *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, George D. Kelsey’s 1965 study, asserted that Christians had largely “failed to recognize racism as an idolatrous faith” and contended that racism was a “Trojan horse” within organized Christianity. It is telling that these searing works, which were written to discuss current events, did not result in historians investigating the widespread absence of “white” Protestant involvement in the nation’s racial turmoil.²⁰

Most histories of Milwaukee have only recently taken an in depth look at the city’s black residents and the opportunities and challenges they faced. Given the extremely small size of the city’s black population, it is no surprise that earlier histories largely ignored Milwaukee’s African Americans. Writing in 1948, Bayrd Still discussed black residents of Milwaukee on only five pages in his book of more than 600 pages. Over twenty years later, despite a significant numerical increase and widened geographical presence of the city’s black residents, Robert Wells’ *This is Milwaukee*

²⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947) xx-xxii. Henry was a one of the founding faculty members at Fuller Theological Seminary in Los Angeles, CA; Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961) 39-79. The *Chicago Tribune*’s obituary of Gibson noted that in addition to being a long time faculty member at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School and Princeton Theological Seminary, he was also an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church; George D. Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965) 9;

devoted five pages to the rescue from jail of captured escaped slave Joshua Glover and the resulting racial violence that occurred in the city. Yet, the open housing marches of 1967-1968 garnered only three pages and the election of Vel Phillips, the city's first African American and female city council member, was not mentioned at all. More recent publications have corrected the deficiency.²¹

John Gurda, the premier chronicler of Milwaukee history and author of thirteen books about it, is best known for *The Making of Milwaukee*. It is a sweeping history of the city from its earliest days as the location of semi-permanent Native American villages up through the late 1990s. While he contends that jobs are what draw people to cities, once present, people engage in all the activities - "political machines, symphony orchestras, young ladies' sodalites, bowling leagues, saloons and, of course, conflict" - that give a city a history worth studying and knowing. Ethnic diversity and conflict - economic, political, religious - occurred between groups that lived in Milwaukee long before the Second Great Migration caused the city's African American population to grow to the point of infringing upon previously all white neighborhoods. Gurda does not shy away from relating this side of Milwaukee's story. He claims that the preponderance of Germans, who quickly outnumbered native born Yankees after the city's 1846 incorporation, prepared Milwaukee for the arrival of more immigrant groups. Irish immigrants arrived at roughly the same time and quickly became the second largest population group. They differed from the Germans in that they were uniformly Catholic - Germans were also Lutherans - and twice as likely to work as unskilled laborers. By

²¹ Bayrd Still, *Milwaukee: History of a City* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948) 162, 423, 454, 471-2; Robert G. Wells, *This is Milwaukee* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 69-73, 256-258.

1850 64 percent of the city's population was foreign born and most people were already choosing to live in ethnic, often religious, enclaves. ²²

Religious and ethnic separation among the city's growing citizenry soon revealed differences of opinion on a variety of issues. Not only was "Popery" denounced from Presbyterian and Episcopal pulpits, but the popularity of Germans gathering at beer gardens on Sunday afternoons also riled the Yankee's Protestant sentiments. Political divisions between native "Americans," staunch supporters of the newly formed Republican Party, and immigrants, who overwhelmingly voted for Democrats, influenced elections at all levels leading up to and after the Civil War. By the middle of the next decade Polish immigrants began to make their presence felt, especially on the Milwaukee's south side, where by the turn of the century, work began on the city's most famous – and expensive – church, St. Josaphats. Throughout the book Gurda refers to the city's three "immigrant faiths," of which Judaism was the last to arrive. By 1910 there were 10,000 Jews worshipping in one of Milwaukee's almost twenty synagogues. Also by 1910, Milwaukee County was home to eight suburbs, a mixture of industrial "company towns" and mainly affluent residential bedroom communities. World War I proved especially divisive. Not only did many question the patriotism of the city's German citizens, Milwaukee's most numerous population segment, but the city's socialists were also roundly criticized for their pacifist beliefs, which were easily misconstrued as un-American. Accordingly, civic and business leaders began Americanization programs to teach English language and American civics to the city's European immigrants, even as the domestic migration of black Americans from southern

²² John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999).

states increased the city's African American population to 7,500 by 1930. Like previous generations of newcomers, black migrants were largely restricted to the unskilled labor positions and forced to live in old and deteriorating housing. Yet Gurda claims that because the African American population was still so small there was little undisguised racism.²³

World War II, which pulled Milwaukee, by this time one of the nation's industrial hubs, out of the economic tailspin it entered as a result of the Great Depression, also led to the unprecedented growth of the city's African American population. Gurda provides ample coverage the challenges they faced upon arrival and thereafter, choosing to situate the difficulties as ones posed by "decentralization and deterioration." While quick to note that those themes were present throughout the country's history in all its cities, Gurda contends that the severity of decay in the neighborhoods where black Milwaukeeans were forced to live compared to the comfort of new housing on metropolitan fringe that was available only to white residents was a drastic change from previous disparities between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Gurda buttresses this claim with a remarkable – and horrible – statistic based on a study of building permits for 1941 and 1945. During that time, over \$4.5 million was spent on new construction in a single ward on the city's lily-white Northwest Side, while the twelve wards closest to downtown, not coincidentally where Milwaukee's African Americans lived, saw a mere \$112,900 spent on new buildings. Gurda characterizes the city's efforts at urban renewal "abysmal," and blames racism for the "dark energy that

²³ Gurda, *Making*: John Gurda, *One People, Many Paths: A History of Jewish Milwaukee* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Burton & Mayer, Inc., 2009). Golda Meir, who would go on to serve as prime minister of Israel many years later, was among the Jewish immigrants who moved to Milwaukee in the first decade of the twentieth century.

carried white families to the suburbs” and was also prevalent in hiring practices. African Americans’ young average age and small percentage of the city’s population both made overcoming such vast differences in opportunity nearly insurmountable. However, it wasn’t the first time the city’s black residents had persevered in difficult circumstances.

24

Recent monographs about various aspects of the lives, trials, and achievements of African Americans in Milwaukee provide deeper assessment. Although the time period studied predated the large numerical growth of Milwaukee’s African American population, Joe William Trotter’s exploration of black laborers in *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat 1915-1945* primarily provides insight into the working lives African Americans carved out for themselves in Milwaukee. Trotter consistently addresses race relations as they coincide with politics and housing, among other issues. It also challenges the “ghetto synthesis,” popularized by historians of race in the urban North at the dawn of the twentieth century. Trotter contends that studies intent on demonstrating the terrible social consequences of white racism on black communities served to deny agency to the populations who were forced to live in racial ghettos. Two other recent books examine, in part, the power exerted by African Americans contesting

²⁴ *Ibid*; In *One People, Many Paths* Gurda notes that many in Milwaukee’s Jewish community, despite moving either to the county’s affluent North Shore suburbs, or the newly developed Northwest side of the city, related to the suffering inflicted upon the African American community and its laypeople were the most widespread and loyal allies in the fight for civil rights; Additionally, more recent edited publications have also paid more attention to Milwaukee’s black population as well as the city’s response to them. Three chapters in *Milwaukee Stories*, ed. Thomas Jablonsky (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005) provide basic coverage of some aspect of the city’s African American residents: Steven Avella, “African-American Catholicism in Milwaukee: St. Benedict the Moor Church and School,” 138-155; Robert E. Weems, Jr., “Black Working Class, 1915-1925,” 259-266; and Fielding Eric Utz “Northcott Neighborhood House,” 267-276. Likewise, Jack Dougherty, “African Americans, Civil Rights, and Race-Making in Milwaukee,” *Perspectives on Milwaukee’s Past* eds. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) gives readers a very thorough historiographical overview of African Americans in Milwaukee including numerous unpublished theses and dissertations as well as areas that deserve further study.

school segregation in Milwaukee as well as engaging in direct public action to compel the city to pass open housing legislation. In *More than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* Jack Dougherty examines efforts to ensure educational equity by African Americans in Milwaukee from the 1930s through the 1980s.

Dougherty's investigation begins with the fight to force the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) to hire black teachers in the 1950s, examines Lloyd Barbee's efforts to ensure that MPS do all it can to desegregate the city's public schools in the 1960s, and follows the divergent priorities of Howard Fuller and Marian McEvilly regarding which schools to focus on as targets in the larger fight to implement school desegregation. Finally, Patrick D. Jones, in *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*, focuses on the open housing campaign that occurred in the late 1950s through the decade of the 1960s, while also discussing other civil rights protests and fight to desegregate schools. The open housing campaign was, uniquely, led by a white Catholic priest, Father James Groppi and energized by the NAACP Youth Council and the Commandos, an unarmed group of young black men designed to be "a direct action force" who also provided protection for the Groppi and the Youth Council. As such, the book provides insight into the Milwaukee Archdiocese's response to his leadership as well as those in the Catholic church in the metropolitan area who were opposed to his efforts. However, as white Protestants were largely uninvolved in these efforts, they are nowhere to be found in Jones' book.²⁵

²⁵ Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007) 115-144, 196-225, 271-274; Among the books that Trotter believes focused too heavily on the creation of black ghettos in northern industrial cities are Allan H. Spear *Black Chicago: The Making of an Urban Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) and Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 1890-1930* (1963; rev. ed., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971); Jack Dougherty, *More than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in*

During the Second Great Migration Milwaukee's "white" Protestant churches responded to the arrival African Americans in the neighborhoods around their church as well as at their Sunday morning services in one of three ways. Some churches chose to sell their building and move to an "all-white" area, either near the edges of the city or in a nearby suburb. Other churches decided to stay put. Of the congregations that elected to stay, most survived for at least a period of time because they had many older white members who no longer lived near the church but still attended on Sunday mornings and financially supported the church. Most of these congregations and their denominations desired, or at least gave such desire lip service, to welcome their new African American neighbors into their church. Some succeeded and became racially integrated congregations. Others failed and eventually closed. The result was never mere happenstance. Rather, congregational and denominational history combined to exert a lot of influence over the result, even though that influence was not always recognized at the time. Additionally, pastoral leadership played a crucial role in the success of those churches that integrated.

Each chapter in this study will focus on one congregation's experience from the three scenarios outlined above. Despite the fact that these three congregations were from three different Protestant denominations, all three churches claimed to believe the same, standard, Protestant doctrine. The differences between the three were in how they applied those doctrines both to themselves and to their new neighbors. The study also benefitted from a fortuitous archival happenstance. Merely by chance, two of the congregations were located in the same neighborhood, mere blocks away from one another. These two

Milwaukee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

congregations would have simultaneously experienced the same demographic shifts and all the changes that resulted from those shifts. Both churches had many members who had already moved away from the neighborhood. Both considered moving. While one chose to do so, the other stayed and to this day maintains a thriving, racially integrated, congregation.

“THE COLORED PROBLEM”

The Colored Problem

The numbered items in the April 20, 1948 meeting minutes of the Advisory Board of the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church began innocuously enough. Eugene Klingbiel seconded George Friedkin’s motion to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting. That was followed by the presentation, for discussion and approval, of the current expense budget, which required some changes, as well as an explanation of the missionary budget. The Advisory Board, which was made up of deacons and trustees, along with the pastor and treasurer, seemed to be making their way through the evening’s agenda with great efficiency. Perhaps it is the sheer ordinariness of those items that adds to the impact of the next. “Discussion followed about the colored problem in our church. Rev. Nottage of Detroit is to be asked to come to Milwaukee and make a survey of the problem.”²⁶

* * * *

Garfield Avenue Baptist Church (GABC) was an outreach-focused congregation in a city of Milwaukee neighborhood that began to undergo racial turnover in the 1950s as the city’s African American population outgrew the area to which they had historically been confined. Since its founding in the 1880s the congregation took seriously the biblical mandate to share the gospel. They prioritized through time and

²⁶ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, pg. 37, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives. The Church has twice changed its name, each time the result of relocating farther away from its original location. In 1964, after moving to Lovers Lane Rd. in Wauwatosa, the church dropped “Avenue” from its name. Then again, in 2001, four years after moving further west, to Pewaukee, it changed its name entirely, to Spring Creek. Thus, many of the primary sources used for this chapter are housed in the archives of Spring Creek Church.

monetary donations their involvement with a variety of mission-work in the city as well as overseas. They deliberately and publicly aligned themselves with the fundamentalist camp in the battle for the soul of Protestant churches as that fissure occurred. GABC's perspective that "colored people" at their church constituted a problem eventually led the congregation to relocate to Wauwatosa, the first suburb west of Milwaukee. Though in retrospect the decision seemed inevitable – "the colored problem" is an auspicious starting point – it actually took the congregation over ten years to decide to move. In the interim they even built a new church building in the neighborhood they would eventually leave. Though they were not paralyzed throughout that time, neither were they proactive.

From April 1948, when the existence of a "problem" was first documented, until January 1961, when the congregation voted to relocate to an all-white suburb, there is precious little evidence to suggest GABC leadership engaged in a rigorous process to assist them in their decision-making. The pronouncement of a "colored problem" was accompanied by an announcement that Rev. Nottage from Detroit was going to be invited to "make a survey of the problem." Yet, his race was not mentioned at the time, nor was any recognition given of the incredibly awkward situation he was being invited into as a black man advising white men who viewed worshipping with people who looked like him to be a "problem." While some Advisory Board meeting minutes demonstrate that that group occasionally discussed Scripture as it related to the "problem," neither the lay people in the group nor the pastor ever suggested a rigorous plan of study to direct them. There is no evidence of in-depth Bible study, or of anyone suggesting they seek to better understand the lives of the African Americans about whose presence they were so concerned. Furthermore, by associating with the General Association of Regular Baptists,

they voluntarily, though possibly not knowingly, put themselves in relationship with people who shared similar biblical and cultural blind spots regarding race in the United States. Rather, the pattern that emerged was that GABC leaders discussed the issues of race and church location when building needs such as repairs and expansions had to be addressed. Additionally, throughout most of the 1950s the leaders on the Advisory Board agreed that discussions of the issue should be kept to themselves without engaging the congregation.

Even though they undertook no systematic study to help determine the best course of action for their congregation, GABC leadership was proactive in other ways. Throughout the 1950s members of the Advisory Board reached out to City of Milwaukee employees to gain insight into where the city expected its black residents to move in the coming years. These queries were not based on excitement about a new outreach venture for the congregation, but rather were conducted with a sense of foreboding. Other fears also percolated during those years. Some worried that integrated worship would lead to intermarriage. Others voiced concerns that the impending arrival of “colored” neighbors to the area around the church could cause members of the congregation to decrease or stop their financial donations to the church. Instances of car break-ins were alarming. Why give, some posited, to a church unwilling to accept black members in what was likely to become a predominantly black neighborhood, especially if it may not be safe from the giver’s perspective. Despite these reservations, which occurred over several years, leadership did not decide to move at the first instance of a black person attending on a Sunday morning.

For an issue that was the most important factor in the decision to relocate, it never dominated the activities of the congregation or its leadership. Their concern was not so profound that they immediately put the building up for sale. To the contrary, they built a new building in 1950-51, even though during Advisory Board meetings in the 1940s there were discussions about whether or not they should make such an investment in the neighborhood. Rather, the question of staying in the area or moving elsewhere simply arose during the discussion when the group had to deal with a separate issue regarding the congregation's physical plant. A necessary repair or the need for more space inevitably led someone to question if everyone else was sure it made sense to stay. The question occurred regularly, but not often. Typically, once every few years. However, the fact that it was always asked is telling. Eventually GABC leadership realized that the continual questioning was indeed the answer.

* * * *

Previous generations of leaders of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church were not unaccustomed to rubbing shoulders with, and being welcomed by, people different from themselves. The decision in 1882 by members of Milwaukee's First, South, and Grand Avenue Baptist churches to establish a Baptist church in the northern part of the city was certainly influenced by the fact that the population in that section of the city was rapidly growing. Additionally, worshippers at these three English-speaking Baptist churches desired that an English-speaking Baptist congregation be established in what was a predominantly German-speaking neighborhood. Until it changed its name in 1895 the new congregation was known as the Fifth Baptist Church Society. It was initially comprised of people who transferred their membership from Milwaukee's Grand Avenue

Baptist Church, Waukesha's Eagle Baptist Church, and even all the way from the Waupaca Baptist Church, a town over 120 miles away. That the arrival of English-speaking Baptists was not perceived as a threat by the German-speaking Baptists already present in the neighborhood was confirmed by the attendance of the Rev. Lewis Mapf, pastor of the German Baptist Church, at the service where Fifth Baptist's first pastor, W.J. Kermott, was commissioned.²⁷

Despite being founded to work directly with English-speaking Baptists in a particular neighborhood, GABC was from its beginning outreach-oriented, engaged throughout the city and the world in a variety of endeavors. Almost 13 percent of the church's budget during its first year was earmarked for mission work. The next year, in a letter to the Northern Baptist Convention, the association of Baptist churches with which it was initially affiliated, GABC declared its desire to "preach the gospel and become entangled in public morals." Also in 1893, the deacons created the Deacons' Benevolence Fund to assist the pastor in providing food, clothing, and/or money for shelter to those in need. That same year it helped create the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, an organization initially founded to help men struggling with homelessness and/or alcoholism. The spirit behind these early activities continued to permeate GABC in the years leading up to the arrival of the "colored problem," although not without some complex, and contradictory, wrinkles. In 1939 Miss Juanita Kleve became GABC's first foreign missionary when she travelled to Nigeria to serve with the Sudan Interior Mission. Three years later Mrs.

²⁷ "Welcome to Garfield Baptist Church" brochure, History insert, Box 15, Folder 5, Spring Creek Church archives; "History of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church" in Dedication Program for new building, September 9, 1951, Box 15, Folder 8, Spring Creek Church archives; Eddie K. Baumann, "A Brief History of the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, 1882-1940." (Graduate-level paper, University of Wisconsin, 1989.) Box 15, Folder 7, Spring Creek Church archives.

Wayne Barber was sent to join her husband and serve in Brazil with Baptist Mid-Missions. Other outreach activities included men from the church driving every Sunday morning during WWII to the local USO in downtown Milwaukee to invite servicemen to church and provide them with a home-cooked meal after the service. In 1941 the new pastor, Rev. William E. Kuhnle, began a radio program, *The Gospel Hour*, on WISN. For its first sixty-five years GABC sought not only to spiritually edify its own members but also work outside of its own walls and teach others their beliefs. The overseas destinations are clear indications that GABC did not believe that Christianity generally, and Baptist doctrine specifically, was to be reserved for whites only.²⁸

GABC's history was not without controversy, though, as the church found itself caught up in the modernist-fundamentalist rift that was tearing apart American Protestantism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Most immediately the congregation wrestled with how to respond to what it perceived to be the Northern Baptist Convention's drift away from doctrinal orthodoxy during the 1920s and 1930s. By the late thirties they had made their decision. In a letter signed November 11, 1937, Pastor F.W. Kamm, along with the deacons and trustees, clearly stated that GABC was,

²⁸ 1893 Annual Report, Box 1, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives. Paul Harvey, "Baptists," in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America*, ed. Philip Goff. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.) According to Harvey, the Baptist practice of creating associations of believers based on their geographic proximity to one another began in the early eighteenth century and functioned as a way to ensure adherence to agreed-upon doctrine and correct practice as well as establish the process for removing from fellowship those who did not stick to said agreements; "History" in Dedication program; Baumann, "Brief History;" Della Mae Gifford, "An Abridged History of Garfield Baptist Church" Box 15, Folder 8, Spring Creek Church archives; 1941-42 Annual Report of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, Box 2, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives. Regarding the impact of the Gospel Hour radio program, Rev. Kuhnle stated in the annual report that "Many have been led to this church because of having tuned into this program." Della Mae Gifford was a member of GABC from 1942 until her death in 2007. She was the church's first secretary, served for a number of years as the church clerk keeping track of membership and taking minutes at meetings, and taught Sunday school for decades. GABC's commitment to outreach through local churches was such that four times in the 1950s and 1960s some of its members left to help begin other congregations: In 1954 fourteen to the Lake Drive Baptist Church, twenty-one to the First Baptist Church of Caledonia in 1958, two years later nine to Bethel Baptist, and in 1965 sixteen to East Side Baptist.

and would continue to be a Baptist church, but that because of “modernism in the Northern Baptist Convention” combined with the fruitless efforts of fundamentalists to purge the convention of that “blighting and destructive heresy,” the Garfield Ave. Baptist Church declared it was severing relations with the NBC and its state body, the Wisconsin Baptist State Convention. The letter went on to articulate both GABC’s doctrinal beliefs and the areas in which it perceived the NBC had loosened its orthodoxy. The tenets listed by Kamm and the church’s leadership team were standard fare among churches that considered themselves fundamentalist.

The Bible as the inerrant and infallible Word of God, believing that the Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born, that He is God’s only begotten Son, that He lived a holy life, died on Calvary as an atoning sacrifice for sin, that He was buried and on the third day rose again in bodily form from the tomb, that he ascended to the right hand of God the Father where He now intercedes for believers, and that in God’s own time He will return in the same body in which He ascended.

GABC’s leadership went on to charge that the present difficulty of modernism in the NBC was not due to any change in beliefs on their part “away from the historic position held by real Baptists,” but rather the problem was “the departure of the above stated faith by others,” including basing that faith solely on the “unaltered New Testament.” The letter offered two pieces of specific proof of the charges it was leveling. First, the letter asserted that an October 1936 article in the Wisconsin Baptist newsletter claimed that the Bible contains “inaccuracies and inconsistencies.” Additionally, GABC was upset at the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society for its failure to assure local congregations

throughout the state that supported missionaries stood “squarely on the inspired Scriptures.”²⁹

In following the Baptist tradition of local autonomy for individual congregations, pastor Kamm and the deacons and trustees brought the issue before the church members at the next congregational meeting. On December 1, 1937, by an overwhelming 48-2 vote, GABC members decided to end the church’s association with the Northern Baptist Convention as well as the Wisconsin State Baptist Convention. However, the identity of the church as Baptist was very important and as such the congregation decided to affiliate with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches. By the middle of the next decade it was using the bulletin for its Sunday service to vigorously assert its fundamentalist viewpoints as they related to a variety of circumstances. Under the heading, “The Great Divide,” the bulletin iterated the doctrinal malfeasance of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, claiming that it “denies the verbal inspiration of the Bible, spurns the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, and scoffs at His Premillennial Coming.” It continued by affirming for its readers that the American Council of Christian

²⁹ November 11, 1937 letter from Garfield Avenue Baptist Church to the Northern Baptist Convention and the Wisconsin State Baptist Convention, Box 15, Folder 4 Spring Creek Church archives. In early January the following year GABC received a letter from C.M. Gallup, the Recording Secretary of the Northern Baptist Convention. It expressed regret that GABC felt the need to withdraw on the basis of doctrinal grounds from the NBC and the Wisconsin State Baptist Convention in light of the fact that those conventions don’t admit to the theological differences outlined by GABC. Gallup reminded his readers that NBC President Dr. Earle V. Pierce recently publicly noted that three-fourths of NBC churches were “conservative” and that all the churches that had recently removed themselves from the fellowship with the group have done so “under complete misapprehension of the position of the Convention” usually due to the misguided understanding and leadership of a few ill-informed people. The letter ended by stating the obvious – that local churches were free to leave – and offered best wishes. Surprisingly, that was not the last letter GABC received from the NBC. Six years later, the Rev. William Kuhnle, who succeeded Kamm upon his retirement, received a letter from Earle V. Pierce writing on behalf of the fundamentalist movement within the NBC. Pierce sought GABC to join with him and other churches in the “purification and thus uniting” of northern Baptists. In an attempt to offer redress for GABC’s previously communicated reasons for leaving the NBC, Pierce included a Confession of Faith as well as a recently published article entitled “Call to Conservatism.” There is no indication of whether or not Rev. Kuhnle responded. Box 15, Folder 4 Spring Creek Church Archives.

Churches was doctrinally sound because it “believes the Inspired Word; preaches the cleansing blood, looks for the blessed hope.” After drawing these distinctions, the bulletin reminded those perusing it – hopefully not during the sermon! – that in 1937 GABC severed ties with the Northern Baptist Convention and the Federal Council of Churches because of modernism had infiltrated those bodies and that GABC was “in fellowship with” the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (North) and “is represented by and in full sympathy with” the American Council of Christian Churches. A year later the bulletin announced a special Friday evening service with guest speaker Dr. William Harlee Bordeaux, the General Secretary of the American Council of Christian Churches. Not content to simply invite readers to attend, the bulletin jogged its readers’ memories by stating that the A.C.C.C. was “raised up by God in 1941 in opposition to the apostate Federal council, whose leaders deny many of the essential doctrines of true Christianity.”³⁰

³⁰ December 23, 1937 letter from Garfield Avenue Baptist Church to the Northern Baptist Convention, Box 15, Folder 4, Spring Creek Church Archives; undated letter from Garfield Avenue Baptist Church to the Wisconsin State Baptist Convention, Box 15, Folder 4 Spring Creek Church Archives; September 15, 1946 bulletin, Box 3, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church Archives; September 14, 1947 bulletin, Box 3, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church Archives. In addition to theological differences, the American Council of Christian Churches also disagreed with the Federal Council of Churches on other matters. In “Dangerous and Promising Times: American Religion in the Postwar Years” in *The Cambridge History of Religions in America: Volume III, 1945 to the Present*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Bill J. Leonard contends that “the ACCC opposed what it saw as the Federal Council’s indulgent approach to socialism, its hegemony over the appointment of military chaplains, its sponsorship of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and the liberal orientation of many of its public pronouncements.” Not all fundamentalists agreed with the ACCC’s “unyielding separatism” though. Margaret Bendroth, in “Religious Conservatism and Fundamentalism” in *The Columbia Guide to Religion in America*, eds. Paul Harvey and Edward J. Blum (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) notes that The National Association of Evangelicals formed in 1942, just one year after the ACCC came into being because its founding members saw a need to “unite a new coalition of theologically conservative denominations in direct engagement with secular culture;” Regarding the importance of the church’s relationship with the GARBC, the their at April 23, 1947 meeting, the Deacons decided to move the date of annual GABC business meeting so as to not conflict with the GARBC annual conference. Additionally, GABC regularly sent delegates to the GARBC annual conference and allowed those that attended to report back to the congregation.

The information communicated in Sunday Bulletins was not limited to doctrinal squabbles and church affiliations, but at times directly addressed issues in the public sphere. In doing so, GABC affirmed its fundamentalist beliefs about the purpose of the local church. In the fall of 1946 a proposed amendment to the Wisconsin state constitution would have necessitated that the state provide, at tax payer expense, free transportation to students attending parochial and other private schools. After passing both chambers of the state legislature, the issue was to be presented as a referendum on the ballot during elections that November. As communicated in the bulletin, GABC's position on the issue was clear, if not clearly ironic: "We feel that the local church has no business meddling in politics and that its sole occupation is to seek to win men and women to Jesus Christ." Closer to the November election, under the heading Let's Get this Straight! the bulletin declared that "Public funds are to be used only for public purposes. Every born-again Christian should vote an emphatic 'No' at Tuesday's election on this amendment." It appears that despite declarations to the contrary, GABC's self-imposed fundamentalist restriction on removing itself from political issues was a ban that could be overlooked should the right circumstance appear.³¹

The church's utilization of the Sunday bulletin for announcing beliefs, affiliations, and events at times provided further evidence that GABC sought to take its beliefs beyond the four walls of the church building and impact the problems facing society. Two weeks after telling members how to vote on the private-school transportation referendum, the GABC bulletin highlighted Rescue Mission Sunday, an event supported

³¹ September 1, 1946 bulletin, Box 3, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church Archives; November 3, 1946 bulletin, Box 3, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church Archives.

by churches across Milwaukee for an institution that GABC had “for many years been vitally interested in.” But lest the readers become confused over the role of the local church, the announcement continued by clarifying that the Rescue Mission was not “a social club for the down and outer.” Instead GABC viewed the Rescue Mission akin to a lighthouse that saved souls not by warning of a rocky shore, but rather through the preaching of the Gospel “seven days a week, 365 days a year.” The church supported the Rescue Mission through prayer, financial support, conducting an evening service there once a month, and by being the home church to the Rev. Roy Briggs, the man in charge of the mission. Both Garfield Avenue Baptist Church’s support for the Rescue Mission, and its vocal identification with fundamentalist Christianity, are a microcosm of its conflicted response to the Social Gospel.³²

While the theological drift of some pastors and churches was certainly one of the main impetuses for the growth of the fundamentalist movement within American Protestantism in the early twentieth century, not all denominations were equally affected by the modernist-fundamentalist rift. Baptists in the north were among the denominations that underwent intense internal battles for the future of their collective faith, the result often being the creation of new associations, as was the case in 1932 when the General Association of Regular Baptists was formed after a number of individual congregations left the Northern Baptist Convention. This shift among Baptists was largely the result of the fact that because the denomination’s seminaries and colleges embraced the modernist teachings of the New Theology, Baptist church traditions regarding congregational autonomy, which left doctrinal policing up to each individual church, made the

³² November 11, 1946 bulletin, Box 3, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church Archives.

mechanics of moving from one association to another particularly easy. It is also worth noting that the Midwest was not only a stronghold of Baptist fundamentalism, but also that many northern Baptist churches had embraced the Lost Cause theology southern Baptist preachers spread during Reconstruction and throughout the 1880s. This teaching promoted the idea that the southern sin of racism had been paid for by the sacrifice of Confederate soldiers during the Civil War and that, furthermore, the reassertion of white cultural dominance after the end of Reconstruction was merely a return to a previously righteous social order.³³

The lasting influence of the Lost Cause theology on the General Association of Regular Baptists, and by extension on GABC, can be clearly seen by examining the resolutions process utilized by the GARBC and its churches as part of the group's annual conferences. That process is described as follows:

Since the first GARBC Annual Conference in 1932, resolutions have expressed the thinking of the GARBC messengers attending the conferences on a variety of subjects. The resolutions reflect the association's desire to uphold doctrinal integrity and to respond to ecclesiastical and social concerns. In recognition of the local church's autonomy, the resolutions are not legislative in nature.

Over the years resolutions were submitted on a variety issues, from a 1934 offering titled Communism, Socialism, and Ungodly Teaching that declared the need to “call attention to the growing influence of radical socialism and Communism, both of which are more or less lawless, Godless, and unpatriotic” to a 1943 missive about supporting the war effort while still maintaining religious liberty by allowing all pastors to pay their Victory Tax

³³ Bendroth, “*Religious Conservatism*,” 309-320; Paul Harvey, “Baptists” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America*, ed. Philip Goff (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 429-445.

contributions in person with cash rather than through the church payroll so that the separation of church and state not be violated. Additionally, resolutions were sometimes given a generic title to help categorize the type of information being addressed in the resolution. In this manner, resolutions with the title of Social Concerns were offered in 1948, 1959, 1968, and 1970. Surprisingly, none dealt with racism, though it is clear that current events were at times considered. The 1948 edition, passed a mere seven months after the publication of *To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights*, expressed concern for the people of Israel and opposition to anti-Semitism. In 1959, at the end of a decade that was home to the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case, *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*, which overturned almost sixty years of Constitutional authorization of the second-class citizen status of black Americans, as well as many other defining events in the Civil Rights Movement, the General Association of Regular Baptists affirmed that “social concern in the name of Jesus is commanded in the Scriptures” but warned that social service ought never be substituted for the Christian Gospel. However, this promising and theologically sound start was followed by the declaration that the GARBC “looks with favor upon” Christian agencies that run homes for the aged and infirmed, schools for retarded children, and hospitals and clinics that operate on “a genuine Christian Basis.”³⁴

Perhaps given the callous omissions of the first two social concerns resolutions it should come as no surprise that the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King did

³⁴ <http://www.GARBC.org/commentary/resolutions/> accessed on July 26, 2016. Given that the United Nations reconstituted the nation of Israel in 1948 by giving it political boundaries, the 1948 resolution about Israel is proof that some of the people who submitted resolutions did so on the basis of noteworthy current events. Furthermore, in speaking out against anti-Semitism, the 1948 resolution demonstrated the propriety of caring for people who suffered in ways that the submitting person or church would not be subject to.

not seem to influence the GARBC's perspective. The 1968 general conference took place only two and a half months after King's death and the subsequent riots that that raged in major cities across the country. In that year's Social Concerns resolution, the GARBC affirmed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives and thereby creates compassion in the hearts of his followers for the "physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of their fellow man." But the iteration of the objects of compassion of Regular Baptists remained tepid, and stunningly aloof, given the ever-present reminders in newspapers and on television of the country's unresolved racism: needy children, the mentally retarded, and senior citizens. The 1970 entry reiterated that people who recognize Jesus' love are "constrained by that love to care for those who suffer." But the rest of the resolution was so bland in its application of that belief that it took no stand on any issue, but rather just expressed "wholehearted support for approved social agencies." In fact, it was not until 1992 that the GARBC passed a resolution that mentioned the reality of racism in the United States and noted that it was a sin. But forty-four years earlier, leaders at the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church did not have such a clear understanding. Importantly, they were also not theologically associated with anyone who could challenge them on their perspective that black people attending their church was a legitimate cause for consternation.³⁵

³⁵ <http://www.GARBCC.org/commentary/resolutions/> accessed on July 26, 2016. While a majority of the referenced social concern resolutions clearly occurred after Milwaukee's Garfield Avenue Baptist Church identified its colored problem, the inclusion of this material is important in that it is a clear demonstration that the churches with which GABC voluntarily chose to identify did not recognize the plight of black Americans as worthy of their concern. Nor, therefore, would they have taken the further step of recognizing their own complicity in allowing laws and systems to exist that caused and exacerbated that plight.

The admission by the Advisory Board of the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church at their April 20, 1948 meeting that the presence of black Christians at their Sunday services constituted a problem was unexpected in that there is little in the body's documentary records that indicates any previous distaste for such an arrangement. In fact, the minutes from the board's May 19, 1941 meeting give exactly the opposite impression. When the topic of outreach to the city was addressed that evening, Mr. Albert Fuller, the Advisory Board chairman, gave the group a "pep-talk" and encouraged those in attendance to dream big. With God on their side, they ought to "think in terms of thousands instead of hundreds." He offered the possibility that GABC should have Sunday schools "scattered all over town." Someone else picked up on Mr. Fuller's enthusiasm and suggested that every available car be filled up with children for the church's Bible School. A strategy began to emerge. Go out into the neighborhood around the church. Conduct house-by-house visitations and follow up with all interested contacts. Speaking specifically in terms of child evangelism someone zeroed-in on the crux of the matter when they stated "If we have a zeal for Christ for missionary work, let's start here in Milwaukee among children of our neighborhood, negroes and white." No one registered a complaint about the intended inclusion of black children among those who should be brought in for Bible School.³⁶

³⁶ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board meeting minutes for May 19, 1941. Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives; In his paper Baumann notes that through the years the Sunday School ministry of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church was a crucial, and quite successful, component of the outreach efforts of the church. In 1898 more than 600 attended Sunday school even though the membership was only 230. Beginning in 1909, the church began to start Sunday Schools in other churches on the north side of Milwaukee that were taught by GABC members until the host church could provide their own instructors. Perhaps Chairman Fuller and others were aware of this history when they dreamed about filling up every available car with children to bring them to Sunday school.

The race of those attending Garfield Avenue Baptist Church was never mentioned prior to the 1941 call to bring both “negro and white” children to Sunday school. From that point on, it was not brought up again until the April 20, 1948 pronouncement of “the colored problem.” However, there are many indications that GABC took seriously its mandate to reach lost souls and no evidence that the race of the person in which those souls resided influenced the church’s efforts. In 1931 the church deliberated over a period of months as to the necessity of hiring a young man to act as a missionary to Milwaukee, particularly to those in the neighborhoods surrounding the church. While there is no record of race ever mentioned as part of this deliberation, the congregation voted down the idea. In addition to this possible hire, the Sunday bulletins also provide a clue to the church’s desire to reach out to their neighborhood. At the church’s annual meeting, held on May 9, 1941, someone moved that the advertising committee begin a campaign to “bring the gospel of Christ to our community” utilizing women’s groups, the Baptist Young People’s Union, and Sunday school, among others “to really work our community.” While no action was taken on the motion at the meeting, the sentiment was put into action in the coming years. From 1941 to 1946 a variety of welcoming statements appeared on the front of the Sunday bulletin, all seemingly clear indications of a non-discriminatory posture. In 1941 it announced “We welcome to the services of Garfield Church all who are with us today for the first time. May you be drawn nearer to our loving Savior for having worshipped with us today. You are a stranger here only once.” By 1946 such statements were rotated monthly. In January that year visitors were told, with a hint of self-congratulations, that “Garfield Church welcomes you, our visitors, to the fellowship and blessing of our services today.” A few months later GABC

pushed the envelope and proclaimed “Ever welcome to this house are strangers and the poor.” In the promotional material for that fall’s annual evangelistic crusade, to be held October 14-19, all who received the booklet, which was presumably distributed at least to all the residences in the neighborhood, would have read that GABC was “In the heart of the city with the city on its heart.”³⁷

The leaders of GABC would have been hard-pressed to find someone more qualified than Berlin Martin “B.M.” Nottage to help them grapple with the implications of and possible solutions to the arrival of colored worshippers on Sunday mornings. Nottage and his two older brothers Whitfield and Talbot were born in the Bahamas but moved to New York in the early 1900s where they began to evangelize West Indian-born blacks in Harlem, eventually establishing a black Brethren congregation in 1914. After that church was on sound footing, they broadened their attention to witness to American-born blacks and had soon founded black Brethren churches in St. Louis, Birmingham, Philadelphia, and Richmond. In 1932 B.M. Nottage moved to Detroit where he began Bethany Tabernacle church, the first of six churches he would establish in that city over the next eleven years. In addition to planting and pastoring local congregations in Detroit, he mentored many younger black Christian men who would rise to prominence of their own accord. Marvin Printis became the first president of the National Black Evangelical Association. William Pannell went on to serve as a professor of evangelism at the

³⁷ The statement regarding race not being brought up prior to May 19, 1941 and not again until April 20, 1948 is based upon a complete review of all documents in the Spring Creek Church Archives. If there were mentions of race in reference to those attending GABC or as prospective attendees prior to the initial date or between the two dates, those were either not recorded, which seems unlikely, or document with the reference was not saved or has been lost; Baumann, “Brief History,” 10-11; Meeting minutes from 1941 annual meeting, Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives; Various Sunday bulletins, Box 3, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archive.

prominent Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Perhaps most notably, Howard Jones, a minister with the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, became the first black evangelist to work with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.³⁸

If Nottage's church-planting and mentoring activities were not enough to make him known to GABC leadership, then perhaps they learned of him from his radio ministry or the notoriety with which he was discussed in newspapers or based on the fact that churches used his presence to advertise their evangelistic crusades. The nation's oldest African-American newspaper, *New York Amsterdam News*, advertised "The Devotional Hour of Songs & Sermons with B.M. Nottage," a program that was aired each Saturday night. Another prominent black newspaper, Cleveland's *Call and Post*, referred to B.M. as a "prominent minister" in an article about an upcoming Bible Conference to be held in the city. While undoubtedly accurate, the praise may also reflect the publication's positive opinion of his older brother Talbot, who pastored the Cleveland's Central Gospel Tabernacle, the church hosting the conference. The *Call and Post* also advertised B.M. Nottage's role as a speaker at a summer encampment in Chicago, a noteworthy example of the national scope of Nottage's ministry. Nottage's notoriety was not confined simply to African American newspapers though. Michigan's *Adrian Daily*

38 Albert G. Miller, "The Rise of African-American Evangelicalism," in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture*, ed. Peter W. Williams, 262-265; Janet Chismar, "Remembering the Legacy of Howard O. Jones," accessed July 13, 2016, <https://billygraham.org/story/remembering-the-legacy-of-howard-o-jones/>. In the biography about him, Jones said the following of his position with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, "There's a mixed blessing to being the first African-American to realize some key achievement in the United States. It is an honor to overcome a barrier that has long kept blacks on an unequal footing with whites. But, along with the outer triumph, there is an inner ache—an angst—of having to live with the often unfriendly fallout of going where no black man has ever gone before. It's the pressure of knowing your every word and action has the potential to make or break the hopes of millions of others who will come after you." Nottage likely felt the same angst at being asked by white Christians for his counsel on how to keep blacks from worshipping at their church.

Telegram frequently wrote about events at which Nottage was a key speaker. For a paper whose pictorial ads exclusively featured white people, it is notable that Nottage's picture was printed multiple times in the paper, an indication that he was a significant draw to the events at which he spoke.³⁹

As evidenced by GABC's move from the Northern Baptist Convention to the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, Nottage would not have been an appropriate expert to bring in because of his reputation alone. While the widespread public nature of his ministry is likely what made him known to the congregation in Milwaukee's Brewers Hill neighborhood, it was his conservative theology that made him acceptable. "Nottage's sermons and speeches show the development of an early theological fundamentalism and criticism of the traditional black church. They reveal classic rationalistic or propositional Christian doctrine, as opposed to the more experiential and ecstatic traditional [sic] of some black churches." In addition to his solid beliefs, Nottage may have seemed unique to GABC's leaders because he was, from their perspective, a black man whose faith rested on more than emotions. This may partially explain why there is no record of them approaching the pastors of any of the five black Baptist churches located less than a mile from their location at the intersection of N. 2nd Street and W. Garfield Avenue.⁴⁰

³⁹ *New York Amsterdam News*, June 10, 1944; "Central Gospel Tabernacle To House Bible Conference," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 31, 1946; "Rev. Nottage At Chicago Meet," *Cleveland Call and Post*, June 22, 1946. *Adrian Daily Telegram*, July 13, 1942; *Adrian Daily Telegram*, August 22, 1942; *Adrian Daily Telegram*, August 6, 1943.

⁴⁰ Miller, "Rise," pg. 263. Berlin M. Nottage, *Facts of the Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Gospel Folio Press, 1972) 9. Despite having been published over thirty years after the meeting, the following quote from Nottage's book is indicative of his beliefs throughout his active ministry. "I shall assume that the majority of our readers accept the Bible as the inspired word of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Also the virgin birth of our Lord, His deity, miracles, atoning death, bodily resurrection, and His personal return in glory. Praise

* * * *

Rev. Nottage joined the Advisory Board for a special meeting on June 7, 1948. In describing the reason for the “colored” preacher from Detroit’s attendance, board chairman Albert Fuller explained “what the board has been faced with regarding the colored situation, as concerns the future. He told of the present-day encouragement of mixture and intermarriage of colored and white. With some colored people attending our church, there is a great need for wisdom from God in handling and making provision for earnest Christian colored people.” Mr. Nottage, who shared that his faith journey began when he was a boy in the Bahamas and was witnessed to by a Brethren group, initially presented a three-pronged strategy. Child evangelism was “the first line of attack.” While it is unknown whether the battle-language was his or the interpretation of the person recording the minutes, either way it is telling that some in the room were gearing up for a fight. He hoped his next recommendation, going house-to-house to hand out tracts – small booklets used to present spiritual material that were a common tool in evangelism – would result in Garfield Avenue Baptist Church members “gaining confidence.” Whether Nottage viewed his white hosts as needing courage or merely practice remains a mystery. The third suggestion, the establishing of a mission church or branch was the only of his ideas that he deemed a potential solution. Evidently, the purpose of the first two suggestions was to prepare the way for the third. His confidence in the potential success of creating a church specifically for the “colored” attendees at GABC was in part the result of the fact that similar efforts had been started in other cities. That he was

God for all of you who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and have eternal life by faith in Him.” It is noteworthy that these beliefs align closely with GABC’s own doctrine.

accompanied that evening by Pastor Stewart of Chicago's Sunshine Mission is likely an indication of this.⁴¹

The benefits and challenges of forming a branch or mission church to provide “colored” Christians in the neighborhood a place to worship other than Garfield Avenue Baptist monopolized the remainder of the discussion. Though Rev. Nottage realized that it might be possible to begin with a white preacher, “he must love the people.” The Detroit-based Bahamian pastor thought it best to begin by identifying a meeting place – presumably not GABC – and planning an informal meeting. Nottage shared about a woman in St. Louis who “learned to love colored folk,” relocated to their neighborhood, and began Bible classes with “colored” women. As some were saved they started to bring their husbands, and as a result the white woman saw the need to find a male leader and “a real work was started.” Nottage was likely preaching to the choir as he opined that although white and “colored” worshipping and working together sometimes works, it is preferable to keep a endeavor “colored” or white. He noted, however, that at present the preaching and teaching in “colored” churches often suffers due to the “type of emotional program offered.” Ironically, he next suggested that leaders from GABC visit local colored Baptist churches in hopes that GABC’s testimony and friendliness may result in

⁴¹ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, 40-42, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives. The concept of churches establishing race-based missions was not new to Milwaukee. According to the history page on its website (<http://www.stbensparishmilwaukee.org/about-us/history> accessed July 27, 2016) in 1911 Capuchin Franciscans assumed responsibility for the outreach ministry started three years prior by Capt. Lincoln Charles Valle and his wife Julia. Valle converted a storefront into a chapel and named it St. Benedict the Moor in honor of the African slave born in Italy in the sixteenth century who after being freed and converting to Catholicism went on to serve as a superior, a novice master, and grew to fame as a confessor. He was canonized in 1807 and is the patron saint for black Americans. (http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=871 accessed July 27, 2016.) By the time of this meeting St. Ben’s had over 600 members and a school with over 270 students including 141 boarding students. Despite it being a Catholic Church, it is reasonable to assume that some members of the Advisory Board were familiar with St. Ben’s.

those congregations assisting GABC should it decide to actively engage the city's "colored" residents in future evangelistic efforts.⁴²

Advisory Board members would not have had to walk very far to visit black Baptist churches, as there were five such institutions less than a mile away from 210 W. Garfield, with a sixth located slightly more than a mile from their church. Three of them, Metropolitan, Greater Galilee, and Mt. Zion, held services on both Sunday morning and Wednesday evening, while both Canon and Calvary Baptist Churches met only on Sunday. Additionally, there were five churches – from other denominations – that also catered to black worshippers who were no more than a mile away from GABC. It is noteworthy that even though Nottage proposed reaching out to the nearby "colored" Baptists churches there is no indication in GABC's records that the idea had ever been considered. Conceivably, GABC leaders may have been hesitant to begin this conversation with someone with whom they had never bothered to speak before. Perhaps, on the other hand, GABC had done its research and concluded that all the local "colored" Baptist congregations embraced the type of emotionalism in worship that they, and Nottage, disapproved of. Regardless of why they opted for an out-of-town expert to offer candid advice about a sensitive topic, it is telling that there were so many black churches located so close to GABC. Even in the late 1940s, when Milwaukee's black population was just beginning to increase, GABC was already located in an area that was very close to the only section of the city where blacks had historically been allowed to reside.⁴³

⁴² Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, 40-42, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

⁴³ Information about the location and service times of churches serving Milwaukee's black residents is from the "Attend Your Church" portion of July 1948 editions of *The Milwaukee Globe*, which proclaimed itself as "Wisconsin's Only Negro Newspaper."

When given the opportunity, members of the Advisory Board peppered Nottage, presumably the first “colored” person with whom they had made the opportunity to intimately discuss racial issues, with a barrage of questions. When asked if it was advisable to invite “colored” worshippers to GABC with the intention of internally growing a nucleus from which to start a new “colored” church, Nottage’s no was firm. He advised that only saved individuals be taken in, but left open the possibility that even that may not be beneficial. He recognized that local “colored” churches would fight any efforts by GABC to start a new “colored” church as doing so would likely siphon off potential members. He did, however, offer that reaching Milwaukee’s colored citizens by radio might be preferable because it does not appear discriminatory. Attempting to balance non-discrimination with the desire to not anger local “colored” churches all the while finding a solution to GABC’s colored problem led Nottage to suggest that maybe the best way forward was the formation of a Bible class in a “colored” home but without GABC’s “backing or name connected to it.” The dilemma of how to accomplish this suggestion led to the discussion of a more fundamental problem. Were there Bible Schools, they wondered, that would be willing to accept “colored” applicants who, because of their race and sub-standard educational preparation, were not candidates for admission to the training centers known to GABC? As evidence for the soundness of the need for theological training and professional preparation of “colored” Christians in Milwaukee and the United States to lead works among that population, someone mentioned that the Africa Inland Mission has “3000 sound native evangelists.” No one,

however, mentioned that while the need for professional theological training was real, it was certainly not a solution to the immediate problem they had recently identified.⁴⁴

Despite having specifically invited their guest in order receive straightforward counsel, the meeting was not without some controversy. GABC's pastor, Rev. William E. Kuhnle "was staggered" by two of Rev. Nottage's responses. He took offense at the notion that "we have begun too late" and the belief that "the older generation is lost." Both of Kuhnle's reactions require explanation. Although Nottage was not recorded, either in his initial remarks or in response to an Advisory Board member's query, addressing whether GABC should have begun wrestling with its "colored" problem sooner, it is possible to understand why Kuhnle was so bothered by the notion that GABC was somehow behind the curve. It is probable that Kuhnle took a misguided observation by Nottage as unwarranted criticism. Nottage was likely unfamiliar with the demographic dissimilarities between Detroit and Milwaukee. While the First Great Migration of black southerners out of the states of the former Confederacy during World War I had increased the number of black residents in the motor city from slightly over 5,700 in 1910 to nearly 41,000 in 1920, Milwaukee's "colored" population in those years grew from a paltry 980 to meager 2,229. By the 1940s the differences between the two cities were even more pronounced. Whereas Detroit's 149,119 black residents made up more than nine percent of that city's population in 1940, Milwaukee was home to just 8,821 "colored" citizens who comprised only one and a half percent of the its population. Additionally, Nottage's

⁴⁴ Although the Africa Inland Mission was not on the extensive list of overseas and domestic missionary agencies financially supported by the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, the Advisory Board regularly reviewed the list and discussed possible additions and deletions to it as well as adjustments to their support amount. They would therefore be familiar with the idea of utilizing "native evangelists" and apparently were not troubled by importing such a strategy.

perspective was almost certainly influenced by painful and ugly memories of the race riot that gripped Detroit for three days in June 1943. In the two years preceding the riot hundreds of thousands of white and black workers flocked there from the southeastern United States hoping to land a job in one of the city's factories. Competition between the groups for both jobs and housing built upon pre-existing animosity and was exacerbated by rumors of racially motivated attacks. By the time six thousand federal troops had quelled the violence thirty-four people were dead, another 433 wounded, and two million dollars of property had been destroyed. In all three categories, black residents suffered far greater losses than did whites. Perhaps unaware of Milwaukee's racial realities, Nottage remarked that GABC should have begun wrestling with how to address the issue of "colored" folks attending their services at least a decade earlier, as would have been warranted in Detroit.⁴⁵

Kuhnle's perspective that Nottage intimated that the older generation had no footing on racial issues is more difficult to dissect. During the question and answer segment of the meeting, in response to the vague "how would children react?" Nottage replied that "children are more receptive *than adults*." (emphasis added) Given the affirmative nature of his answer regarding children's receptivity, it is not unjustifiable to assume that the original question sought to ascertain Nottage's belief about how young people would feel going to church with "colored" children and adults. It is worth recalling that Advisory Board chairman Albert Fuller began the evening explaining to Rev. Nottage, as well as his guest, Pastor Stewart from Chicago, that the board had been

⁴⁵ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, 40-42, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives; Dominic J. Capece Jr., and Martha Wilkerson, "The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation," *Michigan Historical Review* 16 (1990), 49-72.

under pressure from some in the congregation regarding the presence of “colored” worshippers at GABC, particularly “as concerns the future.” The real issue at hand, per Fuller’s characterization, was the potential that worshipping together, or “mixture,” would lead to greater personal intimacy among white and “colored” parishioners, with the end result being “intermarriage.” At this point of the discussion, it was not yet clear whether people at GABC feared intermarriage as a result of their interpretation of the Bible or merely because, as Fuller noted, “of the present day encouragement” of such secularly-endorsed behavior. Regardless, Kuhnle’s offense seems to stem from his belief that their guest-expert did not believe that the attitude of white adults in his congregation – or possibly his own beliefs – towards people of different races worshipping together was appropriate. Otherwise, Nottage could have simply remarked along the lines that “children tend to be comfortable with it.” As for Kuhnle, maybe it was simply the case that he recognized that Nottage was right that race was not as big a deal to children and he was afraid because he had two daughters.⁴⁶

After offering an unrecorded prayer, Nottage and Stewart departed and the Advisory Board began to discuss what their next steps should be. George Oehmcke asked the Deacons what they would do if “colored” Christians inquired about becoming members of GABC. One potential problem of opening membership to “coloreds” was made known as the conversation immediately addressed the possible financial repercussions of such a decision. Some on the Advisory Board had heard, and wondered aloud as to the truth of the rumor, that there were some young people in the church who

⁴⁶ Perhaps some at GABC construed President Truman’s December 1946 appointment of the President’s Commission on Civil Rights, and the report that it published in October 1947, “To Secure These Rights,” as a bellwether encouraging all Americans to embrace one another as equals.

were not giving money to the congregation because of the “coming colored neighborhood.” While the veracity of that statement was not resolved that evening, an examination of annual reports from the from the 1940s and 1950s shows steady growth in giving throughout those decades. Regardless, the possibility of decreased contributions to the church by members of the congregation would have been cause for concern to those who counted it among their responsibilities to set a budget and make sure the church could pay all of its bills. The conversation abruptly turned, however, to verbally processing ways to implement Nottage’s primary suggestion that GABC find a “colored” man to begin a Bible class in a private home. Although the discussion centered on Mr. Albert Gordon, who was seen to be a very good candidate for the role, Rev. Kuhnle believed that it was best if a trained white person initially lead this “work” to be housed in a home or some other, unnamed, church. All agreed that it would be ideal if Rev. Nottage would return to Milwaukee to facilitate a two to three-week campaign in a rented hall in Milwaukee’s Sixth ward with GABC’s prospective pastor to “colored” Christians selected and present in order to continue the “work” at the conclusion of the campaign.⁴⁷

George Oehmcke recognized the sensitive nature of a possible covert mission by GABC leadership to relocate the “colored” believers that had been coming on Sunday mornings. Sensing that it would require thorough consideration and planning, he moved that a three-person committee be appointed. George Stalker seconded, and the motion

⁴⁷Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, 40-42, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives; Little is known about Albert Gordon, even by current staff at Spring Creek Church, who nonetheless acknowledge their forbearers’ racist membership policies. After a 2004 sermon in which he publicly apologized for the church’s racist past, head pastor Chip Bernard was approached by Gordon, who just happened to be in attendance that morning. Bernard recalls Gordon saying, “I am the guy that was not allowed to join. I cannot tell you how much I appreciated what you said this morning.” Chip Bernard, email message, July 13, 2016.

carried. Chairman Albert Fuller appointed Rev. William Kuhnle, Deacon George Stalker, and Trustee H.M. Snow to study the possibility of such a “work,” attempt to determine if there was a suitable man to lead it, and gain an understanding of the financial backing it would require. Rev. Kuhnle immediately sought to exert spiritual leadership by reminding all in attendance that the issue required a great amount of prayer. He suggested that the Advisory Board gather regularly to pray about it as a group. Chairman Fuller went a step further and suggested that someone be appointed to lead such a meeting every Wednesday evening at 7:30. The minutes from the meeting then abruptly announce the end of the discussion about finding a suitable solution to the reality of “colored” worshippers attending Sunday services. “Auditors: Change of subject!” marked an evidently much-needed transition to less stressful topics, like ensuring that good financial practices had been implemented and were being maintained. Perhaps never before had the Advisory Board been so excited to discuss so decidedly mundane a duty! The meeting came full-circle, however, by the agreement of the group just prior to adjourning, “that the colored matter should be kept confidential within the Advisory Board for the time being.” Clearly this group of church leaders understood the delicate nature – and potentially profound impact – of the issue that had dominated the evening’s agenda, and would dictate the church’s decision-making over the coming years.⁴⁸

* * * *

The sentiment contained in the September 9, 1951 dedication program for GABC’s new church building was what would be expected from a congregation thankful for nearly seventy years of fruitful ministry. The dedication statement spoke of “a sense

⁴⁸ Ibid.

of profound humility and deep gratitude” for the church’s history, “sincere appreciation” for the faith of those who preceded them, “responsibility” for those currently “about us,” as well as “a desire for God’s blessing upon those who shall follow after us.” The new building was not a tribute to man’s achievements, it went on, but rather to the faithfulness of God, to whose glory the building was dedicated. After highlighting the foreign missionaries supported by the church in a section titled *Garfield Reaches Out*, the program noted GABC’s domestic outreach via its radio ministry carried on WISN in Milwaukee as well as stations in Chicago, Minneapolis, and Green Bay. A further effort to reach nearby residents was included under a picture of the new building with the title *You Are Invited* by proclaiming that the church offered “A Bible-centered ministry, old-fashioned prayer meetings, a well-organized Bible School, Enthusiastic young people, a world-wide missionary vision, and a life-giving message for you own heart.” As no qualifiers were offered that instructed otherwise, presumably the “you” was universal, referring to anyone who happened to have the program and read the invitation.⁴⁹

Part celebration, part marketing document, the program also contained numerous photographs. A picture of Rev. Kuhnle extracting the first shovel-full of dirt was accompanied by another of the choir adding its joyful noise to the proceedings of the June 11, 1950 ground-breaking ceremony. The setting of the new edifice’s cornerstone four months later was highlighted by large crowds and as well as a presumably staged photo of a church leader dressed in his Sunday best assisting a mason with the setting. Although no church members are seen in the pictures depicting steady construction progress, upon completion the building committee did pose in front of the new structure.

⁴⁹ New building dedication program, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

Some of the men pictured – H. M. Snow, George Oehmcke, and Eugene Klingbiel – had been heavily involved with the Advisory Board’s recognition of the “colored” problem and the discussions and decisions that followed. All in all, it is likely that the program effectively captured the joy and hope associated with a new beginning with one exception. In what seems like an unfortunate omission, the new building’s address is nowhere in the program. In reality, including the address was probably deemed somewhat unnecessary as GABC’s new home was simply, but somewhat surprisingly, directly across the street from the building it had worshipped in since the late nineteenth century.⁵⁰

By the early 1940s it had become obvious to GABC’s leaders that the old wood frame structure that has ably housed the congregation since its construction in 1882 needed both expansion and repair. While Robert Meyer initially suggested in November 1941 that a committee be selected to consider enlarging the present building for Sunday School as well as additional capacity in the sanctuary, he was not made a member of the committee. Benjamin Richter, George Oehmcke, and Keith Alcorn were joined on that committee by pastor Kuhnle and returned a year later with the opinion that the issue might be more pressing than originally understood. At the December 1942 Advisory Board meeting the group was presented with the possibility that the present building was in danger of collapse, or so it was thought. The “spreading stairway” was cause for particular concern. On Ben Richter’s suggestion, the board decided to immediately hire an architectural engineer to inspect the entire premises and determine whether it was safe to continue using it. While all present agreed that hiring a professional to inspect the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

building made sense, some were not able to wait for that report, let alone the end of the meeting, to use this issue to pivot to another.⁵¹

“To move or not to move” became the question of the evening. The group was split on whether that decision should be made prior to asking the congregation to donate to a building campaign. The discussion was complicated by the fact that wartime considerations made new construction “taboo.” Some recommended waiting for the engineer’s report and others suggested that they “definitely pray” for a new building. The discussion refocused on the immediate steps which could be taken to ensure greater safety in the event of a fire. There seemed to be consensus that installing exit lights and out-swinging doors at a cost of a thousand dollars was reasonable. As no consensus could be reached regarding the location of a new church building, should one be needed, the matter was not discussed further and other business attended to.⁵²

By March of the following year, perhaps buoyed by the positive report from H. Schmidt & Company’s three engineers, the board addressed without contention three motions concerning the church’s need for a new building or a significant expansion of the current one. First, Mr. Marchant suggested that the board recommend to the congregation that a new building fund be established. After some discussion over whether or not it was necessary to provide members with some specifics in terms of cost, construction, and location, the motion passed unanimously. Next, the group decided to recommend to the church “that from present leading we build the new church on our present corner.” Finally, they agreed to establish a committee to oversee all aspects of the fundraising, the

⁵¹Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, 40-42, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

⁵² Ibid.

cataloging of the desired features of the new building, and the hiring of both an architect and construction firm to design and build the new structure. It was further agreed that all three motions be presented at the next congregational meeting, scheduled for the last day of the month.⁵³

The solid commitment by GABC leadership to build their new facility in their current location was not surprising given the robust growth in both membership and giving throughout the 1940s. Membership had grown from 280 in 1942 to 415 by 1948, an overall increase of 48 percent. While it is to be expected that a church with more members would result in more giving and larger budgets, the dramatic budgetary increases are nothing short of remarkable. Since its founding GABC had utilized two budgets, one for general expenses and a separate budget for expenditures on local and foreign mission work. Between the 1941-42 and 1947-48 fiscal years the general expense budget grew from \$5,500 to \$14,947, an annual increase of more than twenty-two percent. Remarkably, that growth was meager compared to the commitment shown by GABC to mission work over the same period, with the mission budget increasing by over thirty-nine percent each year from \$3,000 to \$14,250 during that period. There is no evidence to support any worries about giving being put at risk as a result of remaining in their current neighborhood.⁵⁴

The actions taken at the congregational meeting on the last day of March 1942 made it clear that church members trusted the church's leadership to competently guide

⁵³ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Advisory Board Minutes 1941-1975, 40-42, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives; Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Trustee Minutes, 1941-1952, Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives.

⁵⁴ Data gathered from various annual reports, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

their congregation. Many people spoke in favor of the creation of a new building fund prior to the motion carrying unanimously. That decision was the first of what was to be an evening full of consensus. The recommendation of the Advisory Board "that from present leading, we build on this present site" also passed without dissent, a surprise, maybe, to some board members who privately entertained the possibility of relocating. The board's proposal that a new building committee be elected was similarly passed and was then referred back to the board for selection and future ratification at the next congregational meeting. The gathering ended after taking care of other business. At its next meeting the Advisory Board took up the responsibility with which they had been tasked and voted seven people to be on the new building committee. George Oehmcke, Ben Richter, and H.M. Snow all received fourteen votes, followed by Joel Stoen, Eugene Klingbiel, Robert Meyer, and Al Bauer with between twelve and nine tallies.⁵⁵

Despite the overwhelming confidence church members placed in their belief that church leaders were utilizing wisdom in their decision making, for a time at least the Advisory Board was split on whether remaining in their present location made sense. While church records do not make it clear why some members of the Advisory Board believed that moving to a new location was worth considering given GABC's long history in that neighborhood, demographic trends and personal choices may have combined to play a part. Milwaukee's tiny black population in the 1940s had almost no influence on the city and its affairs. The one exception to this reality was the perception of what their presence meant to white residents and/or white-owned businesses and

⁵⁵ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Trustee meeting minutes, 1941-1952, Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives; Advisory Board minutes, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

institutions. This “power” was especially heightened in areas of Milwaukee that happened to be located near where the “colored” population lived and appeared to be moving toward. Garfield Avenue Baptist Church sat at the intersection of North Second Street and West Garfield Avenue. It was less than a mile from the farthest corner of the five census tracts with the largest number of African Americans, diagonally connected to one of them, and adjacent to the tract with the sixth highest number black residents in the city. Thus, both GABC leadership and members at large would have surely observed the changing racial makeup of neighborhoods near the church. Furthermore, these changes appeared to be headed in their direction, thus increasing the likelihood that the blocks immediately surrounding the church may also soon begin to change.⁵⁶

It is, then, important to consider where members of the building committee chose to live in relation to where the church was located in order to understand if living near diversity was an important factor in their decision making in other areas of life. Three members of the committee, George Oemcke, Ben Richter, and Robert Meyer, lived in Wauwatosa, the first suburb west of Milwaukee. Two details about Wauwatosa provide a helpful perspective. It began at N. 60th Street, fully fifty-eight blocks to the west of the church. Additionally, although Wauwatosa was home to 27,769 people in 1940, almost none of them were black. Even those committee members who lived in the city of Milwaukee, as opposed to a suburb, opted to live in sections of the city far away from the church that were either overwhelmingly white or exclusively so. H.M Snow’s home on the 4300 block of N. 17th Street was over three miles away in a census tract of over 2,200 with only two black residents. Likewise, Eugene Klingbiel, at 4070 N. 24th Place, lived

⁵⁶ United States Census, Sixteenth, 1940.

more than three miles from GABC, in a census tract with no black residents. Only one building committee member, Albert Bauer, lived within a mile of the church but even his neighborhood still had only two black residents.⁵⁷

The GABC membership register does not, of course, detail the process each of these men went through when deciding where in the Milwaukee area to live. However, given the scarcity of African Americans in the neighborhoods and communities where they chose to live, it is reasonable to assume that living near black people was a very low priority, if it was considered at all. Additionally, the church parsonage was located on the far-western edge of the city, only a block and a half away from Wauwatosa but nearly four miles from the church. Thus, it should not be surprising that some on the Advisory Board questioned if building a new structure for the church in the location of the present structure was a wise idea. Furthermore, general members of the congregation were relatively spread out across the metropolitan area. They lived in fifteen different zip codes and eight suburban communities. Although 53212, where the church was located, was home to the highest number of households at thirty-six, that represented only fifteen percent of the congregation. The reality that Milwaukee's black population was migrating steadily north, east, and west from its present locus and seemed to be eventually heading right toward the intersection of N. Second Street and W. Garfield Avenue must have given some a reason to pause.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Population statistics by race are not available for Wauwatosa in the 1940 census. But given that the 1950 census only lists twenty-two black residents, even though the city's population had grown to 42,959, it is a safe assumption that very few, if any, African Americans lived in Wauwatosa when the Oehmcke, Richter, and Meyer families moved there. Albert Bauer, who lived in census tract 53, did not complete his time on the committee as he moved to California at some point prior to the new building being built. No address could be found for the seventh member of the committee, Joel Stoen; The 1950 and 1951 "Directory of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church" listed where all the members of the congregation lived.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite previous private reservations held by some members of building committee, the committee's public stance was for GABC to stay right where it was. In December 1945 the committee provided the rationale for its unanimous recommendation reaffirming the Advisory Board's similar endorsement two years earlier. Staying put would allow the church to continue to minister to the immediate neighborhood while also working throughout the city. They felt that GABC's name was known and respected in the neighborhood and remaining there would allow them to capitalize on their previous decades of effort. They deemed the location to also be beneficial for casting a wider net because of the fact that its central location can be easily reached from anywhere in the Milwaukee area by either public transit or convenient "through" streets. The present location had the additional advantage of being "in nearly the center of our present membership." The recommendation also mentioned that being near downtown allowed the church to be "available to transients." After detailing why the church should build there, the committee conveyed its perception of the urgency of the situation. The final paragraph notes that it is "imperative" to expand, that "definite early action" need be taken in planning and designing the new structure, and that building should begin as soon as possible.⁵⁹

The following fall, in September of 1946, the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church hosted a Victory Rally to celebrate meeting their initial fundraising goal of \$30,000. Building committee chairman George Oehmcke shared details about the number contributors and the percentage of pledged giving that had been received. Members of the

⁵⁹ Recommendation of the New Church Building Committee, December 19, 1945, Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives.

congregation had the opportunity to ask questions of Trinity Builders' Darwin McCullagh about the interior and exterior sketches he presented, as well as learn of the long-term financing options available for the entire project. They were also informed of the negotiations the committee undertook in principle to purchase the property directly north of the church in order to have more land for building and allow for the entrance to be on Garfield Avenue. The congregation then made and passed motions to allow the building committee to purchase the adjacent property and proceed with building the new church at an approximate cost of \$200,000.⁶⁰

Regardless of the fact that the church had on multiple occasions affirmed the decision to build their new building where they had always been located, uncertainty about that decision always seemed to bubble to the surface. Less than two years after the Victory Rally, at a special congregational business meeting on June 23, 1948, the issue was once again raised. The discussion surrounding it is telling. After Building Committee chair George Oehmcke recounted all the committee and architect had done, along with the decisions thus far made by the church, he showed the blueprints and artist renderings of the re-designed building plans. The cost was now approximately \$350,000. Following Mel Snow's presentation of the most recent giving and pledge tabulations, Gene Klingbiel offered a different sort of statistic. Using data acquired from the City of Milwaukee Health Department Klingbiel summarized the how the residential patterns of "colored people" had changed from 1940 to 1948. "From Brown to Brewery and East from 3rd" there were twenty-two families in 1940. By 1948 the number nearly tripled to

⁶⁰ Garfield Avenue Baptist Church Trustee Minutes, 1941-1952, Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives.

sixty-four families. However, “north of Brown the influx is not so great.” Notably, GABC was two-and one-half blocks north of Brown, in between Second and Third Streets. Amid the variety of discussion that took place following Klingbiel’s sharing, remarkably there are no recorded mentions of anyone further addressing the nearby presence of “colored people.” Dave Miller, however, did call for answering “Should we build on this sight [sic]?” When the ballots were tallied, 133 affirmed the decision to build on the present corner, with 17 against and three people abstaining. Prior to adjourning, the building committee was once again thanked for their hard work. Harder, it seems, than may have been realized in the simple thanks.⁶¹

The overwhelming support of the congregation for building at the present site did not, however, free the leaders of GABC from continuing to wrestle with that very question given the changing racial demographics of the neighborhood. It resurfaced yet again the following summer at a July 7, 1949 Advisory Board meeting. The minutes of that gathering were later printed under the title “RE: Colored Problem and Our New Building Location.” The four page, single-spaced document goes into greater detail than any other yet produced by church as it struggled with how to respond to the arrival of black neighbors. Ironically, the gathering began with the reading of Philippians 2:13, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure.” Advisory Board chairman Albert Fuller immediately followed the scripture reading by recounting the high attendance of “colored” children at Vacation Bible School. There was no

⁶¹ Ibid. As further evidence that demographic shifts were being carefully monitored, at the June 23, 1948 special business meeting Keith Alcorn delineated the changing patterns in the distance Bible school attendees lived from GABC. Alcorn presented figures from 1940 for the percentages of those living within a two and four-mile radius and also details from 1948 with even tighter specificity, one, two, three, and four miles from the church.

immediate indication of whether this was viewed as a joyous or a troublesome reality, nor whether those at the meeting viewed it God's good pleasure that the races were worshipping together or, conversely, that the races had been divinely ordained into separate spheres. Fuller shared that the Deacon Board, perhaps because it had no idea what else to do, hoped that a "colored" preacher from Chicago, a Rev. Mr. Edwards, would accept their invitation to come to Milwaukee soon. As no direct connection was discussed that evening and no further details provided, it is not clear how his counsel would differ from that provided by B. M. Nottage two years earlier. Although Nottage's suggestions still percolated, GABC had yet to act on anything he offered.⁶²

Whatever the Deacons presumed Edwards's counsel might be, however, it would have been unable to stem the human tide of black residents headed toward GABC. Just as had been the case a year earlier, the church continued to keep a close watch on the residential movements of black families in Milwaukee. Earlier that day, Messrs. Fuller, Oehmcke, and Meyer, along with Pastor Kuhnle, met with Gilbert Clegg of the City of Milwaukee Planning Department to get the city's official perspective on where officials anticipated "colored" residents may move next. After mentioning the city's plans to regulate traffic on Second and Fourth Streets by making them one-way streets, as well as

⁶² "RE: Colored Problem and Our New Building Location" Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives; *King James Bible*; The question of building on the present site was also raised in between the June 23, 1948 Victory Rally and this Advisory Board meeting. A Congregational meeting was held on January 19, 1949 to discuss various aspects of the new building. Architect Lester Johnson showed GABC members his renderings of the new building and opened the floor for questions. Pastor Kuhnle followed this by reminding the packed lower auditorium that sacrificial giving would be necessary to complete the project. Though the new building fund had grown to over \$35,000, Kuhnle also mentioned the need for the church to borrow to pay the total cost of \$230,000. Earl Thiecke's motion to authorize the church to borrow \$200,000 and to give the building committee latitude to resolve any unforeseen issues was quickly seconded but not immediately voted on. Rather, "a very long discussion followed" regarding whether "any further consideration was given to a re-location of the new building." Eventually the 78 members present – it was near 11 PM and many had left by that point – passed the motion 65 to 13, with the understanding that the new building would be built in the church's present location.

designs to increase parking space in the area by condemning buildings and making new parking lots, Clegg offered that “the colored people” would not move east of Third Street, but would rather “stick together.” Without going into detail, Clegg then proceeded to share that his church, First Methodist, located at 1010 W. Wisconsin Avenue, recently decided against moving from its downtown location. Had they chosen differently, in Clegg’s opinion, the congregation would have dissolved rather than moving to a new location, presumably due to the fact that its members were scattered across the city and suburbs. As all present digested this information, Mr. Fuller connected it to the matter at hand by reminding everyone that there existed “evident objection” to giving to the building fund because of the “colored problem.”⁶³

Pastor Kuhnle’s reminder that times were changing and that any church today had to face the breakdown of racial barriers due to a spirit of racial equality set the tone for the rest of the evening. Albert Fuller, however, did not initially pursue this path and instead attempted to guide the discussion by asking, “Are there any on this Board who think the colored problem is serious enough to reconsider the location for the New Building?” The responses made clear that he had not asked the right question. Of the seventeen men present, only Joel Stoen mentioned initially being against building in the current location but that he was now willing to “100% back up” the decision the congregation previously made. No one else so much as hesitated about staying put. Differences of opinion quickly arose, however, as George Friedkin remarked that Fuller’s original question would become moot once the church got a “another work started for the

⁶³ “RE: Colored Problem;” There is no indication that Rev. Edwards ever made it up to Milwaukee to talk with the Deacons. The First Methodist Church congregation eventually did dissolve in 1966 as a result of the construction of the I-43 freeway.

colored people” thereby removing them to “their own setting and work.” Fuller then pivoted, summarized, and sought to move forward by asking the group, “Should we allow colored folks to attend our services.”⁶⁴

Ambiguity reigned now that the heart of the matter was once again the focus of the discussion. Ed Meissner’s pronouncement that the “problem” actually consisted of no more than four or five adults attending regularly on Sunday mornings is quite remarkable. Yet, evidently, when this tiny number was combined with the changing residential patterns of black Milwaukeeans, and all the different things this meant to everyone in the room, those few souls seemed more numerous than the twelve tribes of Israel. There were those present, such as Glenn Franke and Henry Franke, who professions that they had no trouble with “the colored folk,” must be taken with a grain of sand as they were quickly followed by admitting the need to “find a different place for them.” Lynn Smith was also aboard this bandwagon of equivocality. Although he admitted that he did not believe the church could forbid anyone to worship with them, he stressed the need to get the “colored” church started. While Wilbur Smith’s admission that “It is a happier situation if they don’t come” perhaps best summarized the feelings of many present, it certainly was not a solution.⁶⁵

Others, however, did not believe there was a problem that required a resolution. Although Joel Stoen’s declaration “God forbid that we make any racial discrimination” was the most strongly worded such pronouncement, it was not the only one. Harold Schreiber attributed his admission that he has not “really felt the colored situation” to the

⁶⁴ “RE: Colored Problem”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

fact that he lives “among them.” Although he lived in suburban Wauwatosa, Roy Siren claimed “the problem never bothered him.” Gene Klingbiel shared that he had turned to Scripture to assess what it had to say regarding “the colored problem.” He recounted how in chapter 8 of the book of Acts an angel told Philip to leave Jerusalem and travel down a road that eventually led him to an Ethiopian eunuch struggling to understand a passage from the book of Isaiah that foretold of the coming Messiah. After explaining to the man that Jesus was the one who fulfilled the prophet’s words, Philip “lead an Ethiopian to Christ.” Klingbiel took it as evidence that the Bible did not approve of discrimination between races. Likewise, he noted that Moses was not condemned for marrying an Ethiopian woman. Based on these Biblical examples, Klingbiel announced that if GABC were to prevent “colored people” from worshipping with them, they could not in good conscience “send Juanita back to Africa.” Despite this exegesis, even he recognized the challenges the church would face if they decided to go down the path his understanding of the Bible was leading them toward. “Since we are ministering to white people,” Klingbiel reasoned, allowing “colored” worshippers to become members at GABC “might hinder our efforts in winning other white people for the Lord.” One wonders how those present squared the words of Philippians 2:13 with the seemingly unshakeable duplicitous stance that was beginning to take shape and hold sway. ⁶⁶

Klingbiel’s final admission was probably of great relief to building committee chair Gorge Oehmcke, as it was more in line with his perspective on what the Bible

⁶⁶ Ibid. Although the document actually says that “Moses was condemned” it is clear from both the context of the rest of Klingbiel’s statements, as well as the fact that the Bible does not actually condemn Moses’ choice of an Ethiopian spouse, that this was a typographical omission. Klingbiel’s conclusion regarding Juanita referred to Miss Juanita Kleve, who since 1939 had been financially supported by the church as a missionary in Nigeria with Sudan Interior Mission.

taught about interracial churches. Yet Oehmcke's outlook lacked specific scriptural references and relied heavily on fears of what might occur relationally because of people of different races worshipping together. His belief, that the nations were created by God and ordained with their own locations, was the basis for concluding that "this must be evidence [that] they they [sic] choose to be with their own people." His argument began to seem circular, though, when he next tried to spiritualize the supposed dangers of marriage between people of different races. "I think," he proclaimed, "as Christians we have to look at the problem from the matter of children and young people mingling together, and the social life involved and the possible result of marriage." This admission clarifies that the high attendance by "colored" children at vacation Bible school is both a positive and a negative reality. While it is good for children to learn the gospel, if doing so could result in undoing God's divine providence in separating the races, how is a church to react? Yet just as Eugene Klingbiel made a u-turn in his final sentence, Oehmcke embraced ambiguity and concluded by stating that he "would never be against the liberty of allowing the colored people to worship with us."⁶⁷

Pastor Kuhnle, who had earlier re-focused the meeting by correctly recognizing that race, not simply location, was the real issue at hand, offered his thoughts. Though there is no indication that his comments were scheduled to end the meeting, his words ended up doing just that. He lamented that the members of the Building Committee had been subjected to a lot of criticism as a result of "the colored problem," including things

⁶⁷ "RE: Colored Problem." Oehmcke also made a vague reference in the meeting concerning the motivations of some of the colored people who had been attending GABC. "Some colored people have not come to us by choice but by instigation." There is precious little evidence to corroborate this statement. Yet, if true, it stands to reason that he might be wary of allowing people to attend his church who were there as a political statement rather than out of spiritual need/desire.

he deemed that would have been better unsaid. Yet, Kuhnle continued, he did not believe that GABC had “a colored problem.” Rather, while the issue will “arise from time to time,” Kuhnle stated that he did not think they ought to “rest on the fact that there isn’t possibility of a change” presumably in who lives near and attends the church. The church should build, stay, and minister on the “basis of conviction and the guidance of God.” GABC ought not to bar any race from church membership, but rather address each candidate for membership on an individual by individual basis. Perhaps because he knew these words might be difficult for some present to accept, he reminded them that “greater is he that is in you than he that it is in world” and “the battle is not yours, it is the Lord’s.” Finally, he encouraged all to “keep ourselves in the will of God.” Prior to adjourning, Advisory Board chairman Fuller sought clarification from George Oehmcke, head of the Building Committee, as to how the church would move forward. Oehmcke assured the group that on the “basis” of the night’s meeting, the committee was protected against anything that had been said or would be directed toward it to stay the course and stay in the neighborhood.⁶⁸

In addition to re-affirming the decision to remain at their current location, the meeting also eventually led to beginning of a “work” for “colored” worshippers. In October 1951 the Board of Deacons approved \$25 be added to the missionary budget to pay Robert Froehlich for “his work among the colored people.” Mr. Froehlich’s license to preach had been renewed by the Trustees in June of that year, a process that would be repeated annually through 1956. Evidently, Mr. Froehlich’s efforts brought great peace to

⁶⁸ “RE: Colored Problem.” There is no evidence in the church’s documentary record of what things had been said about the building committee.

the leaders of GABC. His license renewal is the only mention of the “colored” problem during those years. There is no indication, though, of whether the four or five black worshippers who had been attending still were. “Colored” children, however, still attended both Sunday school and summer vacation Bible school. Although it is unclear why GABC leadership decided to not follow the advice they received from B.M. Nottage that any such effort be led by a black man, it is not unimportant. The discussion ended, but the problem still existed.⁶⁹

The “colored problem” settled, church leaders were able to focus their energies on other issues, such as addressing the possible need for a new parsonage. While on the surface a seemingly innocuous undertaking, the episode provides evidence that even though the church decided to stay at 2nd and Garfield, the attempts to serve both the neighborhood and the metropolitan area were beginning to skew toward the latter. At the 1952 annual meeting, held on May 9, the Trustees announced that they felt it prudent to appoint a committee to investigate the need for a new parsonage due to the amount of upkeep the current one required. The motion that “it would be well to sell it and look for a new and more adequate one” was seconded and carried without discussion. Yet when it was made public that the Trustee Board’s parsonage committee could look at places but had not been granted authority to make an offer, Fred Jahnke moved that it be given that power and be allowed to spend up to \$25,000. Grover King seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Although the process of identifying a suitable home did not move as quickly, by November 1953 the church adopted a resolution to buy the home at 2810 N.

⁶⁹ Deacon meeting minutes, October 24, 1951, Box 13, Folder 2, Spring Creek Church Archives; Trustee meeting minutes, 1951-1956, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives; Group interview with Spring Creek members who attended GABC while it met in Milwaukee, August 30, 2016.

69th Street in neighboring Wauwatosa as the new parsonage. Despite being only ten blocks west of the old parsonage, which was located at the far western edge of the city of Milwaukee, it is curious that the pastor was moving farther away, and into the lily-white suburbs, if the church truly desired to minister to the neighborhood surrounding it and all of its current and future residents.⁷⁰

Four years later, while presumably enjoying their new building, the tension between focusing on communities at the edge of the metropolitan area at the expense of their natural mission field near the church was brought up at the November 13, 1957 semi-annual congregational business meeting. Lynn Smith remarked that he believed the church should give more thought to a mission “work” for “colored” residents in the neighborhood. As a church in the city “we have a definite responsibility to them.” Smith, at least, seemed to think Bob Froehlich’s efforts were no longer a satisfactory response to the growing need. Indeed, a brief examination of the rapid growth of the black population in three census tracts makes clear it was an issue that GABC ought to make a higher priority if it was an issue worth addressing. GABC was in census tract 34. Tract 31 was directly south of 34 and tract 35 directly west. Although in 1950 “colored” residents comprised only 7.8% of the residents of tract 34, by 1960 that figure would rise to 61.9%. The percentage growth was not as dramatic in the other two tracts, simply because they were already home to more African Americans in 1950. Tract 31 grew from 21.1% in 1950 to 71.4% in 1960, while tract 35 went from 41.2% to 87.3%. Smith, it seems, was

⁷⁰ Minutes from 1952 annual meeting, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives. The previous parsonage was located at 2261 N. 59th Street in Milwaukee.

pushing for a more permanent solution, perhaps even with a building, along the lines of what B.M. Nottage had envisioned a decade earlier.⁷¹

Smith also introduced an additional consideration for those at the November 11, 1957 church-wide meeting to discuss. Immediately after his first observation, Smith also promoted the idea of establishing an extension church “in other parts of our city.” He did not believe that such a “work” needed to be postponed while GABC was still actively working to support establish other branches they had helped establish, such as the Caddy Vista “work” in Caledonia, a town twenty miles south of Milwaukee. This had been the Board of Deacons’ opinion when Smith and Sam Himes approached them a year ago about establishing a local branch work “on the city’s west side.” Moderator Jim Rigney noted that at that time Smith and Himes were told that the “Deacons will be considering this with them in the future” and were still planning on doing so. This answer did not satisfy George Oehmcke, who made it known that the matter should not be “just put aside,” especially when it had been brought before the Deacons multiple times without a real answer. He believed the issue deserved a “full discussion” but simultaneously encouraged Smith and Himes to start such a “work” on their own if they felt lead by the Lord to do so. He closed by announcing his positive view of extension work, believing “It won’t hurt us at all.”⁷²

The remainder of the meeting that November evening provided tentative hints as to the future direction of the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church. As the discussion

⁷¹ Semi-Annual Business meeting, November 13, 1957, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives. Smith’s opportunity to speak at the meeting almost did not occur. After all the official business on the agenda had been taken care of, Eugene Klingbiel move to adjourn. Had not Fred Jahnke spoken up and reminded all assembled that the quarterly business meeting was specifically established so that “the people could express their minds on the needs of the church, not only reports, etc.” Jahnke then encouraged audience participation and Smith stood to speak.

⁷² Ibid.

continued, it tacked back and forth between establishing a more robust “colored work” in the neighborhood near the church and the founding of an extension on the west side of the city. Ed Achterberg noted, presumably in reference to the west side branch, that it was a big topic that required careful “analysis and consideration” but deserved some sort of definite action and conclusion. The choice of language is curious, as previous discussions of the Caddy Vista “work” were never spoken about with the gravity evident at that night’s meeting. Dave Miller’s question to moderator Rigney to see if the Deacons had planned to invite Himes and Smith to a meeting, was answered simply and affirmatively, if not concretely with, a “Yes, we are making plans to meet.” Though no one was doing so publicly, accusations of procrastination by the Deacon Board on the extension work would not have been unwarranted. Smith took the tiller and tacked back the other direction by asking if starting a neighborhood “work” for “colored” residents of the neighborhood was a “dead issue” or was there “something pending?” Rigney’s reply that a “colored work” in the area was already going likely referred to Robert Froehlich’s preaching among the neighborhood’s black residents, but as this was not specified, there is no way to know with certainty that this is what Rigney meant. At this point Rev. Kuhnle spoke up about the need to “proceed cautiously” with such an endeavor due to the Lighthouse Gospel Mission on nearby Cherry Street. Then suddenly someone motioned to adjourn before Kuhnle could explain the evidently delicate situation with the Lighthouse Gospel Mission. Strangely, Grant Peterson seconded the motion and it carried without the pastor speaking up to clarify. Many must have left that evening unsure as to

what the church's plans were regarding a "work" for black residents living near the church as well as the proposed west side extension, and whether the two were related.⁷³

The announcement in the February 9, 1958 Sunday bulletin under the headline *Recommendation Approved* at least brought clarity to the issue of a west side extension work. Earlier that week the Board of Deacons approved a recommendation of the Advisory Board that GABC "encourage and sanction the beginning of a Bible Class and prayer meeting" that they hoped would lead to the creation of a "Baptist testimony" on the west or northwest side of Milwaukee. The Advisory Board acted on the issue at the request of the Board of Deacons, who had earlier appointed a subcommittee to study the persistent requests by Lynn Smith and Sam Himes, "for full counsel on this matter." The subcommittee suggested that those concerned ought to begin with a week-night Bible study and prayer meeting of those "vitaly interested in such a projected arm of our church." The Advisory Board discussion revealed that there were at least fifteen families interested in beginning to meet as soon as possible on Wednesday nights, probably in a Wauwatosa home at first, though there were some buildings available, in order to confirm that the need they all perceived existed near their homes actually did. Once this report was read at the February 5th Deacons' meeting, Ed Newton moved it be accepted. While the motion passed unanimously by hand vote, church clerk Dellamae Gifford noted in parentheses that many did not vote. Unfortunately, she offered no explanation.⁷⁴

Perhaps the lack of transparency was not all that odd. For although the west side extension was proudly announced in a Sunday bulletin, the conversation regarding a

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Semi-Annual Business meeting, November 13, 1957, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives; "Specially Called Advisory Board Meeting re: West Side Bible Study" January 31, 1958, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

“colored work” in the neighborhood that occurred at the Advisory Board meeting on January 31, 1958 was still kept behind closed doors. At the conclusion of the discussion about the west side branch Henry Murach asked if GABC wanted to expand in the neighborhood or elsewhere. Ellis Lithgow confirmed the pertinence of the question by offering that “now is the time to take some action concerning the colored people, as regards the future of our work here.” Henry Franke concurred, if somewhat paternalistically, that a “colored work” ought to be started “to take care of them.” George Oehmcke, speaking as a member of the “colored issue committee,” reminded everyone that that group was created because members agreed that there needed to be a “definite Bible centered colored work, led by a negro.” The committee did not like that the current “work” was “interdenominational” and believed that there was a need for a Baptist “work” in the neighborhood.⁷⁵

The conversation indicated agreement that any expansion of ministry in the neighborhood would be focused on its black residents. The general consensus expressed was tempered, however, by the church’s muddled policy on membership for black attendees. Oehmcke looked forward to the establishment of such a work “then those who come to us for membership can be directed to such.” Yet when asked if the Board of Deacons had a policy for following up with “colored people” Pastor Kuhnle admitted that they did not, but that the Sunday School did. Fred Janke disagreed, stating that the Sunday School never adopted a “definite colored policy.” No one at any level of leadership had. While very few were interested in allowing “colored” members, no official vote had been taken even by a committee, let alone the Advisory Board or the

⁷⁵ “Specially Called Advisory Board Meeting re: West Side Bible Study” January 31, 1958, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

congregation. Oehmcke interjected that a statement of some sort ought to be made to the church at large regarding what has been done with those “colored” attendees who have applied for membership. His next comment not only shifted the evening’s discussion back to the west side extension work, but further connected it to the expansion of a “colored work” in the immediate area around the church. “I am all for putting time and money into a sound, Baptist colored work here in Milwaukee. We should also push a work on the west side, and work on these matters simultaneously.” The handwriting on the wall was slowly becoming more legible.⁷⁶

There were some at the church who did not believe that leadership was giving the possible west side extension the attention it should have. A.B. Johnson referred to a letter Lynn Smith and Sam Himes wrote to the Board of Deacons that expressed that opinion. Johnson added that if GABC were to be involved in such a project, that it must be “strictly GARB” and Ernie C. agreed that the church had been “lax on taking a stand and a step in the direction of the west side work.” The Advisory Board, or at least George Oehmcke, it seemed, sought to rectify that slowness beginning at that January 31 Advisory Board meeting. In rapid succession he proposed that we “have a little search party on investigation concerning west side work” that could be done by a Fellowship of Baptist Home Missions field worker to “make a survey and get a nucleus together, and from there continue in the formation of a church.” Pastor Kuhnle cautioned that it must adhere to the same principles of GABC and Fred Jahnke offered that maybe Sam and

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Recall that it had previously been decided to keep secret all conversations regarding the possibility of a racially exclusive membership policy. White adults could become members on the basis of a written testimony of their conversion that they provided during an interview with one of the trustees. New converts were required to take a class that grounded their faith through study of the Bible.

Lynn ought to first be consulted before any plans were made, but Oehmcke was undeterred. He pushed ahead with a motion to form a committee with the following members: the present liaison committee (Gil Brueckner and A. B. Johnson), the chairman of the Board of Deacons, and Pastor Kuhnle. This committee, Oehmcke strategized, would then meet with Himes and Smith to fill them in on tonight's discussion, consider how they saw themselves fitting into the proposed plans, and then report back to the Board of Deacons. Oehmcke's idea was seconded and passed unanimously. Prior to adjourning, Earl Thielecke, offered that the next Advisory Board meeting "be a similar one as this and continue in our planning."⁷⁷

Despite this burst of enthusiasm, there was very little progress, and not even much discussion, on either issue over the next year. At the 1958 annual church meeting on May 21 it was announced that a line item titled "City Missions" had been added to the missions budget. However, there was no explanation of the proposed "work" or any detail on the amount allocated for it. Later that night moderator Jim Rigney responded to a question regarding the west side "work" that little had been done except that it had been approved by the Advisory Board at their January 31 meeting and they were looking for a place to house it. At least by the October 8 quarterly business meeting the church was able to let everyone know that two committees of two, Gil Brueckner and A.B. Johnson from the Deacons and Trustees Ed Newton and George Oehmcke had been appointed to study the West Side "work."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ 1958 annual meeting minutes, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archive; October 8, 1958 quarterly business meeting minutes, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archive.

Strangely enough, the fact that the boys' Sunday School class was meeting in the boiler room due to space constraints in the still-relatively new building was the issue that re-ignited discussion about the desirability of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church remaining in its current locations. During a portion of the agenda allocated to the open discussion of any issue at the January 28, 1959 quarterly congregational business meeting, Mrs. William Bock asked if the Deacons and Trustees were aware of the need for more space for Sunday School classrooms. Fred Jahnke, chair of the Deacon Board and acting moderator for the evening, replied that they were considering options, which prompted Rich Mueller to ask if the original plans for the current building included ways to add an additional wing to it. Although Jahnke admitted the plans did not, Mel Snow informed everyone present that was because of a lack of available land at the time when the architect was designing the current building. This may no longer be a problem, Earl Thielecke added, as the property just north of the church is said to be available. Fred Jahnke began to hum a familiar tune when he interjected that some people at the church are unsure about the wisdom of "expansion in this locality." The can of worms opened, opinions, questions, and answers wriggled free as the congregation spoke up. Rich Mueller asked Jahnke if there was a committee currently looking at future planning. There was not. The room was divided as whether to stay at 2nd and Garfield or go elsewhere. While Gary Geller was not sure it made sense to add a second story and Roger Best mentioned changes in the neighborhood and wanted to know if the city had bought the property north of the church, Ellis Lithgow spoke of their being in an "ideal location" due to its central location and free parking. He went on to encourage everyone present to pray about the reasons they had for wanting to leave lest we "make a mess of ourselves."

Others strove to find middle ground. Wes Matthew recommended creating two committees, the first to study and present to the church a ten-year plan for staying and the other to present a ten-year plan for moving. Ed Achterberg, on the other hand, thought it best to bypass committees and keep the present church building while also building a new one “out west” to “enlarge the Lord’s work.” Louise Jaeger, however, agreed with Wes Matthews on the need to study and again mentioned the idea of ten-year plans. More tellingly, she recommended the church once again check on population trends. After open discussion as to if there should be a committee to look into these matters Rev. Kuhnle clarified that the Advisory Board is the appropriate group to do so. Rich Mueller moved that they begin right away, which was seconded and passed by verbal vote.⁷⁹

As befitting his leadership role in the church, Rev. Kuhnle had made sure that the night’s agenda had a designated item for open discussion by members in attendance. Additionally, he came that evening with a previously prepared statement in which he reflected on his 18 years as pastor of GABC and reviewed the process it went through in the 1940s to build at the present site and outlined the choices regarding the future of the church as he saw it. Kuhnle deliberately scheduled himself directly after the discussion time, as the final agenda item of the night. His statement began by reiterating the factors that influenced the decision made eight years earlier to stay in their historic neighborhood. After consulting with city planners to ascertain the Milwaukee city government employees’ official perspective on racial shifts in residential areas, the congregation overwhelming voted on two separate occasions to build at N. 2nd and W.

⁷⁹ January 28, 1959 quarterly business meeting minutes, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archive; The fact that boys were being taught in the boiler room on Sunday mornings was one the fascinating pieces of information learned at the August 30, 2016 group interview.

Garfield. He noted that the results of those decisions provided GABC with a central location within the greater metropolitan area, which in turn helped facilitate the church sending members out to start three new churches in across the area and made GABC a destination church for many of the new members received during the last ten years.⁸⁰

Kuhnle continued by presenting what he believed to be the three courses of action available to the church concerning the future, a discussion made necessary, in part, since its growth was such that the present building, which was not yet ten years old, needed to be expanded in order for it to remain useful. Kuhnle's first option was to sell the present building and relocate to "an altogether new area." Next, he offered keeping the current building as a branch and moving most the congregation to a new location, as had been suggested "at a Board meeting." Finally, he said, the current facility could be expanded and ministry could continue from the present location. Kuhnle then proceeded to share his opinion on each of the options. Moving, he believed, would be a mistake because Milwaukee needs a "central aggressive fundamental Baptist witness" and leaving the current location would limit GABC's influence to whatever community they relocated. Neither would it work, he continued, to keep the present building as an outreach center and relocate most of the congregation and the bulk of ministry. He alleged that "the conceivable and almost inevitable result" would be for the present location to "decline and disintegrate." As he did not, however, offer any basis for this judgment it is not clear whether he thought black worshippers unable to sustain such an arrangement, an

⁸⁰ *A Program for Our Future* by Rev. William E. Kuhnle, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives. The new churches Kuhnle referred to were the Lake Drive Baptist Church in north suburban Bayside, the First Baptist Church of Caledonia, located south of the city and formerly known as Caddy Vista, and the Brookfield Baptist Church, in neighboring Waukesha County. Brookfield Baptist eventually changed its name to Elmbrook Church and became the largest Protestant congregation in Wisconsin during the tenure (1970-2000) of Stuart and Jill Briscoe.

unwillingness among most in his flock to support it, or some combination of both. Regardless, he expected that a physical separation in ministry would result in a “division of missionary interest and responsibility.” Such an outcome was unacceptable based upon GABC’s longstanding commitment to global and local mission work. Finally, he offered what he believed to be the best solution. GABC needed a Christian Education Building that can be a “center for evangelistic Bible teaching, Christian education, and missionary programs.” Such a facility could be built on the land currently owned by the church that was being used as a parking lot or by purchasing the property adjacent to the current building. Just as he highlighted the strategic nature of the church’s centrality within the metropolitan area as a deciding factor during the 1940s when discussion occurred regarding building the current facility, the expanded presence in the present location would allow for GABC to continue to send members to start new churches in newly populating areas of greater Milwaukee. He championed remaining and expanding as providing the church with “unlimited horizons of ministry” and being “God’s program for our church.”⁸¹

Unlike the previous year, the Advisory Board began to tackle the question of whether or not to stay put and expand or move elsewhere with purpose and energy. They began their March 8, 1959 meeting by utilizing charts depicting the church, their parking lot, and neighboring properties to guide a discussion about the sizes and presumed purchase prices for land adjacent to the church. They did not make much progress before George Oehmcke redirected them by having church clerk Della Mae Gifford read the motion made at the most recent quarterly business meeting. As it made clear, the

⁸¹ Ibid.

congregation had directed them to decide whether or not GABC should stay in their current location. Only after that decision was made did it make sense to talk about the possibility of buying additional land to expand the present building. As all present shared their perspectives it was apparent that everyone agreed with Pastor Kuhnle's stance that staying and expanding in order to be a church that started other congregations throughout the metropolitan area was the route to go. Yet only Roy Schneider verbalized why this plan was necessary. "I think it is a good deal to stay here and then have our sights raised as to expansion and reaching others whom we can't get to come here." Dave Miller was even more frank. "In presenting this to the church it should be laid out very carefully. We will never be a neighborhood church." Later that evening the board unanimously passed a motion to recommend that the congregation remain and expand the physical plant to include "a modern Christian education building" for the purpose of becoming "a center for evangelism, Bible teaching, Christian education and missions" with the expectation that God would use them in "the establishment of new Baptist churches...in the outlying sections of the greater Milwaukee area." Despite that vote, Schneider and Miller's comments pointed out crucial deficiencies in the plan. Furthermore, they clearly revealed GABC's decidedly un-Christlike approach to the black residents in the neighborhood. As Schneider's comment made clear, even if it was left unsaid, that the vast majority of white people living in or moving to the suburbs would not remain at or join a church in GABC's location due to changing racial dynamics in the area. Likewise, Miller's recognition should have served as a reminder that if they did not allow black people to

become members, there will soon be no one left in the neighborhood that is allowed to join the church. Curiously, both voted in favor of the recommendation to stay.⁸²

The big decision out of the way, or so they thought, that summer the Advisory Board turned to improving the atmosphere of the church to “get unsaved folk to services.” At an estimated cost of \$6000-7000, however, they had difficulty coming to a consensus on whether spending that much on air conditioning made sense. Yet, it was not long before this debate over air conditioning once again caused them to count the cost of staying in the neighborhood. When deciding whether to postpone the air conditioning decision by two weeks to allow for gathering more data, “question was raised as to whether matter of location of church and remaining here, has been settled.” The meeting minutes record neither who asked the question, nor who provided the answer, “no.” In what was perhaps a referendum on staying or leaving, the tally regarding the air conditioning came in at twelve for the expenditure, and remaining put, and nine against the capital outlay and in favor of leaving.⁸³

Unsettled, to be sure, by the fact that a meeting about air conditioning had managed to resurrect the now seemingly ubiquitous question of location, the group met again eight days later. Pastor Kuhnle took control. Given that so many members were currently on vacation and therefore could not gather, he suggested that action on the air conditioning be postponed to the next church-wide quarterly business meeting, scheduled for September 23. On the surface his next idea seemed a bit odd. Maybe a letter ought to be sent to all members to provide them with the facts they needed to make an informed decision. Ellis Lithgow added that a tentative agenda should be included in the letter.

⁸² Advisory Board meeting minutes, March 8, 1959, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives.

⁸³ Ibid.

Momentum had taken over. Fred Jahnke brought up that “the other recommendation of the Advisory Board re staying in this location or leaving here is also to be brought up.”⁸⁴

Rarely were letters sent to members of GABC asking them to attend a meeting. Pastor Kuhnle’s September 14, 1959 communication demonstrated his belief that important decisions about the future of the church were at hand. Indeed, there was more at stake than providing relief to sweaty summer worshippers, as the letter made clear. The first two of four announced “important” agenda items addressed staying in the neighborhood and utilizing their parking lot to build the needed Christian Education Building, or building it on land acquired by buying the two properties north of the church. Kuhnle and other leaders seemed to know that the discussion would not be easy. The letter referred to the fact that Kuhnle and the joint boards – Trustees and Deacons – of the church wanted it to be a “family night” and had therefore arranged for a catered dinner to make attending more appetizing. As befitting his role as pastor and with a nod to the gravity of the items being discussed, Kuhnle ended the letter by requesting “Let us be in prayer that in all matters we might have the mind of the Lord.”⁸⁵

While it is unclear if the dinner succeeded in making everyone feel at home, the prayer requested by pastor Kuhnle did not result in everyone coming to the same understanding of God’s plan for their congregation. Despite the Advisory Board recommendation to stay at Second and Garfield and expand by building a modern Christian Education Center passing 121 to 39, there is evidence beyond the yeas and nays that some on both sides held strong opinions. During discussion Ernie Cochran attempted

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ September 14, 1959 letter from Pastor Kuhnle to GABC members, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek church archives.

to amend the recommendation before the congregation by adding that GABC should “take immediate active interest” in creating branch churches in outlying areas. While this endeavor was to be funded by taking half of the money currently in the “Program of Progress” fund, a sum of \$8250, the motion to amend was ruled out of order with no explanation or evidence of further discussion on the issue recorded. Prior to adjourning, however, Roger Dauchy moved that at the next quarterly business meeting leadership report to the congregation about the efforts being made to expand ministry throughout the Milwaukee area by starting new congregations. Tellingly, no one mentioned outreach to “colored” residents in the neighborhood and the congregation voted two to one against installing air conditioning.⁸⁶

Although the agenda for and discussion at the January 20, 1960 quarterly churchwide business meeting made it appear as if everything was finally settled in terms of staying in the neighborhood, the Advisory Board meeting two weeks later dispelled that notion. Among the issues brought up during the period of the meeting designed for open discussion was “the matter of people leaving our church because of this location.” Sam Himes, who along with Lynn Smith had been pushing the west side branch “work” for years, immediately noted that Sunday School attendance was “15% colored” and that neighborhood visitation – presumably only to white neighbors – was “not proving too successful.” Furthermore, “If we were in a different area, we could grow. I can’t conscientiously give toward building up on this corner, for it just doesn’t seem wise to me.” Fred Jahnke confirmed Hime’s opinion. “Sentiment of the Deacons is no longer for remaining at present location.” George Oehmcke pushed back, but not too hard,

⁸⁶ Quarterly church business meeting minutes, September 23, 1959, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives.

“concerning the non-whites” by pointing out that the Chinese Bible class now being held at GABC was evidence that not everyone agreed with the deacons. As such he advocated waiting on making any decision about expansion until “we know what we should do.” Ernie Cochran pointed out the error in Oehmcke’s logic, however, when he stated “The fact this is again up for discussion is the leading of the Lord and an answer to prayer.” Perhaps, Henry Franke suggested, it could be answer to two prayers. “We have been looking for a place to establish a colored work. I’ve been thinking that if we move away from here we could use this structure for a colored work.”⁸⁷

Although segments of the church had been periodically wrestling with whether or not to stay in the neighborhood for a dozen years, when the decision to leave was made it came quickly and decisively. Mel Snow was the first to hint at what caused the change of heart. He began by admitting that a year earlier he was all for staying, but no longer believed that it wise to make any more capital investments in the neighborhood. He noted that the “past year’s happenings are more than in previous years.” Surveys of Spring Creek Church members who attended GABC while it met at 2nd and Garfield provide helpful insight into the troubling events occurring around in the neighborhood around the church. Flora Schreiber specified that those “happenings” were such that women of the church were afraid of coming to the neighborhood, especially for evening meetings. Survey respondents also noted that perspectives on safety paved the way for wholesale consideration of moving out of the area. While Rolf Altwein remembered that the original site was “in transition,” Beverly Melder was more blunt, as she recalled that “the neighborhood was deteriorating.” Meanwhile, Jon and Catherine Piering, along with

⁸⁷ Advisory Board meeting minutes, February 4, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archive.

Evelyn Lamb, all recollected their excitement at the idea of moving to a safer location. Pat Friedkin saw the fact that the area around 2nd and Garfield was becoming a poor neighborhood the cause of the rash of car break-ins. Pat Hishmer provided more detail. She noted that Miss Tapper, who oversaw the primary department, had her purse stolen from her car weekly and eventually used this unfortunate occurrence as an evangelistic opportunity. She began to leave a purse with nothing but Bible tracts in it in car each Sunday Morning. One immediate practical result of the rise in crime against church members was that the church contracted with the police to secure the parking lot during evening services.⁸⁸

Even Pastor Kuhnle cited the crime wave as a legitimate reason for considering a relocation. Whereas he reminded everyone that when the Advisory Board previously counseled the congregation that they should stay at Second and Garfield, they did so based upon his recommendation. He recalled feeling at that time “very sorry that consecrated Baptist people would have left our church for the reason of colored people coming in.” Now, however, he recognized that they were united in their concern about the future of the church and noted that he “would be most agreeable to remove from here to another location.” He believed that doing so would be advantageous to maintaining a city-wide ministry that would more easily serve their “widely scattered” congregation. Following his explanation that the members of GABC should once again be asked their perspective on staying or leaving, the Advisory Board unanimously passed a motion to

⁸⁸ Advisory Board meeting minutes, February 4, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church archives; Various responses to survey of Spring Creek Church members who attended the church while it was still Garfield Avenue Baptist Church and meeting at 2nd and Garfield. They were responding to the following question: “What excited you about moving to the Wauwatosa site?” The hiring of police to patrol the parking lot during evening services was mentioned during the group interview.

recommend that the church reconsider its previous decision to stay and expand at the present location. Additionally, the board passed a motion to stop negotiations to acquire additional property in the area for expansion. Finally, they successfully moved to hold a congregational meeting on February 24 to discuss these issues. Pastor Kuhnle informed the congregation of these decisions in a February 17 letter that also served as an invitation to attend the meeting scheduled for the following week. The letter ended with the following:

I trust that each one of you will give prayerful consideration to what I believe to be one of the most, if not the most important decision that our church has yet to be called upon to make. I plead that each one will come with a mind open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to doing the will of God. May the Holy Spirit move upon our hearts so that we shall have the mind of Christ and do the will of God. God has great days ahead and a tremendous ministry before Garfield Avenue Baptist Church.

Given that Kuhnle recently confessed that moving because of “colored people coming in” would have been unfortunate, but seemed to have no trouble doing so because of minor property crime, the letter’s closing admonition seemed to be asking God to divinely bless a human decision.⁸⁹

Although the February 24 meeting minutes note that there was “much discussion from the floor” about the Advisory Board recommendations they had gathered to address, church clerk Della Mae Gifford only recorded two specific reasons cited for potentially moving. At least in her mind, but most likely because they had dominated the conversation, the changing neighborhood and “increase of colored children in S. S. [Sunday School] and Boys Club” were offered as rationale for relocation. Evidently, those were enough to impel action by the congregation on some of the recommendations

⁸⁹ Advisory Board meeting minutes, February 4, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1 Spring Creek Church archives.

before them. As soon as the discussion ended the church overwhelming voted to immediately stop all negotiations for property exchange or purchase in the neighborhood and “protect the Trustees and allow them to get out of any commitment.” Perhaps needing to proceed incrementally given the emotional weight of the issues before them, the meeting adjourned without further action.⁹⁰

The Advisory Board, on the other hand, seemed unencumbered by nostalgia and pushed forward at their next meeting on May 8. Kuhnle set the tone by remarking that two attitudes currently dominated the church. First, that ministry in the current location is “stopped and dead” and that “we are going to move from this location right away.” He was really saying that GABC would be unable to maintain a vibrant, growing outreach to white people given the widespread arrival of “colored” people in the neighborhood and they therefore needed to move to a location where only whites lived. Given these realities, and the fact that the annual church meeting was just around the corner on the 18th, Kuhnle expressed to those gathered that the board needed to make decisions that night so that they could bring more recommendations to that meeting. After discussion, they settled on proposing the selection of a twelve-person planning committee that would be tasked with bringing before the church options about where they could move. The committee would be made up of two Deacons, two Trustees, two Sunday School teachers, two from the Women’s Society, one Ambassador, one Harvester, and two at-large members of the congregation. The only caveat was that no members of the same family could serve on the committee. This motion, which passed at the annual meeting,

⁹⁰ Special Business meeting, February 24, 1960, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives.

was the only agenda item at that gathering that addressed the impending relocation of the church.⁹¹

Members of the newly-formed planning committee met jointly with the Advisory Board on August 15, 1960 to discuss the findings from the 308 surveys distributed that summer. (Each household received one survey and was asked to note how many church members lived there.) The results of the 146 returned questionnaires were decidedly mixed. GABC would not leave its historic locale unanimously. Individually, each of the survey's two main questions were straightforward; together, however, the queries ended up providing an even murkier outlook than one alone would have done. The first question asked respondents to answer yes or no to "preference for remaining at the current site." 49 returns, representing 81 members, voted yes, while 80 families, representing 170 members, voted against staying. The seemingly redundant second question regarded "preference for moving from the present site." Strangely enough the results were not simply the inverse of those from the first question. 72 families, representing 158 members, voted to move, while 43 returns, representing 72 members, expressed their desire to stay. Either way, the results revealed that one-third of the congregation wanted to stay while two-thirds thought leaving was best. Additionally, the surveys questioned whether or not people would continue to financially support the church regardless of if it stayed or relocated. Significantly, an overwhelming majority of people commented that they would continue to give money regardless of where they church was meeting.⁹²

⁹¹ Advisory Board meeting minutes, May 8, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives; Annual Church meeting minutes, May 18, 1960, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church Archives.

⁹² Advisory Board meeting minutes, August 15, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives. Comments from the group interview confirm the split perspective among members regarding staying versus leaving. One gentleman remarked that the atmosphere grew so tense that the prospect of moving nearly caused the church to split.

After digesting the survey results, the joint meeting meandered a bit before landing on the next action steps in moving forward, and out of the neighborhood. Pastor Kuhnle shared that he had recently spoken with a business owner on Third Street, as well as an engineer from the city, and they both reiterated that it would be many years before the City's plans to improve the area between Lloyd Street and Meinecke Avenue would come to fruition. The impact of this reality was compounded when Frank Ladd presented a map he had prepared that showed the geographic distribution of members' homes throughout the Milwaukee area. So, in addition to the promised Third Street renovation, which GABC hoped would serve as a bulwark against the steady migration of black residents towards the church, the map provided stark evidence that the membership of the church generally did not live anywhere near it. Accordingly, the Advisory Board passed two recommendations that evening. The Trustees, in cooperation with the Planning Committee, were granted authority to look at the possibilities for selling the current building and to begin investigating locations to move to in the near future.⁹³

Authorization in hand, the Planning Committee began working purposefully. They quickly produced a report that briefly summarized the events of the past few months, laid out the pros and cons of what they considered to be the three options before the church in terms of where it would be located, provided the results of the survey, and offered six recommendations for next steps. The committee's delineation of the options before the church as well as their recommendations to the church both provide useful insight. They recognized three possible courses of action: remain at the present site, remain and expand across the metropolitan area by establishing branch churches, or

⁹³ Advisory Board meeting minutes, August 15, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives.

relocate to another area. The true value of this exercise, however, was not the listing of these well-known alternatives, but rather what the committee viewed as the advantages and disadvantages of each arrangement. Thus, while the benefits of staying were fairly generic – proximity to downtown, good public transportation, free and ample parking, no mortgage on the building – the hindrances to doing so would be far more consequential. They admit an “inability with present conditions” to maintain a vibrant witness in the neighborhood through Sunday School, Boys Club, Vacation Bible School, and Church membership. Even though that inability was wholly caused by the church’s refusal to worship with the growing black population in the neighborhood, the committee also offered, at least by their own way-of-thinking, some more defensible reasons. The “general deterioration of the neighborhood” led to concerns about “the safety of our people and property” as well as especially deterred “women and young people” from attending “evening and special meetings.” Finally, they understood that numerical growth would have to come from “remote areas,” which was unlikely, though they did not explicitly state it.⁹⁴

Remaining and expanding by establishing churches at the edges of the metropolitan area did not offer any substantial advantages other than not having to expand the physical plant at 2nd and Garfield. In addition to not being “a long-range program” given the previously listed disadvantages, it also “would divide the church” and “adversely affect our present missionary program.” While the eventuality of splitting the church is easy to understand, perhaps the latter concern grew from their suspicion that a

⁹⁴ Report of the Planning Committee, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives. As for the “free and ample” parking advantage, many businesses on 3rd Street allowed church members to use their parking lots on Sunday mornings.

dwindling membership base would eventually limit GABC's financial commitment to missions. Not surprisingly, the advantages of relocating mirror the disadvantages of staying put. Doing so gave an "ability to reach immediate neighborhood and surrounding area [of the new location], as well as maintaining a metropolitan church." Additionally, they endorsed the idea that "our Sunday School could be more effective in feeding the Church" in addition to "greater opportunities for Sunday School, Boys Club, D.V.B.S., young peoples' activities, etc." The first three pros fed into the fourth, "with a broader base our missionary program could expand" and would resolve a problem that was occurring across the city and the country, although it had never been mentioned at GABC – "better able to hold present suburban members." As for the disadvantages of relocating, only cost and the loss of free parking were listed.⁹⁵

The report of the Planning Committee ended with its plans for GABC's new beginning. The first two recommendations, which formed the basis for the remaining four, were to sell the current building, land, and equipment, and to purchase land "in a suitable area of the west or north-west section of Greater Milwaukee" for building one or more structures as necessary so that the church could "continue and expand our ministry, under God, of spreading the Gospel of our Lord." With these goals in mind, the report went on to propose authorizing the Board of Trustees to identify two or more locations to move to as well as seeking out prospective purchasers for the current building. Once accomplished, the Trustees were to bring the options before the Advisory Board in order for them to make a recommendation to the congregation. Additionally, they felt it best to form a committee made up of pastor Kuhnle and people from all departments of the

⁹⁵ Ibid.

church to assess the needs of the new building. The findings of this committee were also to be brought before the Advisory Board so that they may be incorporated into their endorsement to the congregation. Finally, prudence dictated creating a building fund to realize the above recommendations.⁹⁶

Now well-oiled, the decision-making process kicked into high gear. The location committee set Silver Spring Drive as a northern boundary, committed to going no farther west than Highway 100, needed to be at least at 35th Street on the east, and settled on Bluemound Road as the southern border in terms of where they would like the new church to be built. Within this area, which comprised both Milwaukee and Wauwatosa, the committee initially identified four lots but “had not made it known that Garfield was looking.” At a December 11, 1960 meeting of the Planning Committee and the Advisory Board, the availability of parking was the first item discussed in relation to the four sites scattered across the identified area. After Location Committee chair Frank Ladd presented a map showing where all GABC members lived, the conversation shifted directions. At first some were curious whether the congregation hoped to serve as a metropolitan or a community church. Pastor Kuhnle’s perspective, that both is ideal and should be considered when selecting where they go next, was well received by all. Talk of “reaching the community” naturally transitioned to “some discussion” on “the trend of the moving of colored residents.” Given that it was no secret among those gathered or the church membership at large that GABC was moving in large part because they were unwilling to offer the hand of fellowship to black worshippers, and their historic neighborhood was quickly turning over, it is strange that the word “omit” was

⁹⁶ Ibid.

handwritten in the margin next to this item in the typed meeting minutes. However, as Glenn Franke later in the meeting asked if the planning committee “had consulted with City officials as to the future movement of the colored in our city” it is clear that GABC leadership wanted to be sure that they didn’t move to a location where they would, in their own minds, have to go through the current process again at some point in the future. Prior to adjourning, all agreed that the church needed to vote to authorize the sale of the current property as well as the raising of funds to purchase new land and build the necessary structures on it for fruitful ministry.⁹⁷

Curiously, while the congregation wrestled with these issues at the January 4, 1961 quarterly business meeting, they once again failed to wrestle with what the Bible said about such attitudes and fears. That evening, Pastor Kuhnle presented his most public and strongly worded assessment yet of why they had to move to a location far away from Milwaukee’s “colored” residents. Amidst discussion of whether or not the current building should be sold when new land is purchased and built upon, Kuhnle reiterated that keeping the current building would “hinder the program of expansion of our church. An integrated church is unscriptural and completely impractical.” No one at the meeting challenged the pastor’s decidedly unbiblical proclamation regarding the integrated churches. He hoped and prayed that GABC would be “of one mind as a people and a church” and do it for the “the ongoing cause of Jesus Christ.” Keeping the current building would result in losing money and effectiveness as they strove to capture “the opportunity to go all-out in a ministry to the greater Milwaukee area.” Despite Kuhnle

⁹⁷ Advisory Board and Planning Committee Meeting, December 11, 1960, Box 13, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives.

providing no Biblical evidence to support his claim regarding the unbiblical nature of different races worshipping together, Mel Snow did his best to back up his pastor. In addition to reminding all present that responses to the Planning Committee's surveys found that members were two to one in favor of moving, he relied upon the counsel the Rev. B.M. Nottage gave twelve years prior that GABC should not integrate. Discussion continued as many proposed amendments failed. Only six people, for instance, thought it a good idea to strike the proposal to sell the current building from the original Planning Committee recommendation being discussed. Eventually the committee's whole recommendation passed without being amended and the meeting adjourned allowing the 187 members present to leave just after 10 PM. It had not been too late to finally decide that changing neighbors called for changing neighborhoods.⁹⁸

* * * *

Neither the November 1963 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article "Garfield Church Will Move to Northwest Side" nor the *Milwaukee Journal's* "Garfield Church to Break Ground" reported upon the fact that a "colored" problem caused the congregation's leaders and members to initially consider moving and was the issue that continued to propel them away from the neighborhood where their church had worshipped for 68 years. Rather, the *Sentinel's* article, which was much longer and contained many more details, offered only that most of the church's 520 members "now live" on the northwest side and, quoting Rev. Kuhnle, "we will be in a better position to make a bigger contribution to a larger community." The *Sentinel* article demonstrated this by noting the

⁹⁸ Minutes from January 4, 1961 quarterly business meeting, Box 16, Folder 1, Spring Creek Church archives.

seating capacity of the new sanctuary, 750, that 900 students could be accommodated in the Bible school wing of the building, and that the parking lot could fit 175 cars. The church took comfort, though, Kuhnle mentioned, in the fact that the neighborhood they were leaving contained many other churches. The article, however, mentioned only two of them, Epworth Methodist and Epiphany Lutheran. Notably, both were churches with white congregations that would eventually disband due to substantially decreased membership, a trend that occurred throughout the inner core of Milwaukee to churches that failed to racially integrate.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ City of Milwaukee Historic Designation Study Report for Epiphany Lutheran Church. <http://www.city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityHPC/DesignatedReports/vticnf/HDEpiphany.pdf> accessed September 23, 2016.

THE COMPROMISE PROBLEM

“Racial segregation should be continued in the Methodist Church, for the foreseeable future, a 70-member Methodist commission reported last week. There was no minority dissent to the report, which was based on four years of study and hearings in 24 cities. Moreover, leaders of the 360,000 Methodist Negroes (out of the ten million total membership) agreed with the decision.”¹⁰⁰

Time, January 18, 1960

The lead paragraph of the *Time* story seems to clearly demonstrate why Kingsley Methodist Church failed to become an integrated congregation. It ended 87 years of ministry on Milwaukee’s near-west side – 1710 W. Walnut Street – with its last service in June 1980. Yet a closer examination of Kingsley’s preparation to encounter people of a different race shows that the process was both more purposeful and hopeful than would have been expected given the Methodist denomination’s convoluted and troubled racial history. Despite years as the city’s largest Methodist church, Kingsley was unable to survive as its all-white neighborhood transitioned from suburban wealth and elegance to an overcrowded multiethnic area beset by poverty. In spite of the Methodist denomination’s well-known racism, Milwaukee was among at least a dozen and a half cities included in an effort by some Methodist leaders and congregants to understand and equip local congregations to combat racism’s pervasive realities. Additionally, even before Milwaukee’s growing black population moved into the neighborhood around Kingsley, the church annually met with St. James Methodist Church, a black Methodist congregation located less than a mile to Kingsley’s east. Despite also being a Methodist

¹⁰⁰ “Religion: Relative Route to Absolute,” *Time*, January 18, 1960.

congregation, administratively St. James existed in the denomination's all-black Central Jurisdiction. The racially segregated denominational structure was insisted upon by Methodist churches in the south when the denomination reunited in 1939. As it became clear that African Americans would soon be living in the area around Kingsley the pastors and some members of the congregation made genuine attempts to recognize and address the challenges and opportunities that would soon be right outside the church. Targeted studies in adult Sunday School classes, panel discussions with clergy and members from a local black Methodist congregation, and a variety of outreach and service programs for neighborhood youth were among the strategies Kingsley employed. Nonetheless, nearly 35 years of learning and serving were, in the end, simply unable to overcome the legacy of racial compromise that is the story of Methodism in the United States.¹⁰¹

Kingsley Methodist's unsuccessful response to the arrival of African-Americans in the neighborhood around the church reveals four important lessons. First, the Methodist denomination's equivocal response to slavery from its earliest days up through the 1844-1845 regional split between its northern and southern factions in the United States heavily influenced decisions made in the 1939 Plan of Union which reunited the

¹⁰¹ Naming conventions of various branches of Methodism in the United States are somewhat confusing. Though typically referred to as the Methodist Church, the official name of the movement started by John Wesley was the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC). A variety of splits and mergers have occurred throughout its history resulting in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church-South, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), and most recognizably, after the 1968 merger between the MEC and the United Brethren, the United Methodist Church. There are also many smaller Methodist sects, often due to congregations continuing to conduct services in various European languages, that do not figure into Kingsley's journey. For the purpose of this chapter, the term Methodist will be used to describe the Methodist Episcopal Church. All other branches will be referred to with either their complete name or appropriate acronym. The machinations which led to pertinent branches will be described throughout the chapter; "Pastors Here, In Reich, Plan to Trade Pulpits," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 12, 1955.

Methodist Episcopal Church – South with its northern brethren. Second, the explicitly race-based governing structure created by the 1939 merger subliminally, yet profoundly, influenced the views of most white Methodist adherents, including those at Kingsley, as to the impropriety of integrated congregations. As a result, a vast majority of white Methodists saw black Methodists specifically, and black people in general, as different from themselves. These white Methodists lived out their faith by paternalistically doing things for their black neighbors, much like a social service agency, rather than inviting them to sit together weekly in the pews at Sunday service, attend adult Sunday school, and even to become friends. Finally, widespread white flight to Milwaukee’s suburbs further cemented notions of racial hierarchy in the minds of most Kingsley members, thereby adding another obstacle to Kingsley welcoming black neighbors as equals within their congregation.

* * *

At its inception in December 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church’s (MEC) hierarchal structure was designed so that decision-making began at local levels. Briefly, local congregations were grouped together by region into annual conferences, which met each year to discuss and vote upon social issues, thereby establishing church rules. Quadrennially, all annual conferences assembled at the General Conference to institute church-wide policy and procedures, which were added to *The Discipline*, the written record of the beliefs and rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The arrangement, which is described more fully in Appendix A, “Methodist Governing Structure,” had the

unintended consequence of the General Conferences settling divergent annual conference-level opinions by compromise. Nowhere was this more evident, and impactful, than in the gradual evaporation of the denomination's initially strident anti-slavery policies.¹⁰²

The MEC's actions regarding slavery failed to live up to the ideals it proclaimed about the peculiar institution's evils. Though Methodist founder John Wesley considered slavery as the "sum of all villainies," the denomination's motivation to "extirpate this abomination from among us" did not last long. Methodists throughout the South soon recognized that their hardline stance against slavery would undoubtedly hinder their message to the region's white population and thereby limit growth in states economically dependent on the enslavement of Africans. As a result, denunciations against slavery and rules that proposed the expulsion of slaveholding Methodists from leadership in the denomination were never enforced. Furthermore, Methodists decided that all previous denominational rules regarding slavery could only be applied inasmuch as they did not contradict the state laws. As many southern states had laws that forbade the manumission of slaves, this provision effectively forestalled efforts by those against slavery from purging it from the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Emory Stevens Bucke, ed. *The History of American Methodism in Three Volumes*, Vol.1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 185-240. Appendix A of this paper offers a more complete description of the various levels of MEC organization.

¹⁰³ Quoted material from original sources as referenced in the following: Donald G. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 3-29; William B. McClain, *Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest?* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1984), 1-14, 55-63; Dwight W. Culver, *Negro Segregation in the Methodist Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 42-50. Grant S. Shockley, ed. *Heritage & Hope: The African-American Presence in United Methodism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 23-38.

The unwillingness to enforce their dictates against slavery was but one instance of racism in the MEC. Methodism was initially quite popular among poor people of all ethnicities because of its message that everyone, regardless of social standing, was equal at the foot of the cross. In some instances, black preachers, even those who were slaves, were permitted to preach to congregations with white and black members. In the late eighteenth century multi-racial Methodist congregations were established in major cities along the eastern seaboard. By 1816, black worshipers made up nearly one-quarter of the almost 215,000 members of the MEC. These congregations were short-lived, however, as black worshippers and preachers were soon forced to sit apart from white Methodists. This action resulted in black Methodists leaving the MEC and establishing their own denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AME-Zion).¹⁰⁴

Like the nation as a whole during the first half of the nineteenth century, Methodists struggled to adequately resolve differences of opinion about slavery. The impasse eventually had dire institutional consequences. Concerned with the growth of the Methodist Church in the southern states, yet hamstrung by the increasingly prevalent existence of state laws prohibiting emancipation, compromise once again crept in. At the 1816 General Conference the anti-slavery position as documented in the *Methodist Discipline* was altered so that state law superseded the Methodist position when considering a slaveholder for a position of authority within the church. Additionally,

¹⁰⁴ McClain and Shockley note that of the mainline Protestant denominations in the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, only Methodists and Baptists regularly allowed black people to preach; As for interracial congregations, St. George's in Philadelphia had 270 white and 17 black members in 1787. New York's John Street Church had 290 white members and 70 black members in 1789. Baltimore's Calvert Church was the largest, with 505 white and 342 black members. W.C. Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions* (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension), Vol. I, p. 268, cited by McClain, p 18. Shockley, *Heritage*, pp 39-44.

white Methodist leaders in the South who had previously been unreservedly anti-slavery now stressed the Biblical injunction that slaves obey their masters.¹⁰⁵

As abolitionist fervor increased throughout the North and within portions of the Methodist church there, southern Methodists became more intransigent, despite some who still tacitly disapproved of the institution. The disagreement grew more prominent during the General Conferences of 1832, 1836, and 1840, as some moderates in the North allied themselves with southern churchmen to forestall any drastic action against slaveholding Methodists. However, Methodists in the North who remained against the existence of slavery in the MEC did not relent in their efforts to purge it during those meetings. In turn, southerners insisted that Methodists ought to endorse the spiritual and moral improvement of slaves without agitating for their freedom. Further attempts at compromise during the 1844 General Conference failed to resolve the impasse and a Plan of Separation was overwhelmingly adopted by the delegates at the General Conference. Two years later the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was established. The fruit of compromise was division.¹⁰⁶

While discussions on a rapprochement began shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, serious efforts at reunification did not begin in earnest until the second decade of the twentieth century. The Joint Commission on Unification, whose fifty members – forty-eight white and two black – were evenly divided between the MEC and the MEC, South, began meeting in 1916. Past disagreement and compromise over the “status of the Negro” was still a contentious issue and caused numerous delays. Northern integrationists

¹⁰⁵ Culver, *Segregation*, 42-50; Mathews, *Slavery*, 32-49. Colossians 3:22, Ephesians 6:5, and 1 Peter 2:18 were the verses pro-slavery advocates relied upon to justify this transition.

¹⁰⁶ Mathews, *Slavery*, 113-211; Culver, *Segregation*, 42-52.

wanted the full participation of black MEC members in the reunited denomination while southerners generally preferred that they leave the MEC and join with one of the historic black Methodist churches. By 1919, after gathering six times, the Commission fashioned a compromise proposal that allowed black Methodists to be in the MEC but administratively segregated them in their own jurisdiction. Many commissioners viewed the arrangement as a victory since it marked the potential reconciliation of the nine million members of the MEC and the MEC, South. Yet not all Methodists agreed. It took twenty more years and multiple failed attempts at each group's quadrennial general conferences before the merger was consummated in 1939. The final result was neither unanimous, nor integrated, despite rationalizations that attempted to promote achievement on the latter.¹⁰⁷

The 1939 merger of the MEC, and the MEC, South, officially sanctioned racial segregation for the first time in the history of Methodist Church. The plan created six governing jurisdictions each with the power to elect its own bishop and internal leadership structure over annual conferences and churches. Five of the jurisdictions – Northeastern, Southeastern, North Central, South Central, and Western – were organized geographically. The sixth, the incongruous Central jurisdiction, housed all of the black conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church no matter where in the country they were located. Apologists for the caste system championed the fact that bishops and other

¹⁰⁷ Dow Kirkpatrick, "Early Efforts at Reunion" in Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *History of American Methodism in Three Volumes, Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964) 664-71. Kirkpatrick notes that it is unknown whether the two sides were able to unite because they agreed upon the cause of the 1844 separation or had merely sidestepped the issue altogether; Blum, *Reforging*, 87-119. This compromise caused consternation among black Methodists in the North. Leaders in the AME Zion denomination lamented that "the prejudice of caste that still exists in the mother church." Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 81-125.

leaders from the Central would have equal rights and authority with white churchmen at the General Conference and other church-wide bodies, such as the General Boards and the Council of Bishops. Despite this rationale, black delegates were aghast. Thirty-six of the forty-seven voted against the plan and the other eleven abstained. (These delegates “represented” more than 330,000 black members in the MEC, which accounted for more than half of black Protestants in the country attending so-called “white” Protestant denominations.) White delegates, on the other hand, were thrilled at the thought of the reunification of the two largest Methodist groups in the country and voted overwhelming in favor of the plan. The co-existence of shame and joy was the result of a process of unification that sacrificed in-depth theological discussion in favor of social comfort, institutional growth, expediency in decision-making.¹⁰⁸

Internal and external criticism regarding the Central Jurisdiction soon followed its creation. Some at the 1944 and 1948 General Conferences called for its elimination, to no avail. In March 1946 the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), an ecumenical organization made up of more than thirty Protestant denominations, resolved to work toward a “non-segregated church and a non-segregated society.” The MEC was the only denomination to object to the resolution. Across the country a few Methodist leaders worked within the confines of denominational rules to promote integration. In 1948 New York Bishop G.

¹⁰⁸ McClain, *Black People*, 75-82; Culver, *Negro Segregation*, 60-78; Dwight W. Culver points out that black people in the Methodist Church had three options regarding their choice of where to be members: a “predominantly white church in a white annual conference, a Negro church in a white annual conference, or a Negro church in a Negro annual conference and jurisdiction.” While there were no rules in the *Methodist Discipline* that required them to choose the third option, 95 percent did. Davis, *Methodist Unification*, 54-62. In “Erasing the Methodist Color Line,” *The Christian Century*, April 21, 1948, 349-50; *The Proceedings of the Joint Commission on Unification of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918-1920; Nashville: Smith and Lamar for the Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1918-1920) 1:162, 184, 2:373.

Bromley Oxnam reopened Brooklyn's formerly all-white James Methodist Church as an interracial congregation. Two years later, Alexander P. Shaw, a black man, was named bishop of the all-white Southern California-Arizona annual conference. By the early 1950s black and white MEC churches in cities throughout the North Central and Northeastern Jurisdictions brought their congregations together annually for Race-Relations Sunday. By 1956, the General Conference passed Amendment IX to the MEC constitution, which allowed for black churches and annual conferences to voluntarily relocate into white annual conferences and jurisdictions so long as the move was approved by two-thirds of the members of all MEC bodies affected by the transition. Recent demographic changes in Milwaukee made it such that these denominational issues would soon become salient there. ¹⁰⁹

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In *Cross and Flame in Wisconsin: The Story of United Methodism in the Badger State*, William Blake, who served as Kingsley's pastor from 1960 to 1966, noted that

¹⁰⁹ Dwight W. Culver, "Segregation in the Methodist Church," *Christian Century*, April 14, 1948, 325-326. It is noteworthy that the General Association of Regular Baptists, which the Garfield Avenue Baptist Church aligned itself in 1937, was not a member of the Federal Council Churches, once again demonstrating that it had removed itself from interaction with people who may have been able to educate them and challenge their notions of the appropriateness of inter-racial fellowships. "Open Interracial Methodist Church: Bishop Oxnam Welcomes First Negro Unit to New York Conference Under New Authority," *The Christian Century*, October 27, 1948, 1150; "Negro Bishop Presides Over White Church Conference," *The Christian Century*, July 19, 1950, 861. "Churches Unite in Brotherhood," *The Christian Century*, March 17, 1954, 350. "Methodist Women Seek End to Segregation," *Christian Century*, December 24, 1947, 1574. Peter C. Murray, "The Racial Crisis in the Methodist Church," *Methodist History*, 26:1 (October 1987), 3-14; "The Methodist General Conference: A Second Glance," *Christianity and Crisis*, June 11, 1956, 73-74. The strategy of volunteerism was appealing to many integrationists as it was both non-coercive, which was better than coercion, which seemed "un-Christian" to some, as well as could eventually end the Central Jurisdiction without the approval of leaders from the Southeastern and South Central Jurisdictions by simply removing all member churches and annual conferences from it.

racial discrimination existed in Wisconsin even before the widespread arrival of black migrants from the South that began in earnest in the late 1940s. He cited a 1940 MEC Wisconsin Conference Social Service Commission report that delineated the following realities: African-Americans were not allowed to live in many Wisconsin communities, most department stores refused to hire them as clerks, they were barred in most labor unions, and if hired in industry they were relegated to the most menial jobs. It is noteworthy that the topic was studied by the Methodist Church at a time when there were only slightly more than 12,000 black residents in the entire state. Furthermore, Blake noted that these realities were “roundly denounced and all forms of segregation condemned.” For instance, at a 1946 city-wide gathering of Methodists Bishop Schuyler E. Garth railed against the “erection of imaginary concentration camps through the social ostracism of minorities and through racial and religious prejudices.” The Wisconsin and West Wisconsin Annual Conferences evidently counted among their number some who were aware of racism within society. With the widespread arrival to Milwaukee of black migrants beginning late in that decade, the city’s Methodists were soon to have an opportunity to put into practice their strongly-worded condemnations of such behaviors.¹¹⁰

The demographic changes that occurred as a result of the Second Great Migration did not initially affect the neighborhood around Kingsley Methodist Church. The number of black citizens residing in Milwaukee more than doubled from 8,821 in 1940 to 21,772 in 1950. Despite this rapid growth, in 1950 they still made up only 3.4 percent of the

¹¹⁰ William Blake, *Cross and Flame in Wisconsin: The Story of United Methodism in the Badger State* (Sun Prairie, WI: Commission on Archives and History, Wisconsin Conference, United Methodist Church, 1973), 194. “Help the Needy, Plea of Bishop,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 25, 1946.

city's population. Furthermore, African-Americans were residentially concentrated. In 1940 only six of Milwaukee's 227 census tracts were comprised of more than twenty percent black residents. All six of these tracts (numbers 20, 21, 29, 30, 35, and 36) were north of Juneau Avenue, south of Wright Street, and between N.3rd and N. 12th Streets. Although by 1950 that number jumped to twenty-four, geographic concentration remained. These tracts were contiguous and clustered north of Juneau Avenue, east of 24th Street, south of Keefe, and west of Holton Avenue and the Milwaukee River. The 1950 tracts formed a triangle, wide at the bottom that tapered to tract 63 at the top. (See Figure 1.) While the influx of black migrants from the South continued to increase over the next decade, nearly tripling the black population to 62,458 (8.4 percent of the city) by 1960, Kingsley's neighborhood remained unaffected. In 1950 census tract 70 had only twelve non-white residents out of a total of 4,618. By 1960 the number of non-white residents in tract 70 had increased ever so slightly to thirty-four (out of a total of 4,330), but none were black. Areas to the east in which other Methodist churches in the city were located had not escaped this demographic shift, however. Two remarkable conferences held in Milwaukee in the 1950s demonstrated that the city's Methodist leadership, unlike the members of the Advisory Board at Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, did not view these changes with the with trepidation. Rather, they spoke in terms of opportunity and committed themselves to study, reflection, and planning.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ U.S. Census, 1940: Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts, Milwaukee, Wis. (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942); U.S. Census, 1950: Selected Population and Housing Characteristics, Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the Adjacent Area (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952.); U.S. Census, 1960: Population and Housing, Milwaukee, Wis. Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961.) Recall from chapter 1 that Garfield Avenue Baptist Church was in regular communication with City of Milwaukee officials who were tracking the residential housing trends of the city's black residents as they considered the long-term viability of staying in their present location in the southeastern quadrant of census tract 34.

Downtown Milwaukee's First Methodist Church was host to *A Conference on Methodism and the Inclusive Church* in late February 1956. It was co-sponsored by Bishop Matthew W. Clair from the all-black Central Jurisdiction and Bishop H. Clifford Northcott of the North Central Jurisdiction, along with the Board of Social and Economic Relations. The conference had three fairly robust purposes. The first was to consider "the claims of the Christian gospel in race relations in Wisconsin" by examining specific situations with the hope of discovering "new, fruitful, and realistic methods of cooperation and service." Additionally, sponsors hoped that the public meeting would be "an interracial witness" to Milwaukee specifically and the state as a whole. Finally, the gathering was viewed as an opportunity to examine carefully the relationships between the Central and the white jurisdictions of the Church and look toward a future in which there might be resolution of that segregated structure. As hopeful as these goals were in light of discord caused by the 1939 creation of an officially segregated Methodist Church, there was a caveat. The official conference report clearly stated that the topic, the opinions shared, and any decisions made belonged only to the conference participants and did not necessarily represent the views of the sponsors or the Church as a whole.¹¹²

Although the entirety of the denomination may not have been in favor of those goals, a recently established group within it had been created specifically to champion such issues. The Board of Social and Economic Relations was created at the 1952 General Conference to speak on behalf of the church in three areas: economic life, race relations, and civic and social welfare. Its membership was elected from the six

¹¹² "Report on Methodism and the Inclusive Church (Milwaukee, Feb.23-24, 1956)," Division of Human Relations and Economic Affairs of the Board of Church and Society, General Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church.

jurisdictions and instructed to create and implement an agenda focused on education and social action. As such, it conducted and shared research, wrote books, and sponsored conferences on a variety of topics, such as “The Responsibility of the Church in Industrial Life” and the aforementioned conference on racial inclusivity in the Methodist Church. Despite the fact that some in the MEC would be vehemently opposed to the denomination’s sponsorship of such a conference, and others did not fully understand and appreciate the need for it, the Methodist Episcopal Church had little choice. Recent substantial progress on civil rights as marked by the Supreme Court’s unanimous 1954 decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* as well as the highly publicized bus boycott by Montgomery, Alabama’s black citizens made it an issue that must be addressed. Thus, between 1956 and 1959, it co-sponsored nineteen such conferences in cities across the county. Significantly, the Board of Social and Economic Relations was very intentional about ensuring that both black and white Methodists were involved in conference planning and leadership as well as as participants.¹¹³

Despite the fact that there were no black people living in Kingsley’s neighborhood at the time of this first conference, it still holds important keys to understanding Kingsley’s response in later years. Prior to delineating those lessons, it is

¹¹³ Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., *History of American Methodism in Three Volumes, Volume III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964)551-553. While Bucke’s edited volume does not specify where the other conferences occurred, other than to note that they were held both in the North and the South, other sources described one of the meetings. “Methodists Look at Race Problem” in the January 22 edition of *The Christian Century* summarized a similar conference in Pittsburgh. That gathering was attended by fifty people from the black Washington annual conference and 100 from three nearby white annual conferences (Pittsburgh and Erie, PA. as well as West Virginia). The two-day event took place in December 1957 and included six workshops, four sessions held during meals, and a communion breakfast. Some of the speakers, such as E. Jerry Walker, a Methodist pastor from Chicago, and the un-named president of Little Rock’s Philander Smith College, were from outside the region. Similar conferences were held across the country in Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Louisville, Indianapolis, St. Louis, New York City, as well as unidentified cities in Florida, Texas, and Kansas.

necessary to mention that Kingsley staff and lay people were involved in both pre-conference planning and as leaders of, or attendees at, conference workshops.

Accordingly, there were at least some at Kingsley aware of the information discussed.

Mrs. Herman Thomas, wife of Pastor Herman F. Thomas, served on the planning committee for housing conference attendees. Reverend Thomas was an enrolled member of the “Future Strategy of the Churches in Metropolitan Areas” workshop, which was led by Mr. George H. Hampel Jr., a Kingsley member. Hampel’s wife, Wilma, was an enrolled member of the “Social Relationships Involving Race Within Church and Community” workshop. By their participation at the conference, the Rev. Thomas and his wife, as well as the Hampels, would have witnessed the fact that Methodists were not afraid to have difficult conversations about race and racism in Milwaukee and other cities in Wisconsin, as well as within the Methodist Church. Additionally, either by listening to the keynote speakers, or in reading excerpts of their remarks afterwards in the post-conference report, the pastor and crucial lay leaders would have been made aware, if they were not already, of the stark racial inequalities in the city, state, and nation.

Furthermore, the conference provided a Biblical basis for both concern and action regarding these realities. Conference attendees could not claim they had no idea about the challenges faced by black Americans living in Wisconsin’s cities during the decades of the Second Great Migration.¹¹⁴

It is not difficult to imagine that Pastor Thomas and his successor at Kingsley, William Blake, were thrilled to have lay leaders in their congregation as knowledgeable, talented, and passionate as George and Wilma Hampel, Jr. As Rev. Thomas likely

¹¹⁴ “Report on Methodism and the Inclusive Church (Milwaukee, Feb.23-24, 1956).”

witnessed while George led the conference workshop, Hampel possessed natural leadership ability and was not afraid to apply those talents to complex situations. These qualities brought him many opportunities. He was Director of Publicity and Research for the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor and a Regional Director for United Cerebral Palsy. His leadership roles were not limited to private associations, but also included civic organizations. He served as member of the Milwaukee Public Library Board of Trustees as well the Milwaukee County Board of Public Welfare and was vice-president of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. However, the perspective and experience he gained as a member of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors from 1947 to 1963, and as its president from July 1955 to July 1956, was likely what most influenced his leadership at Kingsley and throughout the state's Methodist congregations. Serving on that board when the Supreme Court struck down "separate but equal" as a guiding principle for race-based education in the country, Hampel surely had first-hand knowledge of racial disparities in the city's schools, the grievances of black students and their families, as well as the resistance many white families offered when talk of desegregation began. As the *Brown* decision tasked school boards across the country with rectifying the problem, Hampel understood the need to act.¹¹⁵

George Hampel's leadership at Kingsley Church, particularly on racial issues, was well-informed and naturally went beyond the four walls of the church. Two reports saved as part of Hampel's personal papers demonstrate his deep concern for

¹¹⁵ The list of Hampel's various leadership position was obtained from the historical note in the finding aid of the George Hampel Jr. Papers at the Milwaukee County Historical Society; Although Rev. Thomas' perspective on Hampel's workshop leadership at the conference is unknown, Hampel received a thank you letter from Thomas' predecessor at Kingsley, the Rev. Earl Allen, who delivered the conference's opening devotional address. In the letter Allen noted that he believed George's written summary of the work of his workshop was "an outstanding report." March 6, 1956 letter from Earl Edson Allen, Milwaukee District Superintendent, Box 1, Folder 38, George Hampel Jr. Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

understanding the relationship between race relations and Christianity in Milwaukee. The first, “Situations of Racial Tension in Milwaukee and Community Resources for Easing Them,” was from an unfinished 1954 manuscript by Martin Haynes Bickham, a race relations consultant who helped plan and provided background material for the *Methodism and the Inclusive Church* conference. Its stated purpose was to examine situations of racial tension in the Milwaukee area and to ascertain their influence on the “location, continuity, and permanence of our Methodist Churches.” The report discussed barriers to communication across racial lines and techniques for inclusive churches. Hampel likely utilized it in his conference workshop. That he kept it indicates his perspective on the gravity of the problem and his desire to be part of the solution. The second paper, “The Christian and Race,” outlined four “basic needs” – education, employment, housing, and civil rights – and suggested twenty-four practical steps that Christians and churches could do within the four areas of “basic need.” For example, check on schools in minority neighborhoods regarding “over-crowding, training and salaries of teachers, just shares of school funds, and textbooks.” It offered encouragement to study the housing conditions of minority groups and gave stark admonishment. “Know the facts: Work for adequate housing.” Likewise, Hampel did not seek knowledge for personal gratification alone, but passed it on.¹¹⁶

At Kingsley, he was heavily involved in both youth ministry and the drama ministry. In both instances, he relied upon his friendship with one of the city’s most successful black men, J. Howard Offutt. In discussing the emergence of a black middle

¹¹⁶ Martin Haynes Bickham, “Situations of Racial Tension in Milwaukee and Community Resources for Easing Them,” Box 1, Folder 38a, George Hampel Jr. Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society. Mrs. Edmund D. Soper, “The Christian and Race,” Box 1, Folder 38a, George Hampel Jr. Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

class between 1915 and 1932, Joe William Trotter, Jr., author of *Black Milwaukee: The Making of An Industrial Proletariat*, called Offutt probably “the most prominent black musician to emerge” in the city during those years. From 1929 through 1971 he was the choir director at St. Mark’s AME Church, the city’s “oldest, largest, and most stable black church.” He was also involved with the Milwaukee Urban League’s music department and the Wisconsin Methodist Church Youth program. “Papa” Offutt, as he was affectionately known, loved teaching others to sing and in the 1940s led seven choirs in a variety of the city’s churches, schools, and community organizations. In November 1958 Hampel and Offutt were guest speakers to the senior high Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) at Green Bay’s First Methodist Church. The following April Hampel invited Offutt to speak to Kingsley’s MYF high school students. Under Offutt’s direction, the Young People’s Chorus of the Milwaukee Urban League performed at the conference, an invitation that likely came at Hampel’s suggestion. Offutt, however, was not George Hampel’s most important partner in seeking to understand the challenges faced by African-Americans in Milwaukee and then working to reform his denomination and city. Hampel’s wife was even more instrumental to fulfilling his mission.¹¹⁷

The daughter of a Methodist minister, Wilma Hampel’s emerging interest in Civil Rights became personal when she traveled to a race relations seminar in Dallas in the 1950s. On the journey, she witnessed firsthand the atrocious treatment suffered by one of

¹¹⁷ Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007) 31, 97; “Learning Center,” Wisconsin Black Historical Society, accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.wbhsm.org/learning-center/>; *Kingsley Church News*, April 1959, General Commission on Archives and History, Wisconsin Conference, United Methodist Church; Sunday November 30, 1958 bulletin from The First Methodist Church of Green Bay, Box 1, Folder 38a, George Hampel Jr. Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society. Hampel also served as the Master of Ceremonies for Kingsley’s 1962 mission festival.

her travelling companions, Clarence Bolton, who was African American. Their group was turned away from hotels and restaurants on his account. According to her biographer, the experience stuck with her for the rest of her life. Upon her return she resolved to work for the rights of black citizens in Milwaukee. It did not take her long to become involved and begin making a difference.

She initially set her sights on fair housing, an issue that began to percolate in the city in the late fifties and increasingly demanded attention throughout the 1960s. She spoke on “Housing – A Christian Concern” at Kingsley’s November 1958 Friendship Builders monthly gathering. In 1960, she was appointed by Mayor Frank P. Zeidler to the Citizens Urban Renewal Committee, a group tasked with studying the housing crisis for Milwaukee’s non-white residents. The committee recommended non-segregated open occupancy along with the demolition of slums, to be replaced by decent public housing. This experience likely impelled her significant involvement with the founding of the Northcott Neighborhood House, a Methodist mission to Milwaukee’s inner core residents that sought, according to its initial Executive Director, Rev. Lucius Walker, a black man, to help “the residents of a community to understand its needs and problems, and work[ing] toward a common solution.” According to the director of Northcott House at the time Wilma Hampel’s death, “She founded Northcott. She made it happen.” The endeavor was her biggest imprint on the Methodist Church and the city as a whole. But in addition to serving as president of the Northcott Board, she also volunteered in its office once a week. In doing so she demonstrated that she knew the importance of working alongside black Methodists, rather than merely paternalistically serving them. (Her husband’s friendship with Dr. Offutt also demonstrated the Hampel’s recognition that

working together across racial lines was the ideal way prepare churches to become racially inclusive.) It was a lesson they surely hoped to teach their fellow congregants at Kingsley Methodist Church, by any measure a robust fellowship and suitable spiritual home for such a committed, talented, and socially aware couple.¹¹⁸

Kingsley Church in the 1950s was a model of success no matter the metric. Writing in the June 1952 *Kingsley Church News (KCN)*, Rev. Thomas thanked everyone who “has helped to make Kingsley Church stronger in its Kingdom work” and later noted that the 1951-1952 conference year had been a “very successful year in many respects.” He went on to note that church membership had increased and average attendance at Sunday services was higher than the previous year. Furthermore, more members had pledged to support the church budget than ever before. After praising the “positive and progressive spirit” that had developed, he ended his comments by encouraging his flock to “keep up the good work and be ever ready to meet new challenges in the coming year.” The remarks on membership, attendance, and giving seemed to set the tone not just for the coming year, but the entire decade.¹¹⁹

Although measuring the vitality of a church by numbers alone runs the risk of falsely equating numerical health with spiritual vitality, churches are institutional bodies

¹¹⁸ Amy Rabideau Silvers, “Hampel Began North Side Agency, She embraced Civil Rights in the 1950s,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 25, 2008; “Northcott House for Neighbors,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 28, 1961. *They Went Out Not Knowing: 100 Women in Mission* (Cincinnati: The United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, 1986). Hampel’s work in Milwaukee, specifically in the founding of the Northcott Neighborhood House, is covered in more detail in the biography of her in this book. As for her recommendation of public housing, it is instructive that she and her husband and their three kids lived at 4432 N. Sherman Boulevard, across the street and one block north of the Parklawn Housing Project, which opened in 1937. See Patrick D. Jones’ *Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* for the best treatment of the open housing issue in Milwaukee.

¹¹⁹ *Kingsley Church News*, June 1952, General Commission on Archives and History, Wisconsin Conference, United Methodist Church. At the time, Methodist Conference years began in June and ran through to the following May.

as well as spiritual ones. Thus, the February 1958 *KCN* pronouncement that, “The best evidence of a living church is a crowded church” is apt. Throughout the decade Kingsley averaged fifteen new adult members per quarter. This is impressive growth considering that the church was sixty years old and already quite large for the time. (Membership in June 1954 was 1,365. A March 1955 article in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* noted that Kingsley was the largest Methodist congregation in the city.) The new members came from near and far. Forty-five percent were from 53208, the zip code in which Kingsley resided, possibly the result of the biannual door-to-door visitations conducted by men from the congregation. The remainder, however, came from sixteen additional zip codes across the metropolitan area. All of these new members, as well as those who had been there for some, time frequently attended on Sunday mornings. Forty-two percent of Kingsley members came each week in the first quarter of 1955. The figure is particularly notable for two reasons. First, the weather that winter had been especially brutal. Second, it was significantly higher than the national average for church attendance. At the time, Methodist churches across the country maintained an average attendance for members between nine and seventeen points lower. Accordingly, giving was also strong. A June 1954 *KCN* article noted that the budget was “over-subscribed.” In fact, not until 1959 was any mention made of needing to trim the budget due to a shortfall in giving. Throughout the decade, Kingsley thrived.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ *Kingsley Church News*, February 1958, General Commission on Archives and History, Wisconsin Conference, United Methodist Church; *KCN* February 1955; *KCN* May 1955; Pastors Here, In Reich, Plan to Trade Pulpits,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 12, 1955; The use of zip codes to demonstrate the geographic breadth of Kingsley members’ residences is anachronic. Zip codes were not implemented until the summer of 1963. Unfortunately, the closure of Raynor and Memorial Libraries due to COVID-19 prevents me from resolving this issue before submitting the dissertation to the Graduate School as the needed paper-based primary sources are in my carrel in the Memorial Library.

In answering the rhetorical query from the Methodist Church's Council of Bishops, "What do Methodists Believe?" Rev. Thomas noted that the answer was obvious based on the upcoming sermon topics: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Man, Salvation from Sin, Christian Experience, Christian Perfection, Divine Judgment, and Eternal Life. Later that year, while advertising Christmas festivities, the *KCN* stated "the greatest need of men today is the discovery of a Savior." In April 1954 readers were reminded that "Christ sacrificed his life for our salvation" and then in March of the next year were encouraged to extra study "to know the meaning of the Cross and move on the experience of the Empty Tomb." Kingsley viewed itself and the Church worldwide as "the most powerful force on earth to foster our belief in God and spread the Gospel of Christ." Later that decade subscribers were instructed regarding "the Lord's Supper" that anyone who "professes faith in Jesus Christ" was welcome to partake in the sacrament at Kingsley. Yet in more ways than sharing in communion, Kingsley seemed to be open to non-members being in their presence.¹²¹

Throughout the 1950s items in the *Kingsley Church News* demonstrated what appears to be a willingness to consider the possibility of becoming an interracial congregation. Discussions of Membership Sunday in 1952 stress that "anyone" is welcome to unite with Kingsley "as their church home." Given neighborhood demographics at the time, though, it is possible, maybe even probable, that "anyone" did not include black or other non-white Milwaukeeans. As such, Race-Relations Sunday, an annual event celebrated each February, was described as "one time when we put special emphasis on the brotherhood of men under the Fatherhood of God." Despite the

¹²¹ *KCN* January 1953; *KCN* December 1953; *KCN* March 1955;

seemingly single-day focus of the previous statement, a few instances potentially represent an openness for multiracial fellowship. For their Lenten series that year Kingsley welcomed Rosa Page Welch, an internationally renowned mezzo soprano who travelled across the county and around the globe singing in order to be a “change agent” by encouraging her audiences to learn to love one another regardless of racial difference. That she was black was seemingly of no concern to Kingsley Church. That she was famous likely helped overcome any concern about her race, if it existed. The following February a Women’s Society of Christian Service (WSCS) small group read *Cry Beloved Country*, Alan Paton’s searing look at the life of a black pastor and his son in Apartheid South Africa. Other examples of possible openness in the 1950s to people of different races include a Sunday morning guest speaker from South Korea, encouragement to “bring friends of a different race, faith, or denomination” to Sunday service during Brotherhood Week when students from St. James Methodist Church of the Central Jurisdiction would be in attendance, and a visit to one of the WSCS small groups by Vel Phillips, a local civil rights leader whose 1956 election to the city’s Common Council made her both the first woman and the first black person elected to that assembly. Consequently, it stands to reason that there would have been at least theoretical interest among some at Kingsley in the information Rev. Thomas and the Hampels taught or learned in late February 1956 at the *Conference on Methodism and the Inclusive Church*, held a few miles east at the First Methodist Church.¹²²

That those in attendance at the conference mirrored the diversity of its sponsors – both the overwhelmingly white North Central Jurisdiction and the all-black Central

¹²² Deborah Phillips, “I Have a Calling...” *Just Women: Embracing Life* (Summer 2009), 22; *KCN*, February 1952; *KCN* February 1953.

Jurisdiction, along with the Methodist Church's Board of Social and Economic Relations – is evidence of the legitimacy of the conference's name as well as the material discussed. Based on listed conference or congregation affiliation, of the 138 attendees at the meeting, sixty-seven were white, sixty-one were black, and ten people in attendance were unaffiliated with the Methodist Church and their race was not specified. (This last group included reporters and military chaplains, among others.) The Methodist attendees were both pastors and lay people. The majority of the white attendees, forty-nine, were from the Wisconsin Conference of the North Central Jurisdiction. Most of the other eighteen were from the West Wisconsin conference. The sixty-seven black attendees were a more denominationally and geographically diverse group. There were eight people from local A.M.E, C.M.E, and Colored M.E. congregations. Forty-six of the remaining black attendees were from the Lexington Conference of the Central Jurisdiction. However, because the Central Jurisdiction was the only unit to cover the entirety of the country, the seventeen conferences that comprised it each covered a far larger territory than annual conferences in white jurisdictions. Thus, the Lexington Conference was home to black MEC congregations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and Kentucky. (One of the subtler effects of the racism inherent in the jurisdictional structure established by the 1939 Methodist reunification was that black congregations and leaders met with one another far less often than their white counterparts simply due to the distance between them.) There were also seven people from other annual conferences within the Central Jurisdiction.¹²³

¹²³ "Report on Methodism and the Inclusive Church (Milwaukee, Feb.23-24, 1956)," Division of Human Relations and Economic Affairs of the Board of Church and Society, General Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church; Shockley, ed., *Heritage*.

The breadth and depth of the material covered at the conference was sufficient to accomplish its stated goals: studying race-relations in Wisconsin in light of the Christian gospel with the hope of finding new ways to cooperate and serve, being an interracial witness, and considering the resolution of the uneasy relationship between the Central and all other jurisdictions. Though only a two-day conference, each day was designed for maximum exposure and interaction; morning sessions began by 9:15 AM and each day's last agenda item, the general meeting, did not start until 8 PM. Though it is unknown whether attendees received the background materials prior to their arrival at the conference or simply upon check-in, the reports contained crucial information on a variety of topics pertinent to the task at hand. The various addresses provided both theological and practical perspectives. Group reports were based on the discussions that occurred in the conference workshops attended by both black and white Methodists. If utilized, the conference report would be a useful tool for participants once they returned to their home churches.¹²⁴

Background material for attendees was produced by a trio of prominent, or soon-to-be- prominent, individuals: Dr. Murray H. Leiffer, the Rev. Lyle Schaller, and Dr. Martin Haynes Bickham. Dr. Leiffer was a sociologist and a professor of sociology and social ethics at the Garret Biblical Institute at Northwestern University. He noted that in theory Christian churches are "the one organization" that should welcome any who profess faith into membership. Reality, however, had proved that most church members conformed to societal norms. They viewed the congregation as belonging to the current members and typically resisted welcoming newcomers from a different race into it.

¹²⁴ "Report on Methodism and the Inclusive Church (Milwaukee, Feb.23-24, 1956)."

Leiffer's research found that when a new racial group moved into a neighborhood, established churches typically became defensive and eventually sold their building as their members had previously moved out of the neighborhood. Prior to the sale, any remaining members desired for church membership to stay as it always was, "a symbol of a more secure and prosperous past."¹²⁵

This was a stark change from how white churches viewed black visitors prior to the massive post-WWII migration of black southerners to Milwaukee. Previously, Leiffer noted, whites were not troubled by black Christians worshipping with them because there were so few African American residents in the city. Unlike black southerners who had arrived in earlier decades, the migrants in the 1950s largely lacked formal education and financial resources, and were therefore viewed more warily, even as a threat. White Christians in northern cities feared that the congregations they cherished may become unrecognizable if the newcomers were grafted in. The piece ended on a positive note, however, but not without a challenge. Leiffer referred to a recent study of Methodist opinion nationwide that discovered that two-thirds of whites in the North-Central Jurisdiction desired to allow anyone, regardless of "economic status or race" into their congregation. Nevertheless, Leiffer cautioned the need for black worshippers to receive warm concern from white Methodists rather than begrudging acceptance. Another of the men to provide background material for the conference also recognized the difficulty

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* Over the course of his career Leiffer published twenty books focused on the role of urban and suburban churches in solving the challenge of community stability caused by the shifting racial makeup of many city neighborhoods.

many white Christians when faced with the possibility that the racial makeup of their congregation may change.¹²⁶

His 2015 *The New York Times* obituary referred to the Rev. Lyle Schaller as “the nation’s dean of church consultants” for his half-century of providing Protestant churches with nuts and bolts practical advice. Over the course of his career he wrote fifty-five books, edited another forty-one, and visited approximately 6,000 congregations. He was also not one to mince words; when he recalled being asked by leaders of an all-white urban congregation located in a racially-transitioning neighborhood how they could grow, he remarked that what they really meant was “How can we turn back the clock to 1954?” Though during the 1950s Schaller was still working and publishing as a city planner in Madison, having earned master’s degrees in city and urban planning, American history, and political science, as well as a divinity degree, his career confirms that the conference organizers picked a very capable professional to submit critical background information. He provided demographic material about Milwaukee, as well as Madison, Beloit, Kenosha, and Racine, for the conference on *Methodism and the Inclusive Church*. The material he provided was based on census data, included helpful maps, and in addition to a discussion of the population growth rate of African Americans in Milwaukee, he offered one particularly instructive insight regarding the realities of where they were settling upon their arrival in Milwaukee. He began by noting that general population growth had been in outlying areas of the city and in the suburbs. However, when concentrating on the five census tracts with an undefined high percentage of non-whites,

¹²⁶ Dr. Leiffer’s most notable book, *The Effective City Church*, which was republished fifteen times between 1949 and 1993; Leiffer taught for many years at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in nearby Evanston, Illinois, approximately 80 miles south of Milwaukee. Murray H. Leiffer, “New Occasions Teach New Duties,” *Report*, 19-23.

Schaller discovered that between 1920 and 1940 all five areas underwent a population decrease and had little new construction. He therefore concluded that black residents in Milwaukee primarily lived in undesirable neighborhoods from which whites had been steadily leaving. Perhaps this reality fed the subliminal feelings of superiority amongst whites in the Milwaukee area as written about by another of the conference's authors of background material.¹²⁷

Dr. Martin Hayes Bickham was a University of Chicago-trained sociologist who studied racism and poverty, among other subjects. His submission to the conference, "Situations of Racial Tension in Milwaukee and Community Resources for Easing Them," began with a historical examination of the city's ethnic heritage. Bickham then noted that migration patterns during the previous decade had caused a new examination of the relationship between white and black Milwaukeeans. He found that there existed a "variance between our Christian profession of brotherhood and the existing policies and practices of our churches in respect to the inclusion of persons bearing racial heritages other than white Caucasian." In other words, his piece, like that of Leiffer, spoke directly to the reason for the conference in the first place. As he described the situations of racial tension arising in Milwaukee as a result of racially changing neighborhoods, Bickham remarked that in the face of awful treatment by white Americans, newly arrived African Americans often initially retreated into areas where they are in the majority. Eventually, however, as their numbers continued to grow, they were forced to seek housing in "fringe neighborhoods" primarily occupied by whites, and then had to suffer yet another round of

¹²⁷ Sam Roberts, "Rev. Lyle E. Schaller Dies at 91; Helped Protestant Churches Survive and Grow," *New York Times*, March 26, 2015; "Lyle Schaller obituary" United Methodist Church, accessed December 12, 2018 <https://www.wisconsinumc.org/connections/conference-news/latest-news/1590-lyle-schaller>.

humiliation. He quoted an unnamed social scientist who described white Americans as the second-most race conscious people on the planet, trailing only the white people in South Africa. He went on to delineate barriers to communication across racial lines, such as suspicion, fear, and racial prejudice on the part of whites. Eventually, the majority of whites respond to these feelings by leaving areas or institutions which cause them discomfort and relocating to a community or church where they are surrounded only by other white people.¹²⁸

The challenge faced by the Methodist Church, Bickham concluded, was to devise ways to remove the barriers of suspicion, fear, and racism and replace them with strategies to promote interracial congregations. He began by suggesting that the Methodist Church revise its racial practices and policies as a first step. He then listed four techniques to assist MEC congregations in becoming inclusive: adopt a clear-cut statement of serving all people in a neighborhood with an “open-door” policy; create goals for race relations such as allowing dependence on God to supersede all barriers based on human difference; form within each congregation a special committee to welcome, receive, and integrate non-whites into the local fellowship; and act to make/keep neighborhoods around the church multiracial. Bickham’s material went on to stress the necessity of sharing this information with all Methodist churches in the Milwaukee area since any could in the future have the need to cordially welcome non-white visitors. Finally, he utilized the maps provided by Rev. Schaller to identify three

¹²⁸ “Bibliographical note, Guide to the Martin Hayes Bickham Papers, 1911-1965, University of Chicago Library, 2007.” University of Chicago, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/rlg/ICU.SPCL.BICKHAM.pdf>; Martin Hayes Bickham, “Situations of Racial Tension in Milwaukee and Community Resources for Easing Them,” Report on *Methodism and the Inclusive Church*.

congregations – St. James of the Lexington annual conference (11th and Brown), First Methodist (1010 W. Wisconsin Avenue), and Epworth Methodist (N. Second Street and W. Garfield Avenue) – as being in neighborhoods with a concentration of black residents such that the goal of inclusivity was possible. He recommended that all three congregations make the necessary changes to their staffs so that the racial make-up of the staff reflect the desired interracial composition of the congregation. Garfield Avenue Baptist Church clearly adhered to typical white behavior as outlined by Leiffer and Bickham when they anxiously tracked the residential movements of African Americans in Milwaukee to determine whether or not they should stay in the location at N. 2nd and Garfield Ave or move to an all-white area. Alternatively, Methodists, at least on principle at the denominational level in the North Central Jurisdiction, viewed changing neighborhoods as reasons to make changes to their churches in order to better prepare themselves to become racially inclusive.¹²⁹

The men who delivered the addresses at the conference matched the conference hosts in diversity and the providers of background material in reputation. They were local, national, and international and included a close academic mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the country's last socialist mayor of a major city, and a key figure in Mozambique's struggle for freedom from Portugal. Their presence further supports the notion that those who planned the conference were earnest in their theoretical support for making Milwaukee's Methodist churches racially inclusive. The Reverend Earl Allen, the District Superintendent of the Milwaukee District of the Methodist Episcopal Church, set the tone for the rest of the speakers in his opening devotional address by looking to the

¹²⁹Bickham, "Situations."

Bible for guidance. He quoted the Apostle Paul's instructions in Romans 12:10, "In the love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned to one another; in honor preferring one another" in order to challenge all present that part of the privilege of being Christians is that they were afforded the ability to "actively develop Christian appreciation" for those of "different races and nationalities." Allen then gave whites in the audience a concrete example for putting Paul's dictum into action. He told them that prominent scientist George Washington Carver noted he had accomplished all he had as a result of discovering he was a human being while at Simpson College, a predominately white, Methodist school in Iowa that accepted students of all races in the 1890s. Allen closed by sharing that black Americans simply wanted the same treatment afforded whites in education, employment, and the courts.¹³⁰

The next speaker's life demonstrated the possibilities for black Americans if given equal opportunity and yet rebuked white churches for failing to often do so. The Reverend George D. Kelsey based his address on Romans 14:3, "What is not of faith is sin." Kelsey, a theologian and educator who earned his PhD in philosophy from Yale and subsequently taught at Morehouse College and then Drew University, was a mentor to Dr. King while the latter was a student at Morehouse. He is credited with steering King towards the ministry and away from a career in law or medicine. In later years while writing a book chapter on non-violence, King contacted Kelsey with the following request. "I would deeply appreciate your critical comments on this chapter. As you know, I have a great deal of respect for you as a scholar." King's feelings were shared by many.

¹³⁰ Opening Devotional Address, *Report*, 5-6; "George Washington Carver" Simpson College, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://simpson.edu/internal/internal/dunn-library/archives-special-collections/george-washington>.

His 1996 obituary in the *New York Times* noted that “At the peak of his career, Dr. Kelsey was a sought-after speaker at religious and lay meetings often speaking about race-relations and civil rights in America.” Conference attendees quickly learned why. His address, “Sin and Racism,” was a pointed critique of the insidious existence of racism in many white churches in the United States.¹³¹

After reading scripture, Kelsey’s opening line left no doubt as to his belief. “Racism is the very antitheses of the life of faith.” It was concocted, he continued, from a series of rotten ingredients: pride, self-deification, fear, and falsehood on the part of white Christians while black believers harbored resentment, fear, and suspicion. All of these, Kelsey noted, were “diametrically opposed to faith, hope, and love.” There was no justification of the “spirit and practice of racism in the spirit and practice of essential Christianity.” He contended that despite teaching that “God looketh upon the heart” and that sin comes from the heart, many churches do not view race prejudice as sin. The consequences of this belief could be tragic. He concluded his message by quoting Hosea 4:6, in which the Old Testament prophet warns that God will forget as children those who reject his law.¹³²

Other addresses noted the challenges imposed by the history of racism in the Methodist Church, the impotence of political and educational solutions alone, the power of the gospel to change self-perception, and the need for prayer and application of scripture. Mr. Eduardo Mondlane, a native of Mozambique, noted that Africans’

¹³¹ “George D. Kelsey obituary” *New York Times*, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/15/nyregion/dr-george-kelsey-baptist-minister-85.html>; The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/george-d-kelsey-2>. George D. Kelsey, “Sin and Racism,” *Report*, 7-8.

¹³² Kelsey, “Sin,” *Report*.

introduction to the gospel was instrumental in dispelling their feelings of inferiority. On Friday morning the host Bishops spoke. Bishop H. Clifford Northcott of the North Central Jurisdiction called the group to pray and consider how they could be “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13) in order to help guide Methodist congregations in Wisconsin into “a more full and complete expression of the Christian faith in race relations.” His counterpart from the Central Jurisdiction, Bishop Matthew W. Clair, Jr. gave a more robust address that began with a lesson on the history of race relations within the Methodist Episcopal Church from the early eighteenth century through to the present-day existence of the Central Jurisdiction. Despite the desire among many in the three northern and western jurisdictions for its elimination, St. Clair contended that that alone would not lead to integrated churches. Rather, as long as neighborhoods were segregated, so, too, would local congregations be.¹³³

Cornell R. Taylor tackled the challenges presented by the stark reality of residential segregation, which was caused, in his estimation, by white flight to the suburbs. A member of the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights and the Research Director for the Milwaukee Urban League, his “Social Planning for Today’s Urban Community” noted that although modern American cities were heterogeneous, unequal residential mobility had created racially fractured metropolitan landscapes. Taylor argued

¹³³ “In Memory of Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane ‘53” Oberlin College, accessed December 12, 2018, http://www2.oberlin.edu/alummag/oampast/oam_spring98/Alumni/eduardo.html; Eduardo Mondlane, “Test of Brotherhood,” *Report*, 9. Mondlane came to the United States as an undergraduate, and eventually earned a master’s degree from Northwestern and a doctorate in anthropology from Harvard. Prior to returning to Mozambique as the founding President of the Mozambican Liberation Front, Mondlane worked as a research officer at the United Nations and taught at Syracuse University; Remarks by Bishop Northcott, *Report*, 10; Matthew St. Clair, “Problems Facing Negroes in Methodism,” *Report*, 11-13. Other shared in St. Clair’s perspective that eliminating the Central Jurisdiction would not magically result in integrated churches. The same point was made in “Methodist Racial Unit Defines Goals,” in the May 9, 1962 edition of *The Christian Century*.

that each metropolitan area was comprised of three zones: an aging central core often in need of imminent clearance or redevelopment, a geographically large middle area starting to show signs of wear, and the newly developed suburbs. According to Taylor, the inequality inherent in the calculated movement of white people from the middle-area out to the suburbs was often ignored. It contributed to heightened interracial tensions by deliberately taking advantage of the housing shortage among black citizens, who typically initially moved into the aging central core. White homeowners in the deteriorating middle-sections had a conflicted connection to African-Americans in nearby sections of the central core. On the one hand, a combination of fear, prejudice, and misinformation compelled whites to anticipate a move to the suburbs. Yet at the same time, they neglected necessary maintenance projects on their current homes because they knew they would still be able to sell regardless of the condition to middle class black residents looking for anything better than their current unfit dwelling in the inner core. Left unchecked this process clearly worked against efforts at building inclusive churches. Taylor, therefore, proposed that churches stay in racially changing neighborhoods in order to be a “stabilizing factor” that prevented white residents from “running away.”¹³⁴

The conference attempted to apply the knowledge gained from the background material and plenary speakers in workshops in the hope that doing so would better prepare participants to apply the lessons in their congregations. Each of the five workshops had a leader, a recorder, between three and seven resource people – professors, government employees, social service officials – and between twenty and thirty participants. Across the five workshops there was jurisdictional and racial diversity

¹³⁴ Corneff R. Taylor, “Social Planning for Today’s Urban Community,” *Report*, 14-16.

among both the leaders and the participants. Such representation was crucial in order for the discussions to accurately reflect and take into account the multiplicity of lived experiences that the conference desired to meld in local congregations. The topics of the workshops were central to the goal of solving issues that effective and successful inclusive churches would need to address. Each workshop was arranged around a series of questions applicable to the focus of that particular workshop and each produced a written report that detailed their conversation as well as offering suggestions for how individual congregations could put that workshop's conclusions into practice.¹³⁵

The "Social Relationships Involving Race within Church and Community" workshop readily admitted that to confine consideration of interracial relationships to political, economic, and business settings without also addressing them at the social level ignores various implications of Christian fellowship. The group, which included Wilma Hampel as a member, admitted that the idea that Wisconsin had no racial problems stemmed from the fact that "there was no problem because there were no Negroes." General acceptance by churches of the few African Americans who lived in Milwaukee prior to the Second Great Migration disappeared once large numbers of black people came to Milwaukee beginning in the late 1940s. The tendency by most whites towards segregation was tacitly accepted by black residents and became so rigid that even those who had previously grown accustomed to interracial interaction succumbed to the new pattern of strict separation imposed on the those newly arrived from rural areas in the South. The group noted recent openness at some churches, restaurants, hotels, and trade unions in the city such that "now there appears a real possibility of developing complete

¹³⁵ Workshop #4, "Minority Groups in Smaller Communities" is not applicable to this study and will not be discussed.

integration.” To that end the group listed five reasons for segregation and four techniques to overcome it. The reasons included: intermarriage, economic exploitation, political exploitation, over-aggressiveness of whites, and desire in both black and white people to maintain the status-quo. To combat these influences there needs to be social interaction between clergy, more pulpit exchanges than the annual swap on Race Relations Sunday, and greater integration in social and fellowship gatherings of individuals and churches. All of these would help toward the goal of eliminating the Central Jurisdiction.

Furthermore, the group called for everyone to assume “without debate or discussion the brotherliness of one another” so that with humility they can be a witness to the “social righteousness of integration.” Any such witness, however, must point to the universal truths of the gospel and not simply a temporary strategy. Finally, every individual must take personal responsibility for their part in the sin of segregation. If taken seriously, the implementation of this challenge would make the work of the next workshop a whole lot easier.

The second workshop addressed “The Concern of the Church in Housing and Employment for Non-Whites.” Those in attendance recognized that non-whites were forced into restricted districts with exorbitantly priced, overcrowded rental units. They agreed that as Christians they ought to be concerned about why white families flee as soon as the first black family moved into the neighborhood. Christians should also be disturbed by the actions of white real-estate speculators who utilized fear of black residents to buy houses owned by whites for below market value with the purpose of immediately selling them to black families at extremely high prices. Furthermore, Christians ought to consider the negative effect on one’s personality when they are forced

to live in dilapidated neighborhoods with no opportunity to know people of another race. They felt the admittedly complex problem should not be relegated to only secular solutions, but rather believed that Christians – homeowners, landlords, and speculators – ought to be trained to view the housing crisis from a Biblical point of view. One result of viewing the issue through a Christian lens, they believed, would be to support open occupancy housing and petition the mayor and city council to do the same. The group also advocated attendance at community meetings or events sponsored by the city to address housing needs. Other possibilities lacked the rigor of the first ones though. The suggestions to “set a good example” through personal actions and “search our souls” to determine if anyone had a vested interest in segregation might have initially seemed to be worthwhile but could easily be viewed as apathetic statements. Soon, however, the workshop got back to concrete issues with what can only be considered a smoking gun in assessing the guilt of Kingsley members, and all white church members, decisions of where to live.¹³⁶

The Real Estate Salesman’s Handbook was published by the National Institute of Real Estate Brokers of the National Association of Real Estate Boards. The report of the housing and employment workshop highlighted a particularly troubling passage in Section 3 of the publication, which contained the organization’s code of ethics. Part 3 of that section, titled “Relations to Customers and the Public,” explicitly stated that no realtors should introduce into a neighborhood “members of a race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values of that

¹³⁶ For more information on the nefarious actions of white real-estate investors deliberately exploiting racial fears see Beryl Satter’s *Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2010.)

neighborhood.” Though none of the discussion around this crucial admission of how explicitly racist policies were encouraged in order to maintain racially segregated residential areas was recorded, its existence in the printed report is paramount in answering a key question. Namely, did white Christians leaving the city and moving to all-white suburbs have access to information that proved they knew they were taking advantage of a deliberately race-based, inherently unequal, and decidedly unbiblical system? Yes, beyond any doubt. Furthermore, those who knew were people in leadership positions, either denominational officials, pastors, or key lay leaders. Additionally, given that this revealing admission was in the official conference report, distributing the information was not solely dependent on attendees verbally sharing with their local congregations. Anyone who carefully read the report would have also have to confront the troubling reality. This admission marked a stark difference with the seemingly willful refusal by anyone at Garfield Avenue Baptist Church and the General Association of Regular Baptists to acknowledge the existence of racial discrimination in any area of American life in the 1950s.¹³⁷

The workshop’s addressing of employment discrimination was not as robust as its coverage of the housing crisis. According to the resource people in the group, Wisconsin companies in large cities generally did not discriminate in hiring or promotion on the basis of race. Despite these claims, the workshop maintained that there are still concerns and that solutions should start by looking in the mirror to determine if there were any discriminatory practices within the Methodist Church from a local congregation’s office staff all the way up to the Methodist Publishing House. (The inclusion of the

38 “Methodism and the Inclusive Church” conference report.

denomination's publisher was significant given the uproar that would occur in the 1960s over that organization's practice of paying white and black employees different salaries for the same jobs.) After addressing in-house issues, Methodists ought to encourage the National Council of Churches to work across the country to ensure that non-whites are fairly treated when working or looking for work. Locally, the workshop recommended local churches contact local industries as well as their own members to discover where discrimination exists, a process that in and of itself would demonstrate disapproval of any racial discrimination in employment. ¹³⁸

Kingsley's own George Hampel led the workshop tasked with charting a strategy for churches in Metropolitan areas. The committee began its work by asking a series of crucial questions. First, what Methodist agencies in Wisconsin were studying population movements in the state's cities and are they using the data to develop approaches for churches in various communities, particularly interracial ones, to become inclusive? Additionally, were there currently any Methodist churches in interracial neighborhoods or areas that may soon become racially mixed? What were the long-range effects of preserving congregations that exclusively serve white or black members versus the development of inclusive churches? Should utilization of policies created for interracial churches be mandated on churches that serve only one race, particularly those in the suburbs? Partial answers to these questions were provided in the group's recommendations, which were based on the belief that "the church" ought to be a place where people of all races and ethnicities felt at ease. Cooperative planning between black

¹³⁸ James R. McGraw, "Practice What You Print," *Christianity and Crisis*, April 20, 1968, 87-93. Southern traditions were so influential at the Methodist Publishing House's Nashville, Tennessee headquarters at the time of the conference that employees still ate in segregated cafeterias.

and white Methodist churches was the best way to address the increase of racial tensions arising out of the influx of black citizens from the South. Though unnamed, by this workshop at least, the report noted that there were three Methodist churches in the downtown area whose neighborhoods were more racially diverse and that they in particular should carryout evangelism in the areas around their church, especially to those residents whose “constituency” is not already attending the church. It was hoped that such deliberate outreach would counteract “increasing racist propaganda.”

The “Strategy on the Denominational Level” workshop began its report with the admission that white Methodists in Wisconsin had been operating on the faulty assumption that churches in the Lexington Conference of the Central Jurisdiction would minister to “negroes of Methodist affiliation or heritage.” The assumption was not unfounded; *The Methodist Discipline* explicitly stated that the Central Jurisdiction’s local conference, the Lexington for Wisconsin, had the responsibility for “Negro work” in the state. Yet, in many areas of the state, there were not enough black people for the Lexington Conference to start a separate church. Additionally, the Lexington Conference was hamstrung by limited financial resources and a lack of pastoral candidates, problems that were compounded by the huge amount territory under authority of the conference. Thus, from 1945 through 1964, the last year statistics for the Lexington Conference were kept since the Central Jurisdiction was abolished in 1968 with the creation of the United Methodist Church, Wisconsin was home to only three Lexington Conference churches. The first was in Beloit and its membership grew from 42 to 375 during those years. A mission church in Milwaukee began the late 1940s and by 1951 had 80 members. It soon took the name St. James and grew to 339 members by 1964. A third congregation was

started in Racine in the early 1960s. It had 67 members in 1964. Meanwhile, white churches from the Wisconsin Conference were not filling this gap, despite guidance in the *Methodist Discipline* that individual membership in local churches was open to people of all races. The workshop identified three reasons for this lapse. Whites had been psychologically conditioned by racial “separateness” to be suspicious of black visitors unless there was black leadership already in their local congregation. No educational program existed that would help alleviate the problems caused by racial estrangement. The group also believed, on the basis of differing cultural patterns, that churches in the Wisconsin Conference did not appeal to “rank and file” black migrants from rural areas.¹³⁹

Having identified the challenges, the workshop sought to overcome them by combining the financial and leadership resources of the Lexington and Wisconsin Conferences so that there could be a continuous ministry present in racially changing communities. To achieve this, the group recommended the creation of an education program using all available media that would let people know that everyone is “welcome and wanted in our churches.” In recognition of the fact that individual congregations lacked the financial resources to pay for its development, supplemental funding for the program should come from both annual conferences, city and district missionary societies, and the General Board of Missions. Additionally, the workshop advocated that white staff be hired at St. James Church of the Lexington Conference and black staff be

¹³⁹ *The Book of Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1956.) Paragraph 1773 specified that local conferences of the Central Jurisdiction had the responsibility for work among black people. Paragraphs 105,107, and 112 list membership requirements for white jurisdictions as well as articulating that membership is not dependent on race; Membership statistics from the *Official Journal and Yearbook of the Lexington Conference of the Methodist Church* 1945, 1951, 1956, 1960, 1964.

hired at First Methodist Church and Epworth Methodist Church, Wisconsin Conference congregations located in interracial neighborhoods. A newly established Inter-Conference Council would be responsible for accomplishing this goal, as well exploring the possibility of creating an inner-city Methodist Parish. Finally, they drafted a memorial for submission to the upcoming 1956 General Conference requesting an amendment to the process governing the movement of a local church from one jurisdiction to another. Once the current provision, which the group considered “cumbersome and time-consuming,” had been changed, workshop members recommended transferring all Lexington Conference congregations in Wisconsin into the Wisconsin Conference of the North Central Jurisdiction.¹⁴⁰

Sometime after the conclusion of the conference, Dr. Murray Leiffer summarized the reports of the five workshops into a useful one-page document. Citing the excellent participation and lively discussions that occurred in each workshop, Leiffer noted that collectively the workshop reports “demonstrate a profound desire to deal wisely and in Christian Spirit with issues that tend to divide race from race and class from class.” His summary recognized the emergence of five important areas of agreement from the conference’s five workshops. Methodist policies and practices must demonstrate that the Christian gospel is relevant to all of life. The current practice of giving lip-service in sermons and resolutions to “fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men” is not sufficient. In a free and democratic society, everyone deserves employment without discrimination, decent housing, a wholesome family life, and the right to use all public conveniences such as buses and restaurants without fear of harassment. Accordingly,

¹⁴⁰ Paragraph 538 of the *Methodist Discipline* dictated the procedure for a church to transfer to a different annual conference.

every local church should attempt to help its members understand the disturbing obstacles confronting minority groups in the seemingly mundane pursuit of a family-supporting job and an adequate place to live. Furthermore, Methodists ought to train their children so that they will not carry the prejudices that “so often prevent their parents from being Christian in thought and act.” Fourth, the church must open its doors to all people, regardless of race. They admitted that most churches’ members are the people living in the neighborhood where the church is located, which results in racially homogenous churches. However, the workshops agreed that an integrated community with segregated churches would be “a tragedy” because an inclusive church was “a living demonstration of the oneness of all of God’s children and of the transcendence of the church’s message over the divisiveness in our sinful society.” Finally, everyone, laymen and pastors, regardless of race, must demonstrate the effectiveness of Christian concern as the best way to work for a more just and kind society. Two of the conference sponsors attempted to demonstrate this last point in what was sure to have been a well-attended session.¹⁴¹

Given the focus of the conference and the uniformly agreed upon conclusion that the all-black Lexington conference and the white Wisconsin conference would need to work together to achieve the goal of creating and sustaining racially inclusive churches, the forty-five minute scheduled public dialogue between Bishop Matthew Clair of the Central Jurisdiction and the North Central Jurisdiction’s H. Clifford Northcott was likely a highlight of the gathering. Although the single page of notes on their exchange available in the post-conference report surely did not cover all they discussed, the recorded highlights provide further evidence that Methodists were willing to address

¹⁴¹ Murray H. Leiffer, “Reports of Findings of Workshops” in *Report on Methodism and the Inclusive Church*.

everything that might stand in the way of their churches achieving the elusive goal of racial harmony in individual congregations. Furthermore, the frank conversation was evidence of the need for white and black Christians to work together to solve the problem of racism in society and the church. The two men did not always agree, but as they touched on two important topics, listeners surely got the sense that they both sincerely desired the problem be resolved.¹⁴²

Their conversation included the denomination's proverbial elephant in the room – the continued existence of the Central Jurisdiction – as well as a more crucial admission, the existence of paternalism by white Methodists towards their black brethren. Bishop Northcott broached the issue of the Central Jurisdiction by asking if abolishing it would solve the racial problems that had so long plagued Methodists. Clair's response was frank. While doing so would ease Methodists' collective conscience, it would not end segregation in the church. Rather, the solution to difficulties caused and/or maintained by the regionalized aspect of the Methodist Church, Clair believed, required other changes. Attitudes at local churches needed to be transformed so that a "two-way street" of white Christians moving towards black Christians and black Christians moving toward white Christians was built. It was somewhat surprising that Northcott, the white Bishop, is the one who observed "that the spirit of 'paternalism' is very strong in churches that are under white leadership." Though he did not define it, it was clear he saw it as problematic. Could it be reduced, he wondered, in the face of "the extensive migration of non-white elements of our American population?" Clair agreed with Northcott's observation regarding the existence of a spirit among whites that caused them to consider

¹⁴² "Notes on the Colloquoy Between Bishops Clair and Northcott," in *Reports on Methodism and the Inclusive Church*.

themselves better than non-whites. In his estimation, part of the difficulty stemmed from Methodist churches running away from “the inner city and its complex human problems.” He suggested the establishment of study groups in urban churches to face the causes and realities of racial tension. Northcott countered that he saw no “significant movement that will rid us of regionalism and racism” in the near future. In other words, it seemed he was admitting that whites would take advantage of their opportunity to move to the suburbs, so they could escape the discomfort they felt living among non-whites. But, he noted, the Woman’s Societies of Christian Service Groups were attempting to lead in breaking down racial barriers. Clair’s final remark, to give our all to social action programs and “trust God to take care of the results” demonstrated the difficulty Methodists faced in attempting to foster inclusive churches. As it turned out, the reality of paternalism was a challenge too difficult for Kingsley to solve. The widespread suburbanization of its members left God with no building blocks in His attempt to construct a racially diverse congregation. ¹⁴³

The Methodism and the Inclusive Church conference demonstrated that at the annual conference-level, white Methodists were serious about facing racism both in their churches and in the metropolitan area. They recognized that racism’s destructive consequences created and maintained a society in which non-white citizens did not have the same freedoms and opportunities as white ones did. They admitted that the current governing structure of their denomination only served to maintain what some in the denomination considered an un-Biblical racial hierarchy so easily identified throughout secular institutions. Furthermore, they knew that more needed to be done than simply

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

abolishing the Central Jurisdiction. Individual Methodists continued to explicitly and implicitly harbor racial prejudices that informed their daily decision making. In the mid 1950s, at the beginning of the period when the national Civil Rights movement began to gain traction, these were remarkable admissions. Unlike Garfield Avenue Baptist Church's head-in-the-sand positioning, Milwaukee's white Methodist leaders not only publicly admitted to their complicity in racism, but recognized that in doing so they contradicted the Christian gospel. Methodists used economic and employment statistics, population trends, and residential housing data for strategizing how to best help local congregations become racially inclusive, not to determine if one of their congregations was potentially under siege. Nonetheless, conference organizers, leaders, and attendees were not expected to rest on the laurels of what they knew or had learned. They understood that successfully creating racially inclusive churches locally and a racially diverse denomination nationally required that they work together, as equals, with black Methodists currently segregated in the Central Jurisdiction. Beyond this recognition, all those assembled for the two-day gathering had been warned about the pernicious effects of paternalism and white flight to the suburbs. It simply remained to be seen how the message would be received by rank and file Methodists in local Milwaukee congregations like Kingsley.¹⁴⁴

It is unknown what opportunities members at Kingsley Methodist Church had to respond to the information taught and learned at the conference. In what seems a curious omission, given the conference leadership of George Hampel and the involvement as attendees of his wife Wilma and Kingsley's pastor, Herman Thomas, there is no record of

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

any of them sharing publicly with the congregation the hopeful challenge they had been given to shepherd Kingsley into becoming an inclusive church. The conference was not announced in the calendar of activities printed in the February 1956 edition of the *Kingsley Church News*. Nor did Pastor Thomas mention it in his “Pastors Page,” the opening section of the *KCN*, in February or any of the following months that spring. He instead chose to discuss Lent, Good Friday, and Easter. Nor was it mentioned in any of the dozens of *KCN* articles, announcements, and tidbits in the March, April, and May editions. Instead, members learned that the Men’s club was offering golf lessons, thirty-two children were confirmed, and the Brownies needed a new leader due to Mrs. Fedler stepping down as a result of her “leaving our immediate community in the spring.” Yet, some individuals at least, specifically Ross Bardell and Ed Detwiler, learned of the 1956 conference and were excited enough to join the Reverend Thomas and the Hampels at a follow-up conference two years later.¹⁴⁵

The Milwaukee Follow Up Interracial Conference purposed to assess the successes and failures of the Methodist Church in Milwaukee in fulfilling the purposes of the previous conference. The three purposes for the initial conference were studying race-relations in Wisconsin in light of the Christian gospel with the hope of finding new ways to cooperate and serve, being an interracial witness, and considering the resolution of the uneasy relationship between the Central and all other jurisdictions. Significantly, given the previous warning about paternalism and the desire to be an interracial witness, the one-day meeting in April 1958 was hosted at St. James Methodist Church of the

¹⁴⁵ The text of sermons and copies of Sunday service bulletins from the 1950s have been lost to history. However, if bulletins in the 1950s were similar to those from the 1960s, there would not have been a natural place for sharing about the conference in print as the bulletin only offered the order of service for that Sunday and an overview of the upcoming week’s activities.

Lexington Conference and Central Jurisdiction. Bishop Northcott presided over the morning session and host Bishop Clair officiated the afternoon session. The Rev. Frank Shuler, pastor of a Methodist Church in the North Central Jurisdiction's Ohio Conference, briefly introduced the background material just after the morning's devotions. The rest of the day was tightly scheduled. The morning sessions of the conference's four workshops preceded lunch. The day's only speaker, Dr. E. Jerry Walker, the white pastor of a racially inclusive Methodist church in Chicago, gave his address after lunch. After Walker's lecture the workshops met a second time. Next, the Reverend A. Dudley Ward, General Secretary of The Methodist Church's General Board of Social and Economic Relations and one of both conference's sponsors, moderated a discussion between the other two sponsors, Bishops Northcott and Clair. The afternoon ended with the reports of workshops and the presentation of recommendations and next steps.¹⁴⁶

The background material was divided into three sections: changes since 1955, ways the Methodist church responded to those changes, and studies of five Milwaukee Methodist churches currently located in interracial communities. Given that census new data would not be available until 1960, Shuler estimated that Milwaukee's black population was growing by 2,500 persons each year due to continued migration of young adults from the South and a high birth-rate. Housing discrimination against the city's black residents took three forms – gentleman's agreements among whites to prevent sale or rental to African-Americans, a lack of new housing for nonwhites, and low economic potential due to employment discrimination – and resulted in them being overcrowded

¹⁴⁶ Report of the *Follow-up Conference on the "Inclusive Church"* Milwaukee, WI, April 19, 1958.

into areas where the housing stock had already been deteriorating prior to the “negro invasion.” Since 1950, this ghetto had tripled in size and Shuler expected that within five to ten years, Kingsley and eight other Methodist churches would be located in neighborhoods where non-whites comprised over twenty-five percent of the population. Shuler’s information can be best summarized as follows: Poor education in the South combined with white racism led to poor job prospects for African Americans in Milwaukee, which caused a lack of financial stability that resulted in black residents being crowded into substandard housing, which put residents at higher risk for health problems and temptation toward criminality. Shuler painfully admitted that the Methodist Church in Milwaukee had done nothing concrete to mitigate this terrible trend, nor had any of the recommendations from the previous conference been implemented. However, Shuler contended that this failure obstructed the “many hours and much thought” given to the problem by the Wisconsin Conference Board of Social and Economic Relations, a variety of pastors, and Mr. and Mrs. George Hampel. He concluded that interest, leadership, organization, and a specifically coordinated process were all needed and that thus far, only the first two were in place, and that currently the leadership was not being effectively utilized.¹⁴⁷

The studies of Methodist churches currently in interracial neighborhoods provided an expected amount of useful data about each congregation including membership, financial health, building size, and neighborhood demographics. They also offered perspective. Four of the five churches highlighted were in the Wisconsin Conference and each gave clues as to the challenges Kingsley would face in the coming years. Epworth

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Methodist Church was located directly across the street from Garfield Avenue Baptist Church. Over fifty percent of the residents in the neighborhood were African American, but the congregation was entirely white. The vast majority of the members lived “quite far away” and drove in each Sunday morning. Ministries at Epworth were designed for these whites living on the edge of the city or in the suburbs and new members were sought from among others like them. There had been no efforts towards racially integrating the staff so as to minister to black residents in the neighborhood. While its membership was holding steady around 450 and the congregation easily met its budget, Shuler questioned the long-term viability of this arrangement. Summerfield Church, slightly over a mile to the southeast of Epworth, was sandwiched in-between large apartment buildings overlooking Lake Michigan to its east and a blighted neighborhood of black and Puerto Rican residents on the west. The changing racial makeup of nearby residents caused its leaders to begin to ask what the future held for their church, a question Kingsley would similarly begin to ask in the next decade. Unlike Epworth, however Summerfield’s services were racially diverse, with some members who live in the area near the church and others that drive in from some distance. Shuler also noted that Summerfield had attracted young adults and thus maintained a reasonable age distribution among its members. Significantly, every age bracket was contributing to the church’s budget. Thus, even though its membership and budget were very similar to Epworth, its superior physical plant and open approach to the problems of race relations made its future more promising than Epworth.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Of the other two highlighted Wisconsin Conference churches, Highland Methodist's current reality was more akin to Kingsley's near future than downtown Milwaukee's First Methodist. Highland was just over a mile southeast of Kingsley and like the area around Kingsley was in a neighborhood that when originally built consisted solely of single-family homes. The homes near Highland, however, had been subdivided into multiple dwellings or were being used as rooming houses, and their deteriorating condition did not offer stability to new residents as more and more African-Americans moved into the area. Most of Highland's members were old and white. They no longer lived in the neighborhood – eighty-nine percent lived over a mile away and seventy-five percent over five miles away – but still contributed a bulk of the money to support the church budget. Shuler commented that Highland's small membership and the challenges brought about by demographic change left the future of the church in doubt. However, a coordinated program of "some attack on the inner-city problem" with other Methodist churches in the vicinity might lead to a more hopeful future. Shuler viewed the denomination's flagship, First Methodist Church, with the large membership and great economic potential it possessed as a downtown church, as a congregation with a secure future. Though not many of the black residents living just to the north of it were attending, Shuler believed it could become "a very vital center of interracial service and worship, and the hub of inner-city activities in Milwaukee." Unbeknownst to him or anyone else at the time, First Methodist would be torn down eight years later to make way for freeway construction and it therefore never fulfilled that hope. The experiences of these four churches provided Kingsley a clear lesson. Would the leadership and the congregation decide to supplement their current membership – white and increasingly not

living near the church – with new non-white members drawn from those who lived nearby?¹⁴⁹

Keynote speaker Dr. E. Jerry Walker, pastor of St. James Methodist, an integrated church in the Chicago Conference of the North Central Jurisdiction, posed this very question to attendees in his afternoon address. However, before doing so, shared a bit about three different churches in Chicago neighborhoods that had already experienced racial turnover. A church building on the north side that was sold after the congregation relocated to the suburbs was now a used car dealership with cars parked in the sanctuary after renovations added a door large enough for cars to drive through. Another congregation with a large stone building, this one on the south side, was looking for a new minister and offering a very generous \$10,000 annual salary. Walker wondered how they could manage to pay so much. It turned out that the congregation was made up entirely of white people living in the suburbs who drove in on Sunday mornings. They had made no attempt to integrate themselves into the community, and instead relied upon a large endowment to maintain “the good old days that were long past.” The third church did not choose to live just for itself and its members. Rather, this west side Methodist congregation initially decided to do something “for” the community around them. But, as Walker quickly noted, when working to integrate an organization, there is a huge difference between doing something “for” others versus doing it “with” them. In fact, Walker said, “It is possible to do things for people when you are unwilling to do things with people.” The west side church did not realize this and within three years employed four social workers and just one part-time pastor. Walker included the roles of the staff at

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

that church to demonstrate that when a church focused primarily on meeting people's felt needs, rather than inviting them into the spiritual activities of the congregation, the church became just another social service organization. After these three brief portraits, he asked the audience a question as a way to introduce them to the story of the church he pastors, St. James Methodist in Chicago. "Here is a church standing on the corner. Will it or will it not include the Christian people who are in its community?" Eventually, but not without soul-searching and threats by white members to leave if black people became members, his congregation answered yes and there was never again a question about racial integration. It became a natural thing, he said, as described in Galatians 3:28, "In Christ there can be no Greek or Jew, Scythian, Barbarian; slave or free man; but Christ is all and in all..." He didn't let his listeners off the hook easily, though, noting, "You know the passages. But is it the way we live?"¹⁵⁰

With Walker's words surely in the forefront of their minds, participants in each of the four conference workshops had only slightly more than two hours to address one of the following topics: measure the extent to which the situation of minority groups in Wisconsin has improved or worsened since the initial 1956 conference; assess the failures of Wisconsin Conference leaders and churches to meet the problems of ministry and cooperation with Lexington Conference churches and if those Lexington Conference

¹⁵⁰ Dr. E. Jerry Walker, "The Church's Witness to the Community" in Report of the *Follow-up Conference on the "Inclusive Church"* Milwaukee, WI, April 19, 1958. Walker faced a different reality than his audience members, though. According to *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* more than half a million African-Americans migrated to that city from the South between 1916 and 1970. By 1970, they made up 33% of the city's population. James Grossman, "Great Migration," accessed January 16, 2019, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/545.html>. According to his obituary in the Washington's *Kitsap* [County] *Sun*, in 1962, while still living in Chicago, Walker was voted "Person of the Year in Religion." "Dr. E. Jerry Walker, 79: Bone Cancer Claims Wetlands Benefactor," accessed January 18, 2019, https://products.kitsapsun.com/archive/1998/05-20/0004_dr_e_jerry_walker__79__bone_can.html.

churches bear any responsibility; discuss any opportunities made available at the 1956 General Conference to help meet the problems of changing racial demographics in northern cities; outline effective steps of “creative Christian concern” that can be taken to provide an effective ministry to minority groups in Wisconsin. Once again, the Hampels were heavily involved. Wilma served as a resource person for the second workshop and George fulfilled the same role for the fourth. Unlike the previous conference, the reports from individual workshops were verbally presented at the end of the day but were not printed in the conference report. Instead, the report contained only a single summary of the guiding principles agreed upon by conference attendees. The following stood out for its interpersonal emphasis. The workshops believed that person-to-person contacts were of paramount importance because “developing a sense unity which comes from fellowship across racial lines can be fostered without waiting for action from official committees.”¹⁵¹

The final recommendations of the gathering were relatively tame. (Perhaps this is because they recognized that none of the goals laid out at the 1956 conference, which were generally quite ambitious, had been attained.) Thus, attendees recommended that each of the Board of Missions from the Lexington and Wisconsin conferences conduct a “cooperative study of a possible plan” for giving aid to churches that needed outside help. Furthermore, members of “inner-city churches” ought to work with the Urban League or other organizations to establish classes for newcomers that would help them adjust to city life. District superintendents of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and Watertown, Wisconsin districts ought to appoint intra-city, inter-conference committees made up of pastors,

¹⁵¹ “Final Recommendations Adopted by the Delegates to Milwaukee Follow-Up Conference,” in *Interracial Report: “Methodism and the Inclusive Church,”* April 19, 1958.

laymen, and Methodist officials from the Commissions on Social Relations and the Woman's Society of Christian Service. These committees would then serve as vehicles for interested members so that they could carry out the recommendations of the conference; assist congregations in changing neighborhoods by providing training and/or special help as they create and implement programming; study urban areas by making surveys and providing all useful information to local churches to prepare them for the current or coming changes; coordinate work among churches; and provide regular reports to conference committees on Fraternal Relations. Of all the recommendations, only two were not buried under denominational machinations or merely consisted of a lot of the right sounding words and phrases with seemingly no practical value. The first was practical, yet possibly paternalistic – the establishment of a youth work camp that would provide free labor for maintaining church buildings of Lexington Conference churches whose membership is often too small to keep up with the all the needs. Of potentially more value was the recommendation that each church adopt a policy to minister to the people in its immediate neighborhood.¹⁵²

The divergence between the workshop guidelines that emphasized a human-centered approach and the watered-down, denominationally heavy, structurally burdensome conference recommendations must have left all who attended the conference or read the report somewhat confused. Congregations in racially changing neighborhoods seemed to have just two choices. They could opt for the creation of committees with appropriate-sounding purposes that would be overseen by the denomination and be required to submit reports and make further recommendations. Or, on the other hand,

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

they could choose to listen to Dr. Walker's wisdom regarding the huge difference between doing things for people as opposed to genuinely welcoming people into Sunday morning service and Sunday school, weekly women's circles, or Methodist Youth Fellowship gatherings. The first path required local leadership that believed that progress came as a result of planning and meeting within the structure provided by the Methodist denomination. The other choice required the humility to admit and repent of doing things for the non-white people living around the church because they were not interested in bringing them into the congregation as co-equals, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Nationally, however, the Methodist Episcopal Church was not yet ready to eradicate the racism in its own denomination. Throughout the decade many pastors, lay leaders, and regular members in the Northeast, North Central, and West Jurisdictions pressed to abolish the Central Jurisdiction. Unlike the resolution process used by the General Association of Regular Baptists, which did not include a single mention of race or racism in the denomination or the country until 1992, Methodists utilized their memorial process to recognize and fight against racism in their midst as it was occurring. The 1956 General Conference received more than four thousand memorials calling for an end to the Central Jurisdiction and the transfer of its annual conferences and all their local churches into one of the five remaining jurisdictions. Nevertheless, the bishops at the 1956 quadrennial meeting merely appointed a commission of seventy "churchmen," of whom ten were black, to study the issue for the next four years and report on it at the next General Conference in 1960. At that gathering the commission recommended that the Methodists "undertake no basic change in the Central Jurisdiction." They based their decision on the understanding that the 1956 General Conference rule titled Amendment

IX, which allowed for “the voluntary dissolution of the Central Jurisdiction when its members and their white neighbors are ready for it,” was sufficient to resolve the problem. The decision caused dismay within much of the three non-southern jurisdictions.¹⁵³

Officially maintaining segregation within the Methodist Episcopal Church likely did not assist Kingsley and other local Methodist congregations in Milwaukee in successfully navigating the difficulties of becoming inclusive congregations. Indeed, during the late 1950s Kingsley had built a bit of momentum in terms of inclusivity despite the fact that the neighborhood still had no black residents. In November 1958 Wilma Hampel spoke to the Friendship Builders Group on “Housing – A Christian Concern.” The following April was when Dr. Howard Offut spoke to the High School Methodist Youth Fellowship group about Negro Spirituals. In an October 1959 *Kingsley Church News* article titled “Human Rights,” the author of a paragraph length submission began by noting that the Declaration of Independence stated that all men were born free and equal in “rights and opportunities.” The author went on to note that many Americans now recognize that that document highlighted “equality before the law, no discrimination because of race, color or previous condition of servitude.” Significantly, it purported these improvements as “part of the program of Christian people in the challenging days ahead.” The piece was a precursor to a December article, “Federal Activities,” which lauded the federal government’s concern for the basic civil right of equal opportunity. It detailed recent achievements such as the Committee on Civil Rights’ call for a ban on

¹⁵³ “Jurisdictional System Survives Denver Attack,” *The Christian Century*, May 11, 1960, 565; “Methodists Vote Four-Tear Integration,” *The Christian Century*, May 13, 1964, 630-31. The 4,000 memorials received by the 1956 General Conference would have all been submitted beginning after the 1952 General Conference. Also, the *KCN* never mentioned Amendment IX.

discrimination and the desegregation of Veteran's Administration hospitals and military schools. Its positive tone continued through to the end of the article. "The future is bright with promise for a better type of brotherhood and more God-like living." Some at Kingsley, presumably with the approval of both pastoral and lay leadership, fully believed in the Biblical righteousness of racial inclusivity and were making opportunities to educate the rest of the congregation.¹⁵⁴

Kingsley members continued to be presented with thought-provoking articles and opportunities for personal interactions across racial lines. A January *KCN* article on the "Bill of Rights" introduced the United Nations' belief that all "members of the human family deserve equal rights" and "the dignity of the individual can be protected and respected." As befitting both the theme of equal rights and the fact that February was "Human Relations Month," the monthly gathering of United Church Women, a multiethnic Protestant woman's ministry, was hosted by Tabernacle Baptist Church, a black congregation. Members of Kingsley in attendance heard a University of Chicago professor speak on the problems facing the inner city. A "Public Health" piece noted that the welfare of each person was a community concern and encouraged readers to accept "this broader, universal conception of racial betterment." While discussing "Economic Problems," the *KCN* reminded readers that "as Methodists and as believers in the Christian faith we have a great opportunity to put our religion into practice." Though it never mentioned either of the conferences held in Milwaukee just a few years before, the

¹⁵⁴ Various editions of *Kingsley Church News*. The Committee on Civil Rights was established when President Truman issued Executive Order 9808 in December 1946 in order to "strengthen and safeguard the rights of the American people" on the basis that "civil rights were guaranteed by the Constitution and essential to domestic tranquility, national security, the general welfare, and the continued existence of our free institutions." "Records of the President's Committee on Civil Rights: Agency History" Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/pccr.htm>

newsletter did note some of the challenges facing the denomination. Readers learned that the jurisdictional system was one of the topics to be considered at the upcoming 1960 General Conference. Furthermore, Bishop Alton of the Wisconsin Conference was quoted that the Milwaukee district represented the greatest challenge to the conference. In light of this he called for the establishment of “a church program adequate to make a real difference in this urban industrial area.”¹⁵⁵

The tentative embrace of racial justice represented by the content in the *KCN* occurred in the midst of significant, and intertwined, changes for the city of Milwaukee, for Kingsley Church, and for Methodism in the Milwaukee District. In April 1960 Henry Maier was inaugurated mayor of Milwaukee. He replaced Frank Zeidler, who opted not to seek re-election due to health issues and the toll taken on him by a “whisper campaign” against his support for civil rights. The campaign grew throughout the 1950s and culminated during his 1956 re-election bid. In it he was falsely accused of paying for billboards in the South urging black residents to migrate to Milwaukee. Whereas Zeidler demonstrated the marriage of his Lutheran faith and concern for racial equality by attending the 1956 conference on Methodism and the Inclusive Church, Maier seemingly did not share Zeidler’s prioritization of civil rights. Though unknown at the time, the loss of Zeidler’s perspective was surely felt as the city struggled to understand the race riot that occurred from July 30 to August 3, 1967. It precipitated 200 consecutive days of open housing marches from August 1967 to March 1968 under the leadership of Catholic clergyman James Groppi and Vel Phillips. Also of importance to Kingsley and the black residents that would be moving into the area around it throughout the 1960s and beyond,

¹⁵⁵ Each month the *Kingsley Church News* listed the location and theme for the United Church Women meeting.

were changes in pastoral leadership in 1961 and 1967, and the move to another state of crucial lay leaders. These events were emotionally compounded by the 1968 demolition of the Milwaukee's First Methodist Church to make way for freeway expansion north of the city.¹⁵⁶

On the cusp of the new decade Kingsley appeared be well positioned for another successful stretch of ministry as it welcomed a new pastor. In what appears to have been the last significant change to occur during Reverend Thomas' tenure, in October 1960 Kingsley added a 9 AM chapel service to its Sunday morning lineup, which already included the traditional 10 AM service in the sanctuary and as well as youth and adult Sunday school classes. The addition immediately paid dividends as the average attendance in November of that year climbed to 455, as compared to 416 in the previous year. By February the figure had risen to 511, which was surely appreciated by Reverend William Blake, the new pastor, who began in March 1961 after having previously served in the same role at the First Methodist Church in suburban Waukesha. Blake quickly embraced his position as the pastor of a church in a larger city in a denomination attempting to successfully chart a course as neighborhood demographics changed. In November of that year he was elected vice-chairman of the Central Sub-District Planning Council. The group had been dormant for number of years but was reactivated in order to study the challenges facing urban churches and plan a strategy for Methodist Churches in the inner city. His contributions were noticed. In February 1962 Bishop Alton named Blake a delegate-at-large from the Wisconsin Conference to that month's Convocation on Urban Life, a quadrennial conference held that year in St. Louis. The Methodist

¹⁵⁶ Frank P. Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government: My Experience as Mayor of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Publishers, LLC, 2005.)

gathering, which first met in 1954, was attended by bishops, district superintendents, pastors, laymen, and representatives from city and district missionary societies for the purpose of reviewing the progress made by urban churches since the previous two convocations, studying changes revealed by the 1960 United States Census, and planning for Methodism in urban America for the next ten years. Kingsley's new pastor had readily embraced his transition from the suburbs to the city at a time when most white Christians were journeying in the opposite direction.¹⁵⁷

As would be expected, Kingsley church also benefitted from Blake's leadership. Shortly after he was installed, he instituted Sunday evening adult classes. The first class, "The Teachings of the Prophets" was well attended and got the attention of Kingsley's Commission on Missions, which suggested that the next class tackle a book. They suggested either *The Call for New Churches* or *The Edge of the Edge*. Blake opted for the latter, described in the *KCN* as a book dealing with the inner urban areas of our great cities. The *KCN*'s initial description undersold the book's radical Biblical message. It built naturally upon the ideas discussed at the two conferences of the previous decade and, if accepted and followed, its message had the potential to drastically impact the Kingsley congregation as well as the neighborhood around the church.

Written in 1961 by Theodore E. Matson, *The Edge of the Edge* passionately called for its readers to return to the Biblical model of local congregations as outreach-oriented groups convinced of and inspired by all that Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead accomplished for them. Matson particularly hoped that churches in demographically shifting neighborhoods would heed the call to put the lessons and values

¹⁵⁷ Attendance figures as reported in the *KCN*.

of scripture into practice rather than following the patterns of world. He reminded readers that the role of the church, and the challenges faced by it, were the same as those embraced by the early church as described in the Bible. “It was the Resurrection faith that lighted up the first century” and today can do the same in a world threatened by atomic destruction. But the faith exhibited in the New Testament was often hard to find in modern America. Matson quoted fellow clergyman, Lawrence Folkemer, who asked “Is God, God; or is he a god?” He chastised the American church for ignoring God’s holiness, making God in our own image, “an American jolly good fellow.” He allowed no excuses for lax theology that led to inaction. Rather, Matson asked readers to recall that the book of Acts showed the apostles constantly wrestling with new questions and that unanticipated problems arose with regularity. The disciples, he contended, always looked to the Holy Spirit for guidance and made decisions that were followed by deeds, not mere resolutions. In order to fulfill its God-given purpose, the church needed to pay more attention to the world God had redeemed. He extolled his audience that adventure awaited those who were unwilling to settle for a comfortable religious experience. “The demand is for Christians who will dare to lift up the Cross above the customs and standards of the present world – dare to attack the strongholds of economic and social paganism, the class prejudices and racial bigotries – and lift up their voices to him who is Truth and Life.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Theodore E. Matson, *Edge of the Edge* (New York: Friendship Press, 1961), 10-83; Prior to publishing *The Edge of the Edge* Matson was a pastor of congregations in Michigan and Chicago, a member, and eventually executive director of the Board of American Missions of the Augustana Lutheran Church, and chairman of the Committee on Urban Church Planning of the Board of American Missions. Later in his career he was made a bishop with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) denomination, served as the first president of the Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Urban Affairs, and served as a board member and vice president of the National Council of Churches; Edward Baumann, “Lutheran Bishop Theodore Matson,” accessed February 1, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1987-04-25-8701310754-story.html>; In the September 21, 1963 article, “Incarnation Keeps its Mind and Doors Open,”

Matson's call was not simply for Christians to renounce racism in society or the church, though he did do this and pointed out the many ways black Americans had made contributions to the country beyond their opportunities. Rather, he explicated a more holistic Biblical mandate based upon the events described in chapter two of the book of Acts. When the Spirit of God moved on the day of Pentecost, three thousand new believers representing sixteen nationalities from three continents – people of different languages, colors, customs, and cultures – chose to believe in Jesus for their salvation and became members of the church. Matson contended that the diversity of this group of new believers, who were “of one heart and soul” despite their obvious human differences, was a “mighty demonstration” of God's purpose as revealed in John 17:21 that “they may all be one.” He questioned if God's plan for the nations might not include using individual congregations in America as a visible demonstration to the world that the church is “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit – a fellowship that knows nothing about the limitations of nationality, race, color, class, education, social status, or economic circumstance.” He quoted William H. Lazareth, a theology professor and Lutheran bishop, who asked, “is the church committed to being the church, or is it resigned to being simply another social institution?” Matson used the remainder of his book to answer the question.¹⁵⁹

from the *Milwaukee Sentinel's* Churches in Transition” series, it stated that not only did Matson speak to that congregation, but that his book has been used in “urban study groups of many denominations;” The Commission on Missions was one of five such groups that directed ministry efforts at each local Methodist congregation. The other commissions oversaw Finance/Stewardship, Membership/Evangelism, Social Concerns, and Worship.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-40. During his career, Lazareth served as the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as the Director of the Faith and Order Secretariat in the World Council of Churches and was a professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. “William H. Lazareth”, Fortress Press, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://fortresspress.com/author/william-h-lazareth>.

Edge of the Edge presented both a realistic assessment of challenges facing Protestant churches as well as numerous examples of congregations that overcame them. Matson noted that many Protestant congregations were “self-oriented” as opposed to being focused on the neighborhoods in which they are located. This arrangement was due in part to the fact that their members were geographically scattered and thus evangelism efforts by them often occurred far away from the neighborhood where the church building was located. He believed that the primary mission of a local church was to the particular community in which it existed. He was not the only one. He shared numerous stories of churches operating as “bridge-building communities” where people recognize the love of God in large part because the congregation decided that newcomers of any stripe could be in the pew, at the communion rail, in the choir, and on the church board. He shared about a church on the east coast that “ripped off its horse blinder to get its eyes on the precious souls living at its door in the inner city.” They began to intensively witness and serve their community by sending out invitations to 20,000 nearby mailboxes, visiting local nursing homes and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and telephoning apartments off-limits to church visitors. Children from the community began to attend Sunday School and soon the children’s choir was multi-racial. A recent adult membership class included five black participants, an orthodox Jew, a convert from Buddhism, and Indonesian and a redeemed alcoholic. That congregation’s pastor noted, “In years we are an old congregation, but, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are new in spirit and hopeful about tomorrow.” In the coming years Kingsley would be given the opportunity to experience such a gift, if they would only unwrap it. ¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 106-120.

Kingsley's congregation responded positively to pastor Blake's leadership and seemed to embrace the process of preparing to be a racially inclusive congregation. The Sunday evening class for adults, which was advertised as "Churches for New Times," began in January 1962. That month's *KCN*, perhaps recognizing the need for a more robust description of the class, described the course as one which will "bring members face to face with the very real problems faced by Kingsley Church in its relationship to the city of Milwaukee." Participants would consider a variety of questions: "Is our witness to our faith effective to the people about us? Are the real needs being met? Are we truly Christians in our witness? What can we do to make Christ more powerful in the life of Milwaukee? How can we do it?" The course, which was scheduled to run for five weeks, was organized by pastor Blake and a committee of four women from Kingsley and would be taught by Dr. Arthur Scholler, Professor of Elementary Education and Director of The Reading Clinic at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, the Hampels, and Earl Haney. The teaching team was styled as "a group capable of stimulating thinking about our personal and social problems in truly Christian manner." It was, the article continued, what many desperately needed, an opportunity to "enlarge our understanding of our faith to meet the dimensions of our new world. The article ended by plainly stating that every Kingsley member ought to be concerned about the material covered and all were urged to join the group. The article accomplished its purpose; the first meeting, held despite inclement weather, was so well attended that "the capacity of the lounge was taxed." The class averaged sixty attendees each week. Two weeks later

the class went on a field trip to Christ Presbyterian Church, located slightly east at 18th and Walnut, because of the growth of a multiracial congregation there.¹⁶¹

Kingsley was doing its best to prepare to be the same. On February 11 Blake preached a sermon titled “Christ and Race.” The *KCN* reminded its readers that Methodists were called to consider “the way of Christ in this crucial field of life and action” and promised the sermon would address the topic with “candor and frankness.” A week later on February 18, a winter storm was once again unable to keep Kingsley members away from church. Despite a radio announcement cancelling an afternoon hymn singing, eighteen people still showed up and enjoyed two hours of singing, including “Negro spirituals.” In June Kingsley purchased its new assistant minister a junior parsonage at 3916 W. Walnut. It was slightly farther away than Pastor Blake’s residence, which was located directly next door to the church at 3212 W. Walnut. Unlike Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, where the parsonage was located quite far away from the church, Kingsley was naturally adhering to the advice given in *Edge of the Edge*. Also in June, the *KCN* advertised “Summer Camp Opportunities” with the enticing options of a refreshing swim in the lake at the Asbury Acres camp or a time of quiet devotion listening to a Negro Spiritual in the chapel at the Lake Geneva (WI) site. That fall it was reported that outreach to the community around the church had been successful in that many children who attended summer vacation church school were from the neighborhood. (As the neighborhood had not yet demographically shifted it is likely that those children were white. The process of community outreach, however, would be an

¹⁶¹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED023550.pdf>, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED026215.pdf>; “Kingsley Keeps Lights Aglow for ‘Port of Entry’ Neighborhood,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 7, 1963.

important effort to continue in the future as the neighborhood's inhabitants changed.)

These efforts all pointed to an openness to the spiritual expressions of black Christians as well as a willingness to evangelize those living close to the church.¹⁶²

Kingsley Church did not sequester its members as it attempted to continue their education on race and prepare them to become a racially inclusive congregation. Rather, it encouraged them to attend events at other churches as appropriate. As announced in the *KCN*, the April 1962 United Church Women meeting was held at Greater Galilee Baptist Church, a black congregation. In September members were urged to attend a panel presentation and discussion period on the challenges faced by "Indians, Migrants, and Negroes" in Wisconsin at the West Allis First Methodist Church. Later that month Milwaukee's First Methodist Church hosted the North Central Regional Briefing Conference on Christian Social Concerns. Kingsley members were invited to join an expected crowd of 150 delegates to learn more about the "problems of race, world peace, and the city." Speakers included Bishop Alton of the Wisconsin Conference, Bishop Claire from the Central Jurisdiction, and Mayor Zeidler, who was to speak on the challenges of urban renewal. In addition to sending its people out to learn, Kingsley also invited people into their church to teach. In November 1962, Hazzard F. Parks, director of Marcy Place, a settlement house in Chicago, spoke at both the 9 AM and 10 AM services about the work carried on there. Not surprisingly, the *KCN* noted that Emmy Lou Hampel, daughter of George and Wilma, served at Marcy House over the summer.

¹⁶² During three Sundays in the fall of 1961 men of the church went door-to-door in the neighborhood to conduct a "friendly community religious surveys" for the purpose of meeting unchurched people in the community. 1061 contacts were made, with fifty-five possible new members identified. It is likely that some of the neighborhood children who attended the vacation church school were initially contacted on one of those Sundays. The endeavor was repeated in 1962.

Seemingly, all the focus on race was not scaring people away. The November 1962 *KCN* announced that church attendance over the summer increased by an average of forty-one people per Sunday.¹⁶³

On the surface, 1963 seemed to hint at possible difficulties even as Kingsley steadily progressed towards readying itself for the eventuality of the neighborhood around it becoming multi-racial. On February 10th, Methodist “Race Relations Day,” Blake preached a sermon – “Our Dilemma in Black and White” – that he hoped the Holy Spirit would use to confront church members’ “uneasy consciences” regarding the matter of interracial fellowship. Later in February, he scheduled another difficult topic, a sermon on the personal problems caused by alcohol that had been written and distributed by the United Temperance Movement. Though it did not specify which of the issues were troublesome, and for how many people, the *KCN* offered the following caveat after announcing those sermons: “You may not agree with the words of the preacher. Remember that he is doing his best to apply the Word of God to the life of our day. It may be that even though you may not agree. God may speak to your mind, heart and conscience through the experience.” Two months later the *KCN* design received a makeover. Two notable additions accompanied stylistic changes. For the first time ever the *KCN* printed a byline within the masthead atop the front page. Readers were reminded that Kingsley was about “Building a bridge of Christian Understanding in the heart of Milwaukee.” Additionally, hand-drawn illustrations premiered in the newsletter. That month’s picture was of a young white couple singing. In May Bishop Alton reappointed the pastors for another year, perhaps in light of continued attendance growth.

¹⁶³ According to an advertisement in the March 8, 1961 *Ames Daily Tribune*, Parks held a M.A. in Social Work from Atlanta University and was a World War II veteran.

By the fall a budget deficit necessitated a call for extra giving and caused some budget items to be cut or trimmed. However, the situation was by no means dire. There was plenty of money to install a gas-burning boiler over the summer to replace the old coal-fired unit. In terms of the congregation's ability to successfully become a racially inclusive body, however, the *KCN* may have "buried the lead." Readers of the December 1963 edition would have had to read all the way to the last page in order to see the article mentioning that George and Wilma Hampel had moved to Des Moines, Iowa as a result of George's job transfer with the Cerebral Palsy Foundation.¹⁶⁴

The challenges that arose in 1963 did not, however, cause Kingsley Church to waver. It still did all it could to prepare to be a racially diverse congregation. It celebrated its 70th anniversary with a January 1964 sermon series on "Church and Community." As part of the series it announced "Everyone is welcome at Kingsley Church, regardless of race, color, economic or social position. Jesus said, 'He who comes to me, I will not cast out.'" The *KCN* also announced that month that the Senior High Methodist Youth Fellowship was looking for a speaker who could "talk authoritatively and with inside perspective on 'The Problem of the Negro in Milwaukee.'" The inclusion of "authoritatively" and "inside perspective" make clear that they were looking for a black speaker. The fact that they were advertising their need for one seems to indicate that there were no black members at Kingsley who could give the talk. Challenging Sunday evening classes continued with the admission that the book being discussed, *Our Mission Today: The Beginning of a New Age* will cause Kingsley's leaders and members to

¹⁶⁴ In addition to many friends who likely still attended Kingsley and could keep George and Wilma apprised of all the developments there, both of their adult sons and one daughter-in-law are listed in the 1967-68 membership directory. "Hampel to Quit School Board in Near Future," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 3, 1962.

“rethink the role of our congregation in the light of the needs of our community and world,” which may necessitate “drastic changes in methods, activities, and attitudes.” The sentiment from the January sermon series was prominently displayed at the bottom of the front page of the May *KCN* as a way of advertising a second “Loyalty Sunday,” when members pledged their financial support for the coming fiscal year. “The friendly fellowship of Kingsley Church is offered freely to all who seek to know and serve Christ, of whatever race, color or nationality.” All members who were interested in the mission Kingsley has in the center of the city were urged to attend and respond with a generous pledge.

Those promises of monetary support allowed Kingsley to continue to pursue the spiritual, relational, and intellectual growth required to overcome the pervasive effects of racism. On April 11, 1965, Kingsley hosted an interracial crowd of between forty and fifty people when they were joined by members of St. Matthew CME for a discussion of racial problems. The “frank and candid” exchange was “conducted in Christian love” and all who attended expressed appreciation for the evening. It had been sponsored by Kingsley’s Commission on Social Concerns and another meeting was planned at St. Matthew later in April. While a meeting like this would have been impossible for Garfield Avenue Baptist Church to sponsor given its members complete lack of interracial relationships and the fact that such relationships were not valued by the General Association of Regular Baptists, Kingsley’s congregation had been prepared for the propriety of hosting black Christians in their church. In the conferences on Methodism and the Inclusive Church, Pastor Blake’s Sunday evening class discussing *Edge of the Edge*, and by inviting people such as Rosa Page Welch and J. Howard Offut

to participate in their services, leaders from the Wisconsin Conference, as well as those on the Board of Social and Economic Relations, and local leaders at Kingsley had laid the groundwork for such a gathering. That groundwork, however, did not necessarily cover all activities.¹⁶⁵

In June 1965 Kingsley hired a new associate pastor, James Talmadge. Talmadge, an old acquaintance of Pastor Blake, was to continue work towards his master's degree in sociology with an emphasis on community organization at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee while serving at Kingsley. As a result of both his fulfilling school requirements and the prompting of a few Kingsley members, he spent more time outside of Kingsley than in it during his two and a half years there. In an interview Talmadge noted that he arrived at Kingsley "right when the civil rights thing burst on the scene." He did not begin his new role planning to involve himself in the movement. Rather, his engagement with it came almost accidentally, but eventually defined his time at Kingsley. He explained that early in his time there he was approached by three young couples who insisted that he "get into civil rights." He chuckled as he recalled that he didn't want to ask them what that was. They proceeded to tell him to go to a local Milwaukee park the following Saturday for the next march. He did and was comforted to see a fellow he knew from seminary also there. Together they waited and watched as more people gathered. Talmadge remembered feeling taken aback as organizers told those assembled to put away "communist signs." Despite having nothing to do with the organization or leadership of the event, he ended up marching in the front row and was pictured in the

¹⁶⁵ The *KCN* noted that the follow-up meeting at St. Matthew was scheduled to occur on April 30, which was too late in the month to make into the May publication. Unfortunately, no subsequent edition of the *KCN* reported on that meeting; Kingsley's Commission on Social Concerns met monthly.

newspaper. He was energized by the event and purposed to continue learning and attending other marches. Unbeknownst to Kingsley's leadership, they had a nascent civil rights activist on their staff.¹⁶⁶

At field placements to fulfill requirements for his degree and through his continued presence at civil rights marches, Talmadge began to form friendships with a racially diverse group of people. These relationships, in turn, opened his eyes to the racial injustices that existed in Milwaukee that his upbringing in northern Wisconsin had prevented him from recognizing. While serving at the Northcott Neighborhood House he worked closely with a black priest to raise money for the civil rights movement. Together the two young men visited all the local taverns and took up collections from patrons and bartenders. This helped him become very comfortable as a white man in the predominantly black section of Milwaukee. Another Northcott assignment, taking depositions about police brutality from black residents, allowed him to learn more about the need for the civil rights movement. It was a particularly difficult project for him as Kingsley counted a handful of policemen among its members. He recalled feeling like the "token white" as he worked alongside four or five African American men from Minneapolis who had been brought to Milwaukee to start a job training program for the city's black residents. Together, they would often out to eat prior to attending speaking engagements. Whereas everyone else at Kingsley had been taught solely under the

¹⁶⁶ James Talmadge interview with Peter Borg August 29, 2014. Talmadge does not remember the identity of the three couples who verbally introduced him to the civil rights movement. He did not specify which civil rights issue the marches he participated in was protesting. Given that he was at Kingsley from June 1965 through March 1968, he likely marched in support of one or more of the following three causes: the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC), protests of discriminatory membership policies at the Eagles Club ballroom, or the open-housing marches. The latter two were led by the NCAAP youth council and Father Groppi, with city council member Vel Phillips also leading the open housing marches.

auspices of the Methodist Church, Talmadge's training took place outside the walls of the church.¹⁶⁷

Through his regular attendance at marches Talmadge got to know Father James Groppi, who he considered "as close to a saint as he'd met in his life." Talmadge recalled that Groppi never knew if he would be alive at the end of the day and was totally committed to living out his Christian faith. Thus, Talmadge considered it a great honor that as he was recognized as a regular participant in marches led by Groppi, which resulted in the Catholic priest often asked him to read scripture to the assembled marchers prior to starting. Additionally, Groppi challenged Talmadge and the other white clergymen in attendance at marches. Groppi said that while he would always take the side of "his people," the parishioners at the all-black St. Boniface Catholic parish, "you guys have to be the bridge builders." It would not be an easy role. Talmadge remembered the march across the [Sixteenth Street] viaduct as "one of the creepiest experiences he had ever had" due to the combined presence of so many police officers and the utter hatred in the eyes of white residents of Milwaukee's South Side who Talmadge claimed "wanted you dead" for daring to push for open housing in that all-white working-class section of the city. It was a confrontation that likely seemed a world away to most Kingsley members in the mid 1960s.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Talmadge evidently gained the respect and trust of those running the Greater Industrialization Center. When he completed his master's degree they offered him a job with a \$14,000 salary, far higher than what Kingsley had been paying. He turned it down to pursue opportunities establishing residential mental health facilities in the Green Bay area.

¹⁶⁸ In *Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* author Patrick D. Jones described how the Sixteenth Street Viaduct was "the city's equivalent of the Mason-Dixon Line, [and] linked and divided the largely African-American North Side from the predominantly white, working-class South Side." Jones noted that many "joked that the viaduct was the longest bridge in the world because it linked 'Africa to Poland.'"

Despite initially being informed about Milwaukee's civil rights movement by members of Kingsley Church, Talmadge maintained that "none of them went with me." He recalled deciding not to "push it down their throats" and did not remember the congregation as being one that understood the connection between all they had been learning about the Biblical imperative to consider embracing such activities and there being any interest in actually doing so. Talmadge claimed to never have discussed all that he was learning and doing with Pastor Blake or his replacement, Fred MacKenzie, or the church council, or the bishop. Upon reflection, Talmadge believed one reason he never shared with the congregation at a Sunday service was that Blake loved preaching, tightly controlled the flow of the morning service, and did not want anyone to alter it. In what seems as if it may have been an outlier, but is worth noting due to its intensity, Talmadge related one instance of outright aggression against him that he understood to be because of his involvement with civil rights. Talmadge recalled one man, whom he believed to have been the treasurer of the church, confronting him as he walked down the stairs after service one Sunday. The man grabbed Talmadge by the shirt, pushed him against the wall, and said, "You know what you're doing, don't you. Giving has fallen off considerably." Talmadge was quick to note that he did not know how many others at Kingsley felt the same, as he was only especially involved with the youth of the church and did not, therefore, "get the pulse of the people."¹⁶⁹

Thus, his bridge-building at Kingsley was confined to asking the board to fix up the gym and locker rooms, getting a day care center in the building, and talking every once and awhile to those "supportive" young couples who initially told him about the

¹⁶⁹ Talmadge interview.

first march he attended. He regretted that Kingsley never got any type of “organization going in the church to get more of the people to support and do more.” He recognized that all the time he spent outside the church – at Northcott, or on marches, or meeting with neighborhood groups – limited his ability to think about getting Kingsley more involved. Perhaps, however, it was a congregation that despite all that some of its leaders and members had wrestled with was never a good candidate to be like one of the churches featured in the *Edge of the Edge*.¹⁷⁰

The fact that almost none of the congregation’s members lived anywhere near the church was one of reasons that Kingsley and other predominantly white congregations were unlikely to radically alter their priorities for the sake of sharing the gospel with, and inviting into the congregation’s activities, anyone who came to them or lived in the area of the church. This was true during James Talmadge’s tenure at Kingsley. Lay leaders at the church served in a variety of capacities. They worked as officers, trustees, and stewards, in addition to serving on one of the five commissions, a host of committees, or as teachers for children’s Sunday school classes. Based upon the *1965-1966 Directory of Officers, Boards, Commissions, Committees, and Organizations* the sixty-four men and women who volunteered as an officer, trustee, or steward – positions whose roles were important enough to require nomination and congregational approval – lived an average of four miles away from Kingsley. That distance meant that the vast majority of Kingsley’s lay leaders chose to live in all-white neighborhoods in Milwaukee or in all-white suburbs. Very few lived in the immediate vicinity of the church; four people lived less than a mile from the church with another seven between one and two miles away.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Occasionally the *KCN* noted the reality that members did not live near the church. The June 1962 mention of Miss Mable Van Roo's resignation as Cradle Roll Superintendent specified the reason as she "was living at considerable distance from the church." A few years later in a November 1965 article about a new neighborhood organization asked readers "If you live in the church's neighborhood do you belong?" Clearly, the author knew many did not. This timing is particularly important given that it was true prior to the neighborhood around the church undergoing significant racial turnover.¹⁷¹

That Kingsley as an all-white church had a substantial number of members living far away from it in the mid-1960s was not a new phenomenon. Rather, that had been the reality for at least fifteen years. Many women of the church gathered once a month as part of a Women's Society of Christian Service (WSCS) Circle. While two of the seven groups that met in 1951 and 1952 gathered at the church, the other five were hosted on a rotating basis at the homes of the women in the group. Calculating the distance from those homes to Kingsley church provides a glimpse at where many highly-involved members lived. In 1951 the *KCN* listed thirteen different host homes. Those homes were, on average, 3.2 miles from the church. In 1952 the twenty-one homes hosting WSCS circle were an average of 3.7 miles away from Kingsley. (Each year the mean distance was 2.5 miles, demonstrating that there were a few members who lived so far away that they skewed the average distance upward.) Also notable from these years is the fact that very few people lived right near Kingsley. In 1951 only three host homes were less than a mile away from the church and just one was between one and two miles away. The next

¹⁷¹ The mean distance away of those sixty-four people was 3.4 miles. Thus, the average was not significantly skewed by a few people who lived a great distance from the church. June 1962 *KCN*, November 1965 *KCN*.

year there was only one host that lived less than a mile away and five that lived between one and two miles away. Another measure of where the members of the congregation lived beginning in the early 1950s is found by examining the zip codes of new members. From 1952 though 1965 Kingsley welcomed people from fifteen different zip codes in addition to 53208, where the church was located. This data confirms that many Kingsley members lived far away from the church and had for some time. The same data also revealed that the number of new members who joined each year was decreasing over that time period. Presumably, this downward trend was caused by white families choosing to join suburban congregations.¹⁷²

Talmadge's interview provides helpful information on what was occurring with Kingsley's membership during the 1950s up through 1967, when he left Kingsley. He recalled that when he was there most of the congregation was getting very old, with many members in their seventies, eighties, and even some in their nineties. The children, often in their fifties and sixties, and grandchildren of this oldest generation largely still belonged to and attended the church, but those two younger generations all lived in the suburbs. Although Sunday morning was the only time of the week most of them came to Kingsley, he described their loyalty as "tremendous." But it seems as if they were more loyal to their parents than to Kingsley itself, or the neighborhood around it. He later shared that once the grandparents died, the younger generations opted to attend churches in the communities where they lived. Thus, twenty years before the neighborhood around Kingsley underwent racial turnover, a significant number of its members lived far away

¹⁷² Data regarding the location of Women's Society of Christian Circles was published each month in the *KCN*. The data for Women's Society of Christian Circle host homes from 1953 through the mid-1960s differs from 1951 and 1952 only in that the average distance from the church increased as did the number of hosts living in the suburbs. See fn. 21 for explanation regarding use of zip codes.

from the area, in sections of Milwaukee or suburban communities with negligible racial diversity. Those in the suburbs, in fact, lived in municipalities that were allowed by federal guidelines to be for whites only as a result of redlining, restrictive covenants, and a variety of strategies employed by neighborhood associations and realtors to keep neighborhoods for whites only.¹⁷³

The massive relocation of white city residents to all-white suburbs significantly undermined efforts by the Methodist Episcopal Denomination to foster diverse local churches. The April 1959 “Wisconsin Area News Edition” of *Together: The Midmonth Magazine for Methodist Families*, highlights the challenge suburbanization presented to the Methodist plan for racial inclusivity. The edition championed the denomination’s commitment to that ideal by noting that Methodist churches throughout the country were being called on to institute their positions as “inclusive Christian fellowships.” It provided the text of the official policy adopted by the First Methodist Church in Wausau, a town of some size, but no racial diversity, in north central Wisconsin. The policy began by reminding all who read it that the 1956 General Conference suggested that all Christians and churches prayerfully examine their own hearts as regards their “attitudes and practices” toward “racial equality and fellowship.” The Wausau policy then offered three pronouncements on which the congregation agreed: First, God is the Father of all peoples and races and as such all men are brothers, each of “infinite worth as a child of God.” Next, as all people have “supreme value in the sight of God” they ought to be held

¹⁷³ Ibid. Correlating data from 1950, 1960, and 1970 U.S. Censuses for the Milwaukee Metropolitan area with the 1967-1968 Kingsley membership directory unequivocally demonstrates that the vast majority of those Kingsley members who lived more than a mile away from the church resided in neighborhoods that were home only to other white residents. For more information on the use of redlining, racially restrictive covenants, and zoning by various levels of government for the purposes of making sure African Americans and other racial minorities did not live in the same areas as white Americans, see Richard Rothstein’s *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*.

in the same esteem by their fellow men, and similarly respected by institutions and societal practices. Finally, “There must be no place in the Methodist Church for racial discrimination or enforced segregation.” On this basis the policy offered seven resolutions, including the following: Christians without regard to race, color, or national origin should be accepted into membership; current members ought to support the pastor in welcoming all new members with grateful anticipation of the contributions they will make to the church; and members were expected “in their home, employment and community relations endeavor to work actively to eliminate discrimination and create true brotherhood.”¹⁷⁴

That month’s *Together* magazine also reported on a variety of Methodist construction projects in Milwaukee’s suburbs. The population demographics of these suburban locations were remarkably similar to Wausau. It is, therefore, wholly appropriate that the inclusivity policy championed by the magazine came from a municipality where demographic realities made it extremely unlikely that it would need to be put into practice. The suburban communities highlighted that month were similarly devoid of non-white residents. The lead story in the “Wisconsin Area News Edition” concerned the February 22 groundbreaking ceremony for the \$2.1 million Methodist Manor, a Wisconsin Conference Home for the Aging in West Allis, a working-class suburb just west of Milwaukee. In 1960 West Allis was home to 68,157 residents; only thirteen were black. A picture from December 1958 showed the Rev. Clifford Fritz, chairman of the Church Extension Committee of the Wisconsin Conference Board,

¹⁷⁴ *Together: The Midmonth Magazine for Methodist Families*, April 1959, page A-3. The Biblical mandate for Christians loving their neighbor comes from Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, found in chapter 10 of Luke’s Gospel.

turning the first shovel of dirt at the groundbreaking for a new congregation in Brown Deer, a suburban community slightly north of the city that had incorporated in 1955. In 1960 Brown Deer was 99.5% white. The following page noted that the village of Pewaukee, in Waukesha County, Milwaukee County's western neighbor, was to be the home to a new Methodist Congregation. While an artist's rendering of the \$160,000 structure noted its "striking lines," it is unlikely that many non-whites would see them in person, much less worship in the building. In 1960 Waukesha County was 99.8 percent white. Finally, the publication mentioned that a variety of Protestant denominations were cooperating to conduct a religious census in another Waukesha County town, Oconomowoc. Survey results were to be used to "plan the expansion of churches and in finding and recruiting prospective members."¹⁷⁵

Left unsaid in the ironically titled *Together* magazine is that by and large only white people were together in America's suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s. Almost all the growth occurring in suburban communities and churches was due to the movement of white families from Milwaukee to those areas. As is clear from the magazine, many of those families arrived in the suburb of their choice looking for a church to be involved with. (Although there were no laws preventing African Americans from travelling out to the suburbs to attend these churches, doing so would have been problematic. There are

¹⁷⁵ According to the 1960 U.S. Census Wausau's population was 31,943. All were white except for two black residents and twenty-seven in the "other" racial category. Likewise, in 1960 Brown Deer was home to 11,280 people. All were white except for sixteen black and 38 "others." 1960 Census data shows that Waukesha County had 146 black residents and 145 residents of other races compared with 157,958 whites. Of the 291 non-whites living in the county, almost half lived in its biggest municipality, the city of Waukesha. Similar to the April edition of *Together*, the January 1962 *KCN* noted that Milwaukee District Superintendent, Guy R. Nelson would be preaching at Kingsley later that month. The article touted his pioneering work in west suburban Elm Grove, where he began with only a pack of survey cards and oversaw the establishing of a new congregation and construction of a new church building. It noted that when Nelson left to become superintendent, the Elm Grove church was "one of the most flourishing Methodists churches in the metropolitan area."

simply no good reasons to drive past numerous black or inclusive congregations to attend service at a church in a location where residential demographics made it clear they were not wanted.) Nowhere in the magazine, however, are the reasons for leaving the city discussed, nor are the realities for churches still in the city and the growing challenges in their neighborhoods mentioned.

That was not the case, though, at the 1956 Methodism and the Inclusive Church Conference. Bishop St. Clair, during his moderated discussion with Bishop Northcott, noted that ending segregation in the Methodist Church required “a two way street: a movement from white Christians toward negro Christians, and from negro Christians toward white Christians.” It is reasonable to believe that he recognized the detrimental effect of white flight. Churches in the suburbs could not be expected to become inclusive if the communities themselves were not. Others also noted this problem. Dr. Murray Leiffer’s background material for the conference began by quoting a white school principal frustrated by the widespread abandonment of the city by white leaders and their churches. “If only the churches will work with us in our effort to stabilize community life instead of getting panicky and moving away, we can solve the basic problem of the inter-racial community.” The same point was made by those who attended the conference workshop on housing and employment discrimination. The group report recommended that “the church and its members” ought to set the standards of behavior in society, rather than “lagging behind.” One specific way to do this, the workshop noted, was “staying and serving where the church is physically located, regardless of racial changes in the neighborhood.” A few white Methodists, at least, recognized that there was no Biblical

justification for secular officials to be more concerned with race relations and community stability than followers of Jesus.¹⁷⁶

Unfortunately, the widespread suburbanization of Kingsley's members only served to further reinforce the paternalistic attitudes instilled in them as a result of the racial segregation built into the Methodist jurisdictional system. The racial compromise at the core of denominational structure that resulted from the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1939 reunification plan subtly yet powerfully influenced the understanding and imaginations of individual white Methodists. If black Methodist churches were not supposed to be a part of the same jurisdiction as white churches, then it could easily stand to reason that black Methodists were not supposed to share the pews at Kingsley on a Sunday morning or to join a WSCS circle or attend meetings at someone's home. In short, the history of compromise central to the Methodist Episcopal Church and its segregated governing structure gave white Methodists sanction to view black people as an "other." This reality short-circuited all the targeted education both the denomination and Kingsley had undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s. Kingsley came away from that rigorous process convinced that it was their Christian duty to do *something*. In their understanding, however, doing things for people or giving money to people less fortunate than themselves was sufficient to fulfill their spiritual obligations. They had evidently never heard, or decided not to take to heart, the Rev. E. Jerry Walker's warning to

¹⁷⁶ A January 1954 *Christian Century* article about St. Louis, "Suburban Growth Poses Challenge," asked a series of pointed questions regarding the racial implications of suburbanization. "Are 'white' churches to be forever in flight? Just where does our jim crow horizon come down; where is the point of no return?" The article wondered if the "problem of church comity can ever be solved by segregated churches." Milwaukee was not alone in the challenge of white flight to the suburbs amid the stated goal of racially inclusive churches. In *Edge of the Edge*, Matson quotes from architecture historians Christopher Tunnard and Henry Hope Reed' *American Skyline*, as they discuss the "terrifying cost" of suburbanization. It is not, however, the loss of open land at the edge of the city. Rather, they lament the abandonment of the city "once it had been worked for all it was worth."

participants at the 1958 follow-up conference to the Conference on Methodism and the Inclusive Church, that “it is possible to do things for people when you are unwilling to do things with people.”¹⁷⁷

For many years Kingsley had done things for those less fortunate than themselves, especially black Methodists. The financial generosity of Kingsley members typically occurred each February. As early as 1952 the *KCN* reported on Race Relations Sunday and described it as “This is one time when we put special emphasis on the brotherhood of men under the Fatherhood of God, a matter which needs our utmost concern today.” The article went on to mention that Kingsley members had two opportunities that year to “do something for our brother who needs our help.” As was their typical gesture on this annual observance, members could donate to help “Negro Schools under Methodist jurisdiction.” That year, however, there was an additional “obligation.” The congregation at St. James Methodist Church of the Lexington Conference, located two miles east, was too small to pay the \$75,000 loan made to them by the Methodist Board of Missions for the purchase of their church building. Thus, Kingsley and other white Methodists in Milwaukee had decided to split the traditional Race Relations Sunday special offering between Methodist schools for black students and the St. James’ debt. Giving on Race Relations Sunday continued through the years as evidenced by a February 1964 *KCN* article which reported that the special offering on Race Relations Sunday will once again

¹⁷⁷ Report of Follow-Up Conference to Methodism and the Inclusive Church Conference. In his April 21, 1948 *Christian Century* article, “Erasing the Methodist Color Line,” Dwight W. Culver noted that “At the local level there is relatively little contact between Negro and white Methodists. Although the Central Jurisdiction is not entirely responsible for this state of affairs, it seems clear that the separate ecclesiastical organization tends to perpetuate the separation and the sense of isolation now felt by Negroes in the Methodist Church.”

be given to support “Negro Colleges.” While the longevity of this particular special offering is noteworthy, so too is the fact that it occurred but once each year.

Milwaukee’s Northcott Neighborhood House, a central city outreach of the Women’s Society for Christian Service was another regular recipient of Kingsley’s arms-length goodwill. Northcott House was founded in October 1961 and quickly became a regular recipient of the special offering taken at Kingsley’s annual mission festival. The festival was typically a time for Kingsley members to hear from one of their own, or another Methodist, who was home on furlough from their foreign mission work. Shares in the “Kingsley Advance for a Better World” fund were sold for five dollars apiece and generally distributed among a variety of recipients. In 1962 and 1963 Northcott House received \$100, one-quarter of the proceeds of each year’s fund. The January 1963 *KCN* described the work of the Northcott House for the benefit of its readers who were not familiar it. “It is doing a truly Christian work of helping the residents of the Hillside Development project and surrounding area discover and use their own resources for better living.” Giving money allowed Kingsley members the chance to do something for economically less fortunate black people without having to be with them. The April 1971 *KCN* once again reported that Northcott House, which was “doing a great service for the minority groups,” would receive a quarter of the money earned as a result of the Kingsley mission festival. The following spring, seeking to help Northcott House obtain a desperately needed new bus for its day camp, Head Start, Kingsley members spearheaded the drive for a new vehicle utilizing a rather unique opportunity. The General Mills-Betty Crocker Special Project Plan allowed consumers to collect coupons printed on bottle and can labels as well as boxes of food in order to redeem them for rewards. One million

coupons saved could “purchase” a new minibus. The appeal was sent to all Wisconsin Conference church women to diligently collect coupons. By April 1974 Methodist Women from at least fifteen states had collected the requisite one million coupons, and had, with the benefit of an extended program deadline from General Mills, been able to get a vehicle valued at \$7200 for the work at Northcott House. All of the *KCN* descriptions describing the work that occurred at Northcott House and Kingsley’s support of it sound remarkably similar to how the *KCN* spoke of the natives benefitting from Kingsley’s support of foreign missions.¹⁷⁸

There is ample evidence that even while giving regularly throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s Kingsley’s members were content to paternalistically serve rather than take the necessary steps to become a racially inclusive congregation. Perhaps because the vast majority of the congregation lived in lily-white neighborhoods none of them recognized the irony that although the church claimed, both in the *KCN* masthead and at the bottom of the weekly Sunday service bulletin, to welcome anyone, the illustrations in the *KCN* only featured white people. It was a simultaneously silent but loud proclamation of who Kingsley really existed to serve. The November 1967 drawing of Jesus left no doubt that Kingsley members viewed him as being made in their [European] image. Contemporary illustrations of non-white people appeared in April

¹⁷⁸ The *KCN* in October 1961, January 1962, January 1963, April 1971, May 1972, and April 1973 reported that the Northcott House was a recipient of funds raised at the mission festival. According to the May 1972 *KCN*, coupons could be found on 175 General Mills food products. Though an ahistorical musing, one wonders if the Hampels had never moved to Iowa how Kingsley’s relationship with Northcott House may have been a relationship based on equality between people of different races rather than the paternalistic interchange it became. Recall that Wilma Hampel was one of a few individuals responsible for starting the project and served as the initial board president. During Northcott House’s first few years, prior to her 1963 out-of-state relocation, while serving in an executive leadership position, Wilma Hampel also volunteered one day each week to be the secretary. As such she worked under the direction of Northcott’s black director, the Rev. Lucius Walker, and almost certainly interacted with the numerous people coming there for the services provided.

1969, but the context was telling. The variety of dark-hued faces merely served as an advertisement for that year's foreign mission festival. Clearly the people represented by the drawing were not seen as equals in the family of God but rather as those in need of compassion and generosity from Kingsley members. If proof of this were needed, the following month the illustration accompanying the *KCN* article about National Family Week portrayed a white family. Ironically, a poem titled *My Church* published in that month's edition proclaimed "This is *my church* – it is composed of people just like me. We make it what it is."¹⁷⁹

Not until November 1969, six and a half years after the illustrations first appeared, did a picture of non-white Americans appear in the *KCN*. Yet its existence actually reinforced Kingsley's penchant for doing things for those less fortunate as the drawing of black, Asian, and white children advertised work occurring at Kingsley's Learning Center for neighborhood children. (The same edition of the *KCN* included another picture of white Jesus.) Similarly, a March 1971 picture of three boys, two white and one black, advertised Kingsley's Boy Scout troop. Not until the following month in a drawing about the Women's Society of Christian Service did the *KCN* include an illustration of a black adult shown as equal to white adults, and even that picture had five white women with a single black one. Kingsley was not entirely to blame for the subliminal message sent by the monthly appearance of white faces in the *KCN*. The illustrations were from the "Mimeo Pix of the Month Club," a service Kingsley purchased from Kirban Associates of Glenside, Pennsylvania, and were likely used by

¹⁷⁹ Illustrations began appearing in the *KCN* in April 1963. (Pictures of Native Americans alongside Pilgrims did appear in the November 1965 *KCN*, but that is hardly indicative of a modern current desire for racial equality in the congregation.)

congregations with only white members all across the country. However, this fact does not absolve Kingsley from all blame. Had anyone in the congregation recognized the message of exclusivity the drawings sent, the pictures could have been edited prior to use in the *KCN* or the service terminated. The fact that neither occurred indicates that the continual inclusion of such illustrations was, at best, a blind spot. At worst, perhaps it simply told the truth about how the congregation viewed itself and its future.¹⁸⁰

That Kingsley members did not recognize black people as appropriate potential members of their congregation and accordingly paternalistically did things for them rather than seeking mutually edifying relationships with them is also clear in additional ways. Perhaps the most atrocious and yet aloof example is found in the April 1966 edition of the *KCN*. Under the heading “Slave Auction” the newsletter encouraged readers to “call the church office and hire out a slave to do those little jobs about the home you’ve always wanted done.” In no conceivable way could this blatantly insensitive attempt to raise money for the church’s youth missionary fund square with the stated desire of the church to “Build[ing] a bridge of Christian understanding in the heart of Milwaukee.” Not only would a black visitor or prospective member recoil at it, but it additionally speaks volumes that there exists no evidence that any of the white people at Kingsley had a problem with it. Ironically, the very next article in the *KCN* sought volunteers to teach sewing, chemistry, mathematics, and English to neighborhood children at St. James Methodist Church. The article advertised it as follows, “Here is an

¹⁸⁰ While Kingsley apparently took years to recognize this issue, Dr. E. Jerry Walker mentioned his understanding of the need for racially inclusive illustrations in any material used by his church in his 1958 conference address. He said that he was troubled by some things in his church, among them the fact that his Sunday School was racially integrated, but the materials used in it were not. He said, “I began wondering to myself, ‘Now, this is interesting literature and I’m sure it is well worked out, but where can I find material to show integration as a natural part of Christian life.’”

opportunity for real Christian service at one of the greatest points of need in our city. Kingsley members who can help out will be truly engaged in helping to ‘build a bridge of Christian understanding in the heart of the city.’ They can serve as representatives of Christ in a ministry of love and compassion.” The back-to-back placement of the two pieces is stunningly out-of-touch. The callousness is perhaps better understood in light of the fact that when the congregation allowed its building to be used by non-members living in the neighborhood, they hired someone to interact with the non-white visitors rather than being there themselves.

A few years after James Talmadge’s work around the city and in civil rights marches, Kingsley sought to revive their open gym program so that the church could provide a safe recreational alternative for kids living near the church. In April 1974 the church hired Phil Gloudezman, who would graduate from Marquette University the following month, to run the program. The *KCN* article announcing the move noted that the police department had previously commended Kingsley for allowing local youth to use the gym because there was a corresponding decline in local vandalism when the gym was well-used. It also mentioned that while Gloudezman’s salary was paid by the Wisconsin Conference, Kingsley members needed to donate to the gym program to keep the program open. When interviewed, Gloudezman confirmed the idea of Kingsley members seeing him as their way of interacting with the neighborhood. “I think they were very comfortable hiring a Caucasian...almost everybody had moved to the suburbs. I was a very safe choice. I looked like them and sounded like them.” He recalled his belief at the time that Kingsley members were not at all connected to the African American community around the church. Rather, their connection was to the Kingsley

building because it was where “their kids were raised and where they were married and where they may have buried a relative.” Gloudezman, however, could connect with the “one hundred percent black” participants in the gym program because he was young and “got street cred because I [he] could play hoop.”¹⁸¹

When asked to further explain the lack of connection between the church and the neighborhood, Gloudezman’s commentary was pointed. In addition to there being no connection to between the members and the people living in the surrounding area, he recalled that despite living right in the neighborhood the pastor had only a modest connection and “he might as well have been living in Shorewood.” Gloudezman recollected that Kingsley folks viewed the kids in the gym program as “foreigners and I was the caretaker of the foreigners...doing the dirty work that they didn’t want to do and weren’t equipped for.” But to many those kids may have been even worse than foreigners. “To them [Kingsley members] most of the kids were criminals, heading in the wrong direction” and they hoped Gloudezman would be able “turn them a little bit in the right direction.” Any time anything was missing in the church the blame was immediately placed on the gym kids, even though in Gloudezman’s mind they were just excited to be in the gym. He noted that while he may be able to guilt trip Kingsley members into giving some money, they would not be volunteering as there was “no engagement at all” with the community around the church.” In response to whether or not Kingsley was interested in becoming a racially inclusive church, Gloudezman’s reaction was unequivocal. “They didn’t want any minorities in the church, this was off limits, this was an island that they wanted to preserve.”¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Interview with Phil Gloudezman on June 21, 2018.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Gloudezman recalled that this attitude was pervasive despite the fact that it seemingly guaranteed that congregation would not exist much longer. There were no young people at the church by the mid-1970s and the elderly members were regularly dying. Refusing to supplement the shrinking congregation with new members had only one outcome. These realities are confirmed by the results of a congregational survey sponsored by the Milwaukee District in late 1973 and announced in May 1974. It found that membership had dropped from 675 to 499 during the time between the survey was administered to when the results were released. Furthermore, the death rate was 1%. More people transferred out each year than became members. 56% of the congregation was over 65, a group that accounted for over 70% of the financial pledges. Only 33% of members pledged and only 15% of pledges came from people between 25 and 35 years of age. The survey results noted that “our church will indeed be fortunate if it can continue financing itself for the next ten years.”¹⁸³

Kingsley was not fortunate enough to survive even that long. It closed down six years later in June 1980. The three men hired as pastor after the 1967 retirement of William Blake, who seemed to have had both passion and vision for helping Kingsley transition into a multi-racial congregation, had neither. His immediate successor, Fred G. MacKenzie, had never served in a church in a racially transitioning neighborhood. His previous pastoral appointments were in Upstate New York, South Dakota, central Wisconsin, and Milwaukee’s far wealthier and whiter east side. Upon his retirement in May 1972, he was replaced by the Reverend Charles J. Schinlaub. Schinlaub’s tenure at Kingsley was marked by tensions between himself and the congregation over his

¹⁸³ *KCN* May 1974.

homosexuality and consequent ministerial emphasis on working with Milwaukee's gay community rather than focusing on Kingsley's members. By the time Brian McCarthy was hired in June 1977, the handwriting was on the wall. *Kingsley Church Newsletters* during his tenure regularly published articles about the future of the church, the process for current members to transfer their membership to other congregations, and how especially cherished items at the church should be distributed prior to the building's eventual sale. By March 1980 the decision had been made to sell the Kingsley church building to Solomon Community Temple after Kingsley held its final service there on June 15th. Despite nearly twenty-five years of intentional education and opportunities, where its members were given many chances to catch a vision of becoming a racially inclusive church, a Kingsley had failed to build a bridge of Christian understanding in the heart of the city. It could not overcome the problems caused by compromise.

AN INTEGRATED SOLUTION

“Often an old mission field receives a new church. With us it is just the reverse. Our old church now has a new mission field.”¹⁸⁴

For better or for worse, individual congregations are bound by the decisions made by their forebears locally as well as by their denomination. Reverend Paul W. Knickelbein, pastor of 88 year-old St. Marcus Evangelical Lutheran Church, was able to see the racially evolving neighborhood around 2201 N. Palmer Street in the summer of 1963 as an opportunity in part because of the priorities and strategies he had inherited from previous pastors and lay leaders at St. Marcus and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). While leading a numerically shrinking congregation that never seemed to have enough money to pay its bills on time, Knickelbein was the beneficiary of nearly 100 years of steady leadership executing a well thought out plan. To this stability he brought insight and experience that had prepared him, perhaps uniquely, for the challenge of shepherding the St. Marcus congregation, as German-speaking Lutherans left the neighborhood and were replaced African Americans. His successor, the Reverend Richard Seeger, also seemed to be especially suited to lead a church in a racially transitioning neighborhood. Both men built upon the foundation of those who led before them. They did not have to attempt to maintain and grow a church in which previous unfortunate decisions left parishioners ill-equipped to prioritize Scripture over societal norms. As a result, Paul Knickelbein (1955-1967) and Richard Seeger (1967-1979) led St. Marcus as it became a truly integrated congregation.

¹⁸⁴ “Churches in Transition – XXIII, St. Marcus Finds ‘Mission Field at Its Doorstep,’” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 11, 1963. In the article Knickelbein noted that he preferred to talk of St. Marcus’s “challenge” rather than it’s “problems.”

Three realities allowed for the successful transition of St. Marcus from a bi-lingual, Caucasian, neighborhood congregation to a racially integrated one with many actively involved white members who lived some distance away from the church yet still chose to maintain their membership there and welcome the church's new black neighbors to join them. First, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod was geographically and chronologically unaffected by the issue of slavery and therefore was not burdened with the liability of previous unfortunate decisions. Second, this freedom allowed theology alone to direct WELS and its congregations. They rigorously adhered to their understanding of all that the Bible taught and applied it consistently, even to areas of daily life not considered typically within the purview of a church. Though in the broadest sense of Christianity their doctrinal beliefs did not differ from those at Garfield Avenue Baptist Church and Kingsley Methodist Church, the consistent application of those beliefs at St. Marcus was much more rigorous. St. Marcus members were prohibited from being members of many other types of organizations, making it appear to be the most conservative of the three churches. Yet, those restrictions led it to focus solely on preaching the gospel, rather than engaging in social programs. As a result, St. Marcus's response to African Americans was the most biblically faithful of the three churches. Finally, at its formation in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Wisconsin Synod prioritized its local churches utilizing Christian Day Schools to supplement Sunday School in the Christian education of their children and also to serve as an evangelistic outreach to their neighborhoods that would ensure the church spiritual conversions and therefore new members and future growth.

St. Marcus recognized their new black neighbors as people just like them in the most important way - sinners in need of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ – in large measure because their synod hadn't previously compromised on the issue of slavery. WELS began in 1850 as the German Evangelical Ministerium of Wisconsin. It was founded in a free state by immigrants from a nation essentially uninvolved with the slave trade. Furthermore, it was a part of a branch of Christian theology, Lutheranism, whose adherents in northern colonial America consistently applied their understanding of the Bible to baptize black people, whether slave or free, and extend church membership to them. These historic realities freed the pastors and lay leaders at St. Marcus to respond to the church's new neighbors primarily based on their interpretation of Scripture. WELS was nothing if not theologically rigorous.¹⁸⁵

At its formation, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod placed an extraordinarily high priority on doctrine and theological training. In 1864, less than fifteen years after its founding, the Wisconsin Synod had broken ground for the first building of its own seminary campus. Controlling the theological education of its pastors and teachers had many ramifications for leaders, members, and neighborhood prospects

¹⁸⁵ On the founding of the Wisconsin Synod Evangelical Synod see Edward Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Sigle Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 1-17; Andrea Weindl, "The Slave Trade in Northern Germany from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, ed. David Eltis and David Richardson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 250-271. Weindl notes that "German slave traders played at most a minor part in the history of the transatlantic slave trade." This was largely due to the fact that Germany as a politically cohesive national state did not exist until 1871; Douglas C. Stange, "'A Compassionate Mother to Her Poor Negro Slaves': The Lutheran Church and Negro Slavery in Early America," *Phylon* 29, No. 3 (3rd Qtr. 1968): 272-281. Stange relates numerous examples of Lutherans evangelizing both slaves and free blacks in colonial America. Upon conversion, Lutherans in northern colonies did not hesitate to baptize them and allow them to become members of a local congregation; Robert Fortenbaugh, "American Lutheran Synods and Slavery 1830-1860," *Journal of Religion*, 13, No.1 (January 1933): 72-92. As Fortenbaugh details, Lutherans in southern colonies and states, just as was the case in so many other Protestant denominations, relied upon certain passages in the Bible to buttress their wholehearted support of slavery.

at St. Marcus. Attendance at Communion – “The Lord’s Table” – was continually and vigorously encouraged as it served as a reminder that God had done all the work required for reconciling humans to himself. The belief that God accomplished what human effort and attempts at obedience could not was so vital to St. Marcus that it needed to be protected from all external influences. Members of the congregation could not also be members in fraternal organizations. Neither could the children of the congregation be involved with scouting. Associations with other Protestant denominations were deemed dangerous since there was not total agreement on all points of Biblical interpretation. Indeed, even joining with other Lutheran synods in the state was a practice undertaken only after rigorous study of the Bible and much prayer to assess whether such a connection could result in its members encountering beliefs that WELS theologians deemed unbiblical. Education at all levels, from kindergarten to seminary, was a crucial aspect of the Wisconsin Synod.¹⁸⁶

When Milwaukee’s first WELS congregations were forming in the decades surrounding the Civil War, the leaders likely had no idea that their insistence on simultaneously starting Christian Day Schools would provide future generations with the perfect tool for building relationships with African American neighbors one hundred years later. Rather, they offered two reasons why a local congregation ought to have its own parochial school. The school was an outgrowth of the responsibility of parents to raise their children to know God’s love for them and his plan to save them. Sending children to Sunday School once a week was not sufficient to fully teach Lutheran children about the faith of their parents. Additionally, and crucially, the Christian Day

¹⁸⁶ John M. Brenner, “John Bading and the First Fifty Years of Wisconsin Synod History,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (Summer 2012), 170-176.

School also provided congregations with a built-in outreach to the unchurched in their respective neighborhoods. The congregations actively invited children whose families had no church affiliation to be students at their school. After utilizing the school as the first point of contact with nonbelievers, the founders of WELS congregations hoped and planned for their non-WELS students to visit the church with their families. If all went according to plan, the student's parents would eventually opt to join an adult basics of faith class to prepare them for church membership. Thus, WELS congregations expected their church's Christian day school to be the primary mechanism by which the congregation would grow through eventual spiritual conversion.¹⁸⁷

The benefits accrued from these three realities would not necessarily have been realized were not the right men leading St. Marcus during the crucial decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Both Paul Knickelbein and Richard Seeger came to St. Marcus having previously served in racially diverse ministry roles. Immediately prior to being hired at St. Marcus, Paul Knickelbein served as the pastor of St. Philip's, WELS mission congregation to Milwaukee's black population. There he became intimately familiar with the daily lived experiences of African Americans as they built their lives in a city that was not prepared for the opportunities and challenges their presence brought. Richard Seeger came to St. Marcus after having served in Japan and Hong Kong. While there, he not only lived out the WELS belief that the gospel is for all people, but also experienced what it was like to be a racial minority. Thus, first Knickelbein, and later Seeger, were able to view the racial turnover of St. Marcus' neighborhood as an opportunity to share

¹⁸⁷ David Schroeder, "'Paddling their own canoe': Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in Milwaukee during the Bennett Law Contest," *Milwaukee History* 26, No. 3 (Fall 2003), 66-77.

the gospel rather than something to be feared that would likely result in the eventual death of St. Marcus. Under the leadership of these two men, the congregation became what it remains to this day, a racially-integrated local church.¹⁸⁸

* * *

Understanding the structure and purpose of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and its relationship to individual congregations is crucial to understanding why and how St. Marcus was able to welcome African Americans when the opportunity presented itself. By the late 1940s, 750 congregations from Wisconsin and other states in the upper Midwest belonged to the Wisconsin Synod. The Synod had three primary responsibilities. First, it sought to train “Christian teachers and preachers” at one of five schools, including two in Wisconsin – the seminary in Thiensville and a college in Watertown. Additionally, the Synod started new congregations within the United States. This process was known as “Home Missions” and the Synod promised financial support as long as necessary, though it was expected that the new congregations would eventually be able to support themselves. Finally, the Synod provided missionary outreach to Apache Indians and “Negroes in our country and Africa.” Administratively, St. Marcus and other WELS congregations in Milwaukee were in the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the Synod. District officers were pastors charged with providing oversight and encouragement to the congregations in their district. St. Marcus never stood alone; it was

¹⁸⁸ “Pastor Biographical Information” for Paul W. Knickelbein, St. Marcus Church archives. Robert Wendland, “Antigua Pastor 25 Years in the Ministry,” *Forward in Christ* 69, No. 1 (January 1982). The decision to focus on St. Marcus in this chapter was based on their available archival records as well as the fact that they continue to exist and operate from their historic location.

a part of a theologically robust and numerically growing association that had prepared it to share the gospel with whomever it encountered.¹⁸⁹

Prior to the widespread arrival of African Americans to the neighborhood around St. Marcus, both the denomination and the congregation were already putting into practice the structures and priorities that would allow their future outreach across racial lines to be recognized and received as genuine. By 1889 Milwaukee was home to nine WELS congregations with a total membership between ten and twelve thousand. Each of the congregations had their own school within a year of its founding. St. Marcus followed a more ambitious schedule, with the school briefly predating the 1875 formation of the congregation. (What eventually became St. Marcus school was originally the second parish school of St. John's Church, a WELS congregation then located at N. 4th Street and Prairie Avenue.) The first six months of Sunday worship services were held in the school classroom. WELS schools and churches were also distinguished by their overwhelmingly German constituency. By 1890 all WELS schools dedicated hours of classroom time each day to teaching English even though it would not be until 1912 that any WELS congregation in Milwaukee offered a church service in English. This homogeneity did not, however, blind them to the spiritual needs of others. The Wisconsin Synod began its official outreach to black Americans in southern states in 1877. Given that the city had only 300 black residents at the time, it is doubtful that WELS pastors

¹⁸⁹ *Saint Marcus Messenger*, April 1946; "Getting to Know Your District Presidents," <https://wels.net/getting-to-know-your-district-presidents/> August 31, 2018.

dreamt that their congregations might one day include non-white, non-German speaking members.¹⁹⁰

Much of what allowed Knickelbein and Seeger to successfully befriend St. Marcus's black neighbors was evident during the tenure of Knickelbein's predecessor. Ernst Dornfeld served as pastor of St. Marcus from 1911 to 1955. Though there were very few African Americans living in the area during those years evidence from the late 1940s and early 1950s confirmed the congregation's commitment to a non-racial gospel, the primacy of theology, and the centrality of the parochial school to the life and future of the church. Both the *Saint Marcus Messenger (SMM)*, a monthly newsletter, and minutes from church council and congregational meetings provide insights into the beliefs of St. Marcus and its parishioners, as well as how to best apply that theology. These sources provide important information for understanding the context of St. Marcus in the years leading up to it becoming a racially integrated congregation.¹⁹¹

Aided by the racially untainted history of the Wisconsin Synod, during the late forties and early fifties St. Marcus acted on their belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ was indeed good news for all people and, furthermore, that all Christians ought to follow the command to share it with everyone. The October 1948 lead article in the *Saint Marcus Messenger* encouraged the congregation that they ought to be grateful for their status as redeemed sinners and that Jesus had done "so indescribably much" for them.

Furthermore, their greatest hope should be that "all sinners were such as we are: sinners

¹⁹⁰ Schroeder, "Paddling," 67-76; Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 55. Prairie Avenue is now known as W. Highland Avenue.

¹⁹¹ According to census data, only one African American lived in tract 34 in 1940. By 1950, 237 black residents lived in tract 34.

who know Jesus and have salvation through faith in Him.” Accordingly, their response ought to be joyful obedience to Jesus’ command to “Preach the gospel to every creature.” The article then gave practical ways for children, adults, and the elderly to do so as individuals in their daily life. Such possibilities were seen as separate from the collective actions of the congregation, which quickly achieved success.¹⁹²

Significantly, the strategic application of WELS theology occurred throughout the world. A year earlier St. Marcus had taken steps to ensure the proclamation of the gospel to non-white people living outside Wisconsin. A portion of the collection taken at its 1947 Missions Festival, an all-day affair highlighting the preaching of the gospel around the world, was pledged for work with Native Americans in Arizona as well as missionaries in Nigeria. That December readers learned about the progress of WELS efforts in Africa. Since 1936, 83 churches and 67 schools had been established. Weekly attendance at those churches averaged nearly 8,000 people, half of whom were members. Significantly, the *SMM* noted the participation of two Africans working alongside the Caucasian WELS missionaries. At the 1948 Mission Festival, St. Marcus members rejoiced over the establishment of a WELS seminary in Africa that was currently serving ten students. That WELS recognized the propriety of training Africans for leadership positions signifies an apparent lack of paternalism in their efforts. The 1953 Mission Festival further updated members on the good work continuing in Africa, which had expanded from Nigeria into Northern Rhodesia. As with their plan in the United States, WELS prioritized parochial schools in both countries, where 100 schools served over

¹⁹² *SMM* October 1948.

11,000 students. It is notable that the Wisconsin Synod maintained the same priorities and strategies no matter the location.¹⁹³

St. Marcus also took tentative steps to fulfil the mandate to “preach the gospel” to African Americans in Milwaukee. In October 1947, the congregation voted to support the appeal made by another WELS congregation in Milwaukee, St. Matthews, to the Missions Board of the SE Wisconsin District for a canvass regarding the possibility of “doing mission work among the Negroes of Milwaukee.” Notably, this decision was made a mere six months before Garfield Avenue Baptist Church identified its “colored problem.” The area to be surveyed, N. Center Street to W. Vliet Street, from N. Holton Street to W. 16th Street, comprised a twelve by nineteen block section that was home to almost all of the city’s African American residents. St. Marcus was located on its eastern edge of the area. The results of the survey led to an “exciting development” regarding WELS work among Milwaukee’s black residents. Bertram Sauer, a 1952 WELS seminary graduate, was installed and commissioned as “negro missionary” in September of that year. St. Marcus members were encouraged to pray for Sauer that the Lord give him courage and patience for the task ahead, and that God would help him to succeed. God answered their prayers. Sauer used the contacts gained from the canvass to start two information classes, which he conducted until he became too ill to continue. St. Marcus’s future pastor, Paul Knickelbein, took over the classes from Sauer in March 1954 when his health prevented him from continuing.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ *SMM* October 1947; *SMM* October 1948; *SMM* October 1953.

¹⁹⁴ St. Marcus Church Council minutes, October 1, 1947; St. Marcus Congregational meeting minutes, October 6, 1947. St. Matthews was located at N. 10th and Garfield Avenue; *SMM* September 1952; *SMM* October 1952; “Beginnings in a Broom Factory,” St. Philip’s Lutheran Church History, http://www.stphilipmilwaukee.com/site/cpage.asp?sec_id=140007635&cpage_id=140043835, last accessed January 9, 2020. About ten people in the two information classes started by Sauer became

While Sauer and Knickelbein were starting a new work among Milwaukee's black residents, pastor Dornfeld and lay leaders were discussing a "delicate matter." At hand was the question of whether the school would accept African American children as students. After initially considering the issue at its September 9, 1953 meeting, the church council agreed to present it to the congregation without recommendation. The congregation voted to allow the Todd children to attend apparently because of the fact that the family were Lutherans. Future requests by black families were to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In each instance the congregation would meet to consider the merits. As there is no mention of a similar process for prospective white students joining the school, it seems as if St. Marcus initially only tentatively embraced their new black neighbors. It would take a visionary leader to encourage them to use their school to diversify the church. Nonetheless, the answer was not no.¹⁹⁵

St. Marcus's lukewarm embrace African American children into its school makes sense given that the congregation was simultaneously wrestling with its future at N. 2nd and N. Palmer Streets. The September 1952 issue of the *Saint Marcus Messenger* noted that the congregation was in a "peculiar situation" and at "the crossroads." An article hailed the efforts of "The Old Guard," that attended regularly, gave generously, and responded positively to every emergency that required additional contributions. Without them the financial state of the church would be "worse than it is." Two-thirds of the

founding members of St. Philip's church in when it was officially organized in October 1955; Paul Knickelbein "Pastor Biographical Information" sheet, St. Marcus Church archives.

¹⁹⁵ St. Marcus Church Council meeting minutes, September 9, 1953; St. Marcus Congregational meeting minutes, September 14, 1953. While not the result of an exhaustive study, as best as can be determined, St. Marcus School was the first WELS day school to admit African-American students. Aliela Armstrong, "Lutherans Expect Little White Flight," *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 13, 1976, pg. 1; Others eventually followed, such that by the mid 1970s WELS schools had non-discrimination policies regarding enrollment in their Christian Day Schools.

members contributed little to no money, which made the reality that a “goodly number” of the old guard had moved out-of-town or too far away to continue attending all the more the difficult. The new members acquired from the neighborhood around the church did not have the resources to give at the level of those older members. The significant deterioration of neighborhood around St. Marcus put the future of the congregation in its present location as risk. Not only had many Lutheran families had left, new Lutheran families were not moving in. Only the Lord knew what was in store for St. Marcus. It was possible He would tell them to “pack up their belongings and re-establish further away.” The article concluded with the admonition to trust the Lord with grateful hearts and do what He expected in terms of supporting the church and the school.¹⁹⁶

St. Marcus’s willingness to wait patiently on God as it discerned His plans for their future was the result of the congregation’s steadfast application of Bible teachings to all areas of life. On the surface, the church’s beliefs did not differ from what other Protestant denominations proclaimed. God the Father allowed his son Jesus to be treated “like a criminal” and nailed to a cross, where he died. He was placed in a grave from which he rose from the dead three days later. By this process, Jesus took the punishment that humans deserved and therefore allowed the Father to grant humanity “a complete pardon.” However, while these tenets were standard, St. Marcus applied them to daily life in a manner that was anything but. The pastor and leaders demonstrated their unwavering belief in these doctrines by how they utilized them in their own lives and in the lives of members of the congregation. In this way, St. Marcus and other WELS congregations distinguished themselves from other Protestants. This was made possible by the existence

¹⁹⁶ *SMM* September 1952.

of their own seminary, which allowed them to thoughtfully control the theological education of their pastors.¹⁹⁷

Rigorous attention to the daily consequences of Biblical principles led St. Marcus to encourage certain habits while also restricting their members from involvement with particular groups. No regularly scheduled activity at St. Marcus was held in higher esteem than communion, also called “The Lord’s Table” and “The Lord’s Supper.” Its importance was due to the fact that it served as a routine reminder to members of their inability to save themselves; Only God could rescue them. Accordingly, members were continually encouraged in a variety of ways to be at church on the six Sundays each year when communion was served. The church newsletter printed those dates well ahead of time. It also regularly provided articles about the importance of communion complete with many scriptural citations. It used leading questions, such as the article titled “When was the Last Time You Partook of the Lord’s Supper?” in order to encourage regularly taking the sacrament. Additionally, the *Messenger* published carefully tracked statistics of the number of “communicants” – only those confirmed in a WELS congregation could partake of the sacrament – who had been the Lord’s Table during a given time frame. The 1945 annual report, for instance, noted that 3,134 people took communion that year, a “gratifying” increase of 410 over the previous year.¹⁹⁸

St. Marcus’s high regard for its understanding of the Bible, and the ease at which this theology could be infected by other philosophies, led them to restrict their members from potentially harmful associations. Freemasonry was forbidden because it taught that

¹⁹⁷ *SMM* March 1947. For information on the early formation of the WELS seminary see Brenner, “Bading,” 170-176. The June 1950 *SMM* noted that every pastor at St. Marcus since August Pieper, who served from 1890-1901, had been educated, either wholly or in part, at WELS schools and the seminary.

¹⁹⁸ *SMM* February 1946. *SMM* June 1946. *SMM* June 1948. *SMM* August 1948. *SMM* January 1951.

“purity of life and conduct” is what earned a person entrance into Heaven, whereas Lutherans believed they could do nothing to earn salvation, but rather that Jesus completely redeemed them by his perfect life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection. Thus, the congregation voted to strike Mr. August Schmeling from membership due to his joining the Elks Lodge and the council voted to postpone the acceptance of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Trudell’s membership until he brought them his letter of resignation from the Eagles Club. Similarly, children were not to join the Boy Scouts as the movement “refused to narrow the interpretation to a Christian God.” This decision was fateful, St. Marcus and WELS leadership believed, because by “pussyfooting around the subject of religion” boys involved with scouting could very easily lose their understanding of their need for a savior and become “self-righteous Pharisees.” Comic book reading, which filled a child’s mind with “crime, violence, and filth,” was seen as a cause of rising juvenile delinquency and thus frowned upon. The leadership at St. Marcus church possessed a finely tuned theological antenna which they put to use in order to protect their members. This was in stark contrast to the other two churches in this study. Garfield Avenue Baptist Church primarily applied theology by taking sides in the modernist/fundamentalist battle but did not seek to help protect its members from organizations it understood to be a spiritual danger to them. Kingsley Methodist Church, on the other hand, never seemed to take a stand on any issue of theology as it pertained to its members, some of whom were members of the freemasons. ¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ *SMM* December 1946; St. Marcus congregational meeting minutes, June 2, 1947; St. Marcus church council meeting, September 3, 1947. Trudell quickly produced the letter of resignation and he and his family were admitted into membership the next month; *SMM* March 1947; The December 1947 *SMM* relied on the book *Scouting in the Lutheran Church* as the basis for its article. Later editions of the *SMM* - August 1948 and January 1951 - provided a detailed rebuttal of The Scout Oath by comparing it to Biblical teaching. The organization was deemed “anti-Christian” because it essentially encouraged boys to earn

Even partnerships with other Christians were often deemed taboo. Reformed theology was understood to be a “poisonous doctrine” capable of “infiltrating” Lutheran services. Prayer fellowship with other Christians – just about all were deemed “erring” – was inappropriate because Romans 16:17 warned against those who “put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.” Even a one percent disagreement paired with 99% agreement could have far reaching effects on the basis of Galatians 3:9, “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Accordingly, in 1939 the Wisconsin Synod decided to no longer allow its pastors to serve as military chaplains, a decision it reaffirmed two years later. From the WELS perspective, even associating with other Lutherans could lead to unbiblical doctrine and practice. In 1951 the Wisconsin rejected the “Common Confession,” agreed upon by the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, over the wording about the divine inspiration of the Bible. WELS was constantly on guard against “unionism,” the partnering with non-WELS churches. The protection they sought to provide by this stance extended to the process of people leaving to join other congregations. When a member left St. Marcus to attend another WELS church, they were granted a “peaceful release.” Those who chose instead to join with a non-WELS congregation were forced to resign their membership, essentially communicating to them the dangers they faced by their choice.²⁰⁰

their salvation rather than rely on the redemption purchased by Jesus. *SMM* August 1954; Rev. James Talmadge mentioned in his interview that some members of Kingsley Church were freemasons.

²⁰⁰ The August 1946 *SMM* summarized an address at the recent SE District convention entitled “The Reformed System, its Essence and its Menacing Impact upon American Lutheran Doctrine and Practice” that thoroughly compared the doctrines of Reformed theologians John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli with Martin Luther; Dale E. Griffin, “The Wisconsin Synod and the Military Chaplaincy,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (Summer 2000). *SMM* August 1948. *SMM* December 1949. *SMM* September 1951. Evidence of peaceful releases and resignations of memberships are found regularly throughout church council meeting minutes.

The extreme importance of doctrinal purity within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod was among the chief reasons it stressed each of its congregations have a Christian Day School. Although the schools taught all the age appropriate academic subjects, teachers were held in such high regard largely because they assisted parents with their primary responsibility, the spiritual nurturing of their children. As such, the school itself was not a separate entity from the congregation, but an essential aspect of it. In the late nineteenth century, in fact, WELS theologians determined that the role of teacher was a divine call not unlike that of the pastor since both were carrying out a responsibility God had assigned to all Christians. Thus, the hiring of teachers required a congregational meeting and vote just as was done when offering employment to a pastor. Furthermore, the school principal was to be present at all church council meetings not only because school business was church business, but also because the school played a vital role in the future of the church. The program celebrating the congregation's 75th anniversary in 1950 noted that many of the school's 205 students were from homes with no church affiliation. By attending St. Marcus school these students received a Christian education and the opportunity to associate with Lutheran children. Importantly, it also prepared them for membership at St. Marcus.²⁰¹

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²⁰¹ *SMM* August 1947. *SMM* August 1948. *SMM* August 1949. John M. Brenner, "From Federation to Merger: The Birth of the Wisconsin Synod as We Know it Today," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 114, No. 4 (Fall 2017), 276-77. Congregational meeting minutes, January 6, 1948. Congregational meeting minutes, August 2, 1948. St. Marcus Diamond Jubilee Program. Church council meetings minutes January 2, 1947 and February 26, 1947.

St. Marcus members surely read with sadness Pastor Dornfeld's June 1, 1955 letter announcing his intention to retire after 44 years of leading the congregation. In the Lutheran tradition the hiring of a new pastor involved what was known as "the call." It was not a human undertaking, but rather was "given by Christ" and regarded as a divine institution "exercised through humans." The calling of a new pastor was the only agenda item at the August 27th congregational meeting. The President of the Wisconsin Synod's Southeastern District, Pastor A.F. Halboth, informed those assembled that four "special qualifications" ought to be considered when calling a pastor to St. Marcus: ability to preach in German, "be a man of experience," be very familiar with school work, and possess a strong voice. In retrospect, the qualifications seem banal and backward-looking. Surely future church growth would not come from those drawn to services in the mother tongue of their grandparents! Rather, as was the patented WELS strategy, St. Marcus School would drive new believers to the church. Significantly, at Pastor Dornfeld's final congregational meeting as pastor, which occurred in June, the group agreed to modify the policy for admitting black children to the school. Rather than a congregational vote, the school board and pastor were to be given authority to act upon each individual request. The disconnect between the looking to the past to hire the pastor of the future only served to highlight the necessity of divine intervention in "the calling" of a new pastor. Paul Knickelbein was not among the eight names presented that evening for a vote. Fortunately for the congregation, the first man they called declined the invitation, which dictated the need for another congregational meeting and the calling of another man. At

that meeting on September 12th, Paul Knickelbein was nominated from the floor and prevailed on the fourth ballot.²⁰²

Knickelbein was likely a known quantity to many of the voting members in attendance that evening. After taking over the well-publicized information classes Bertram Sauer formed a few years prior, Knickelbein shepherded the “Colored Mission of Milwaukee” and oversaw the formation of the St. Philip’s Church, initially located just five blocks from St. Marcus. Accepting the call, however, was no mere formality; Knickelbein attended a council meeting in late September to discuss aspects of the call. His concerns highlight that he was the right man to lead St. Marcus into an unknown future. His worries about the high cost of fuel in the parsonage and poor German language skills paled in comparison to his challenging the council on their planned course of action should a black person request to become a member of St. Marcus. Until he questioned it that evening, the council’s idea was to direct any such persons to St. Philips. Meeting minutes don’t record Knickelbein’s response. The minutes do, however, note that the council replied “if this should not be satisfactory” the matter would be taken under special consideration by the council. It seems as if Knickelbein had communicated his perspective that both theologically and practically St. Marcus needed to be open to accepting black members.²⁰³

²⁰² Dornfeld resignation letter, June 1, 1955; The decision came not due to age – “threescore years and ten” – but rather because he and his wife needed to move from the parsonage to their son’s home in order for her to take care of their grandchildren upon the untimely death of their daughter-in-law. He was convinced that the role of pastor could not be fulfilled without living in the parsonage, which was just across North Avenue from the church; “The call” was described for St. Marcus members by the Vice President of the SE District of the Wisconsin Synod at the August 27th, 1955 congregational meeting to call a new pastor; June 6, 1955 congregational meeting; September 12, 1955 congregational meeting.

²⁰³ “Church History,” St. Philip’s Church; church council meeting, September 28, 1955. At this meeting Knickelbein also asked for, and received, permission to continue on as interim pastor at St. Philip’s until his replacement could be found and begin serving.

It is difficult to imagine a pastor within the Wisconsin Synod better prepared to bring visionary leadership to St. Marcus as the neighborhood around it lost Lutheran families and gained African American ones. His WELS pedigree was perfect. He had been baptized, confirmed, and married in Wisconsin Synod congregations and received all his education – kindergarten through seminary – in WELS schools. Furthermore, he had shown great promise at his previous pastorates, though most who voted to call him would likely have only known about his time at the nearby “Colored Mission.” Two stories demonstrate his suitability for the job at St. Marcus. Once while conducting a neighborhood canvass, Knickelbein heard arguing from within the upstairs unit he was to visit. Undeterred, he rang the doorbell, at which point, “a big, burly man from the downstairs flat came and asked, ‘What you want, white man?’” Knickelbein introduced himself as a Lutheran pastor from nearby and the gentleman gave Knickelbein contact information for his neighbors, who did not come to the door. There was no fear, suspicion, or condescension, just a pastor calling on a prospect and meeting another potential prospect in the process. But St. Marcus did not just need a white guy who was comfortable with racial diversity. They needed someone able to assist whites in recognizing and embracing the humanity of black people and the Biblical mandate of the church being for all people. Knickelbein’s “Pastor Biographical Information sheet” recalled that he would visit other WELS churches and present a slide show about his ministry at the “colored mission.” Many of his listeners shared that they were not yet ready for blacks to attend their church and certainly would be unwilling to take communion with them. This entry in the biographical information sheet ended with “so

there was much work to be done, both among the Negroes AND the whites. Which is one of the reasons he accepted a call to St. Marcus.”²⁰⁴

In addition to likely needing to convince some members that a racially integrated congregation was both God-honoring and crucial to survival, Knickelbein in all probability understood that the St. Marcus job came with ongoing financial and membership challenges. Decreases in membership from 1950 to 1953 had been greater than from 1947 to 1950. Despite this trend, in November 1953 the council had agreed to send letters to 27 members who had not attended services, taken communion, or contributed financially to let them know they were in danger of being dropped from membership, as indeed five couples and nine individuals had recently been. St. Marcus took seriously its responsibility to care for its members and was not beyond utilizing the leverage it had to induce them to act in their own best interests. Unfortunately, tough love did not resolve the issue and not enough new members were added each month to offset the those leaving either after communicating this choice with the pastor or lack of participation through attendance and giving and forced removal. Decreasing membership inevitably led to decreased giving and eventually, debt, which stood at \$4500 in November 1954. Though being pastor at St. Marcus may have been Paul Knickelbein’s dream job, it would not always be accompanied by a good night sleep.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Knickelbein, “Pastor Biographical Information,” St. Marcus Church archives. Prior to serving at the “Colored Mission to Milwaukee” Knickelbein held posts in northern Wisconsin and Michigan. Though these are unlikely locales to prepare someone for multiracial ministry in a large city, Knickelbein’s work ethic and WELS-informed priorities were clear during these two postings. Salem/Nasewaupie, “a small, country” congregation in Door County Wisconsin was considered “dead” prior to his arrival. Knickelbein revived it by confirming 40 adults during his two and a half years there. At Immanuel Church in the upper peninsula of Michigan he convinced the congregation of the need to add a day school to the ministry of the church and spearheaded the fundraising for the project.

²⁰⁵ *SMM* October 1953; Council meeting minutes, September 5, 1956.

St. Marcus's financial troubles continued unabated with Knickelbein at the helm. The church responded to each crisis with a new attempt to remain solvent. It borrowed \$3,000 to meet its September 1956 payroll obligations. Six months later, though giving had improved, it had not increased enough to offset higher expenses. At its May 1957 meeting, the council decided that the special Pentecost collection to be added to the general fund, rather than spent on missions, as was the practice with that annual collection. The next month the congregation responded to the \$900 deficit in the general fund by authorizing paying bills with money available in the property improvement fund, which had a \$2,400 balance. Despite these continual challenges, St. Marcus received a thank you letter from St. Philip's church for the \$658 gift it had given St. Philip's towards their purchase of a new building. This generosity was not, however, the result of an unexpected windfall. Rather, the deficit in the general fund surpassed \$2,300 in September and the congregation approved the use of money in trust funds to cover operating expenses. In October the council, surely tired of "robbing Peter to pay Paul," decided to send statements to the 157 members who had given less than \$20 that year. By November an "every member canvass" had been planned to address the now \$3,472 deficit. At the annual church meeting in December members were made aware that the great majority of letter recipients had not responded, but that special funds drives – essentially emergency appeals – would not be necessary if "each member contributed according to his means."²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Church council meeting minutes, September 5, 1956; Congregational meeting minutes, March 3, 1957; Church council meeting minutes, May 29, 1957; Congregational meeting minutes, June 2, 1957; August 15, 1957 letter from St. Philip's Church; Congregational meeting minutes, September 8, 1957; Church council meeting minutes October 2, 1957; Church council meeting minutes, November 6, 1957; Congregational meeting minutes, December 8, 1957.

Leadership sought to address the deficits by cutting costs in addition to raising money. A brainstorming session at the January 1958 council meeting resulted in the following possibilities: discontinuing ads in the newspaper; reusing old church bulletin covers; and engaging retired men from the congregation to make minor repairs, wash, and paint. The council also got creative in searching for assets that could be turned into cash. In April the council decided to discontinue the use of the bowling alleys in the church basement and put the alleys and all related equipment up for sale. Unfortunately, by September, it became obvious that the idea was the fiscal equivalent of a gutter ball; there was “virtually no market” for used bowling alleys, though a small savings was realized by cancelling insurance on the unsaleable lanes. Despite all of these efforts, including the savings realized by 200 hours of volunteer labor by members of the congregation, leadership informed the congregation at the September all church meeting that the deficit stood at \$4,700. Pastor Knickelbein would not see financial relief as he began the tasks of clearing from the membership those who no longer attended the church, educating those still at St. Marcus about the need to allow black members, and stepping out in faith to substantially renovate the school so that it could eventually bring new members to the congregation.²⁰⁷

Among the challenges Pastor Knickelbein had to tackle at St. Marcus was determining who was still an active member as opposed to someone who used to be but generally no longer attended and rarely, if ever, donated financially or took communion. Two years of tracking attendance, writing letters to those not attending, and visiting

²⁰⁷ Church council meeting minutes January 8, 1958; Church council meeting minutes, April 2, 1958; Church council meeting minutes, September 3, 1958; Two years later, in November 1960, the council discovered that there was also no market for used vacuum cleaners.

people in their homes had resulted in what he felt was a fairly accurate list by January 1958. St. Marcus had 753 communicant members. These were adults and teens who had been confirmed in a WELS church and were therefore allowed to take communion at St. Marcus. 720 of these were regularly giving. 224 of the communicants – the adult men – were also voting members. Fourteen communicants were currently on the probationary list, but the 76 people on the suspension list were not counted among the communicants. Even this count was fluid, however. In October of that year, for instance, the church gained two new members but another was granted a peaceful release and 5 others were removed, including 3 who left to attend a Missouri Synod congregation. Thus, by December 1958 membership figures had to be revised downward to 659 communicants and 210 voting members.²⁰⁸

These financial and membership trends made it clear that Knickelbein needed to lead in new ways, and perhaps get some help along the way, in order to revitalize St. Marcus. Help came in the form of sisters, Rose and Zora Waller, African Americans who sought to transfer their membership from St. Philip's to St. Marcus. The church council deliberated the request at their two February 1959 meetings. Initially, they voted to table to matter until the congregational meeting scheduled in early March. Three weeks later, however, the council changed course and voted to recommend to the congregation that the Waller sisters' request for membership be granted. Significantly, the minutes for the latter meeting note that the sisters had been granted "peaceful release" from St. Philip's. Given the WELS habit of blessing members when they sought to transfer membership to

²⁰⁸ Church council meeting minutes, January 8, 1958; Church council meeting minutes, October 1, 1958; Congregational meeting minutes, December 7, 1958; For perspective, by Pastor Dornfeld's count, in 1952 there were 1,216 communicant and 359 voting members.

another WELS congregation, this was likely a necessary precondition for their acceptance as members at St. Marcus. The congregation followed the council's recommendation and voted to accept Rose and Zora Waller as members of St. Marcus Church on March 1, 1958.²⁰⁹

Welcoming the Waller sisters into church membership not only spurred neighborhood evangelistic activity within the congregation, but it also does not appear to have damaged St. Marcus's relationship with St. Philip's. In May 1959 the council agreed to thank St. Philip's for allowing the St. Marcus School boys basketball team to use its gym during the previous season by paying them \$10. More importantly, in September 1960 the church council adopted the recommendation of its Special Committee on Economic Affairs to begin planning a canvass of the neighborhood around the church for the purpose of gaining new members. Although the exact geographical area to be included had yet to be determined, it was sure to include many African American households. St. Marcus sat on the border between United States Census tracts 33 and 34. According to the 1960 figures, tract 33's 1,592 African American residents accounted for 47% of the people living in that zone. Similarly, the 1,054 black residents in tract 34 made up 37% of the population there. The move was likely encouraged by two factors. Evidently the Waller sisters had been regular attenders and done nothing to make council members regret their earlier decision. Additionally, a few months earlier at their meeting

²⁰⁹ No evidence exists that confirms the Waller sisters knew Knickelbein from his time at St. Philip's, but it seems likely that they were acquainted. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that Knickelbein hand-picked them to be the first African Americans to seek membership at St. Marcus; Church council meeting minutes, February 4 1959; Church council meeting minutes, February 25, 1959; Congregational meeting minutes, March 1, 1959.

in June, updated membership numbers showed that communicant membership had dropped almost 14% further, to 570.²¹⁰

The letter St. Marcus members received from the Special Committee on Economic Affairs in September 1960 is nothing short of remarkable for its realistic presentation of the situation faced by the congregation, the clearheaded delineation of the options available, and its direct communication of the need for all current members to generously strive to fulfill their financial obligations to the church. After briefly detailing the early history of the congregation, the committee got straight to the heart of the matter. The neighborhood around the church was no longer what it had been. Since the end of WWII, Milwaukee's near north side had changed tremendously. The substantial increase in African American families was indicative of the rapid transition of the area, which had resulted in various social and economic problems that had garnered the attention of the city government. The letter did not explain the situation as being caused by either those that had moved in or those that had left. Regardless, St. Marcus and its school were now located in the "Inner Core." Many members of the congregation had left the neighborhood yet retained their membership with the church despite living "some distance" from it. Others, however, chose to join congregations closer to their new homes. Accordingly, both church membership and school enrollment had declined by 50% over the past decade. At the same time, the cost of running both entities increased nearly \$7,000. Consequently, the average "cost" per communicant member to operate the

²¹⁰ Church council meeting minutes, May 6, 1959; Church council meeting minutes, September 7, 1960; 1960 United States Census; Church council meeting minutes, June 1, 1960.

church rose from \$47 to \$98 and the expense to educate a single student ballooned to \$179 when it had been \$89 ten years prior.²¹¹

“St. Marcus Congregation literally stands at a crossroads” the letter proclaimed. Continuing to operate while costs exceed income would be ruinous. The alternative, however, may be no better. Relocating and building a comparable campus would result in taking on a debt possibly as high as \$750,000. Additionally, such a move would only result in competing with other congregations that had already left the inner core. Despite these troubling realities, it went on, St. Marcus “stands in a new mission field” that will almost certainly yield new members if the congregation reaches out. Though these new members may need to “learn to crawl before they can walk” and will likely not be able to donate as much as current members due to “low economic status,” with their participation St. Marcus could survive in its present location. The previous ambulatory references likely referred to new members not necessarily being immediately ready to serve, such as Sunday School teachers or in other ways. In this sense, as church membership stabilized and eventually grew by garnering new members from the neighborhood, it would take time before they were able to fill the service positions vacated by long-time white members who left St. Marcus. While admitting that continued study is still needed as “there are no easy answers,” the letter offered two readily apparent conclusions. First, St. Marcus “has every reason to stay where it is.” Reaching those now living in the neighborhood will assure the growth of the church. Additionally, a “concentrated effort” needs to be made to reach current members who had given “little to nothing” in recent years. It ended with the following statement and invited members to the September 12th

²¹¹ September 8, 1960 letter from the St. Marcus Special Committee on Economic Affairs.

meeting. “In the difficult months and years ahead, it becomes increasingly important that the members of St. Marcus Congregation give evidence of their faith by a continuing willingness of hearts and hands to stand by the Church, come what may.”²¹²

In October 1960 the congregation voted to request the assistance of seminary students from Thiensville in that month’s neighborhood canvass. Visiting households from Holton Street to 3rd Street between Vine and Center was seen as the “first step” to reach families not currently attending any church. The initial response of such families was positive. At November’s congregational meeting Pastor Knickelbein shared that three people had already committed to attend the upcoming Adult Information Class, where prospective members were taught the basics of Christian doctrine. He reminded all in attendance of “little ways” they could help make visitors feel welcome and “assist in their taking part in the church service.” Knickelbein’s previous experience in cross-cultural ministry was key to the success of the current effort.²¹³

As concerns about neighborhood safety increased, Paul Knickelbein’s wisdom and conviction were surely crucial to helping the congregation keep focused on its mission to preach the gospel to those living in the area. A year before the letter and subsequent neighborhood canvass, the council had agreed that any group that holds an evening meeting appoint a man “to patrol hallways during meetings and to lock the building afterwards.” This plan was expanded a few months later. Initial discussions were held about the formation of a “House Committee” that would be responsible for “the supervision of evening group activities in the school building.” Research for that idea

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Congregational meeting minutes, October 10, 1960; Congregational meeting minutes, November 13, 1960;

included studying how nearby Jerusalem Church – 3012 N. Holton Street – utilized a similar system. The fact that its churches in the inner core were wrestling with such issues was not lost on the Wisconsin Synod. After discussing the report from the invitational meeting of the “Federation of Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Congregations in the Greater Milwaukee Area” the council decided to recommend to voters that St. Marcus join the group and be represented by a member of the council.²¹⁴

While the opportunity to discuss and problem-solve within that group likely brought some measure of comfort to leadership at St. Marcus, it did not mitigate concerns about how to safely operate at 2nd and Palmer. Over the next few years the council considered requesting the police department to accompany the treasurer, Mr. Trettin, as he made evening deposits at the bank. Vandalism insurance was added to the church’s insurance policy. A problem with “outside children” in the school building led the council to decide to keep the school building locked on Saturdays and Sundays, as well as after 4 PM during the week. Repeated breakage of the glass covering the church’s exterior bulletin board resulted in a decision to use wire-reinforced glass or Plexi-glass “when,” not if, the need arises again. Likewise, installation of wire mesh over the windows at the rear of the school was seen as the solution to repeated broken windows. In spite of these issues, the police were only contacted to request the installation of additional traffic lights on nearby North Avenue. Unlike at Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, which hired police to patrol the parking lot during evening meetings and whose members cited car break-ins as a reason for leaving the neighborhood, fear did not drive

²¹⁴ Church council meeting minutes, November 12, 1959; Church council meeting minutes, February 3, 1960.

decision-making at St. Marcus; they knew their mission. They believed God placed them in that neighborhood to preach the gospel to all who lived there.²¹⁵

The decision to stay in the neighborhood, which was based on the conviction that the area's new African American residents would begin attending the church, put school-based outreach at the center of the congregation's plans. "As we recognize that our congregation had its beginnings in the Christian Day School, so may we contend that the future of our congregation is the Christian Day School" declared a November 11, 1960 letter written to members that explained the school's new tuition policy. In addition to deciding to substantially renovate the school building, it also caused the council to re-examine the operation of the school. Among the first decisions the group made was to increase tuition "for children whose parents are not members of the congregation." Thus, the cost of attending St. Marcus school rose by \$30 per year to \$80 for unchurched children, by \$20 annually to \$80 for children whose families who were members at another Wisconsin Synod congregation, and by \$50 to \$150 for children whose families were members of a non-WELS congregation. Children whose parents were members at St. Marcus attended for free if their parents regularly gave to the church. Otherwise, they were charged \$50 for one child, \$80 for two children, and \$90 for three. Significantly, if a family became members of the church as a result of first being introduced to St. Marcus by a child attending the school, that family would no longer be required to pay tuition if they regularly contributed to the congregation. No matter the particulars of a given student's church affiliation, the fees could be paid over ten months and the Board of

²¹⁵ Church council meeting minutes, April 3, 1962; Special church council meeting minutes, April 16, 1962; Church council meeting minutes, November 14, 1962; Church council meeting minutes, September 4, 1963; Church council meeting minutes, November 3, 1964.

Christian Education would decide each hardship case – a request for discounted tuition – on its own merits. The letter ended with a solemn declaration. “May God bless us in these trying times, strengthen our faith thereby, and bless our humble efforts in His service.”²¹⁶

The decision to substantially renovate the St. Marcus school building was seemingly an answer to the prayer offered at the end of the school tuition letter. Rather than a grand plan, the idea to repair and modernize the school building started as part of a church council conversation about enrollment, money received for book rentals, the challenges of tuition collection, and the long list of repairs the school building required. After having previously considered ways to increase enrollment, including buying a bus as well as seeing if Jerusalem Church had extra students it could send to St. Marcus, the council seemingly stumbled into the idea of significantly renovating the structure while having “lots of discussion on repairs to the school building” at a meeting in September 1962. Later that month the Special Committee on Economic Affairs recommended to the council that the capital improvement project seemed unattainable and ought to be postponed until “prospects of growth and related factors can be assessed much more easily.” It was a reasonable conclusion, even if it left no room for faith. Only a small fraction of church members were regularly giving, the building fund contained just \$410, and there were projects totaling \$6778 currently underway. Pastor Knickelbein, however, presented a different perspective. For the first time in many years the congregation’s general fund was “in the black.” To be precise, there was a lot outstanding debt and

²¹⁶ November 17, 1960 letter to St. Marcus members explaining new tuition policy. Church council meeting minutes, September 7, 1960; Church council meeting minutes, October 7, 1959 contain the most recent detailed enrollment figures for St. Marcus School. That year there were 124 students: 72 were children of St. Marcus members; 34 were considered “mission,” meaning that they came from families with no known church affiliation; 16 were children whose parents were members at a different WELS congregation; two students attend a non-WELS church.

known upcoming expenses without the necessary funds to cover them. However, Pastor Knickelbein was right to point out that the balance in the general fund, the bucket out of which monthly operating expenses were paid, was stable for the first time in a long time. Thus, despite an overall challenging financial picture, progress had been made. Also, in addition to special building projects often inducing members to give extra, if the leadership failed to demonstrate faith about the school renovation, it would essentially be telling the members that it didn't care about the future of the school before the project even started.²¹⁷

The council followed Knickelbein's leadership and began to assess the situation and plan accordingly. The total cost of school renovation bids totaled \$37,265. Additionally, the scope of work required the services of an architect. The council approved the scheduling of a preliminary planning meeting and authorized \$2000 towards it. A special congregational meeting was called that April specifically to discuss the possibility of taking out a considerable loan in order to substantially renovate the school. After introducing the concept, the president of the church council, Mr. Donner, took questions from the congregation. The elephant in the room was immediately addressed when someone asked how they could possibly afford such a large loan given the church's current dire fiscal straits. Donner blamed "piecemeal repairs" for the current indebtedness. Repairing everything as part of one project would be much less expensive. Additionally, he noted, two big projects – the school's windows and stairs – required immediate attention. Satisfied, the congregation voted to accept the recommendation to

²¹⁷ Church council meeting minutes, November 12, 1962; Church council meeting minutes, November 28, 1962; Congregational meeting minutes November 30, 1962; Church council meeting minutes, August 21, 1962.

invest in the school so that it could build relationships with African Americans and Caucasians in the area and introduce them all to the church.²¹⁸

The decision quickly garnered regional attention when St. Marcus Church was highlighted on May 11 as part of the *Milwaukee Sentinel's* "Churches in Transition Series." After providing statistics about the recent demographic changes in the neighborhood and corresponding membership decline, the article highlighted Pastor Knickelbein's advice to his congregation as it considered relocation. "The Lord surrounded us with a mission field. It would not be right for us to leave it. Our church can either close its doors and rot on the vine, or open its doors to the people of the neighborhood and grow." In order to prepare for that growth, the piece continued, St. Marcus was spending \$55,000 that summer to modernize its school, which currently taught 115 students, 30 of which were African American. In this, the school was a mirror of the church, which has 25 black members and expects more given that six of the ten adults in the current instruction class were African American. The article also mentioned that Knickelbein was troubled by the fact that St. Marcus was the only Lutheran day school between its neighborhood and Lake Michigan, which was two miles to the east.²¹⁹

Knickelbein's troubles, however, would soon hit closer to home. Although records do not indicate the reasons, in quick succession at the end of the year the treasurer of the Board of Christian Education and the president of the Church Council both announced their intention to transfer their membership to other congregations. They were not the only ones to leave. Between October and December nine households sought

²¹⁸ Church council meeting minutes, February 6, 1963; Special congregational meeting minutes, April 7, 1963.

²¹⁹ "St. Marcus Finds 'Mission Field' at Its Doorstep," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 11, 1963. Lake Michigan is slightly more than two miles to the east of the St. Marcus campus.

peaceful releases and four others left to join churches not affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod. Knickelbein surely must have been exhausted after having met with each family or individual as was part of the normal procedure when a member left. Things did not improve in the new year. That January there were three more peaceful releases and one more resignation. Additionally, two leaders were removed from the church council due to their lack of attendance and participation. All of this took place as Knickelbein and others were busy contacting members delinquent in their giving to make up for the reality that in January the congregation approved taking out an additional \$10,000 loan to meet the church's many obligations.²²⁰

In the midst of these pressures, Knickelbein's responsibilities increased substantially. In July 1964 he became head of the newly formed Stewardship Committee. Next, "grumbling" by teachers and students about principal Gronholz surfaced in December 1964. Some teachers had shared concerns with one of the church Trustees, Mr. Collura. They expressed unspecified "unsatisfactory conditions between the teachers and children and Mr. Gronholz." They were also concerned about unauthorized purchases of athletic equipment that Gronholz had recently made. A month later the council voted to not allow the principal to attend its meetings, a significant decision given the vast importance of the school to the growth of the congregation. The situation did not improve. In March the council sent Gronholz a letter reminding him of his being under the authority of both the Board of Education and the Church Council and that any further problems would result in his dismissal. While that problem resolved itself two months later when Gronholz received and accepted a call to teach elsewhere, it only served to

²²⁰ Church council meeting minutes, October 2, 1963; Church council meeting minutes, November 6, 1963; Church council meeting minutes, December 4, 1963; Church council meeting minutes, March 4, 1964.

saddle Knickelbein with yet another responsibility as school principal. It was not just financial realities that caused him to assume headship of the school; he really believed in the inter-connected mission of church and school promoted by the Wisconsin Synod. In fact, Knickelbein also received a call that spring. Among the many reasons he cited for declining it was that the congregation that sent the call did not have a school. His congregation at St. Marcus agreed with him and voted that he should decline the call and stay at St. Marcus, which he did.²²¹

The creation of the Stewardship Committee and adoption of the 1965 budget resulted in tighter financial oversight, as was necessitated by the school renovation loan and the continual need for generosity from members. As a result, updated financials were presented at each month's church council meetings. These included monthly giving and expenses, the current deficit, the total amount of outstanding bills, and the balance on loans from banks and members. By the end of 1965 St. Marcus's total debt was \$5,096 and it still owed \$51,194 in loans. Attempts to increase enrollment throughout 1964-1965 had yet to yield significant results. After initially brainstorming about using the local paper to advertise about summer vacation Bible school and the Christian day school, the council settled on another strategy and contacted churches without schools to see if they had families that would value the St. Marcus education. In the end, however, they had the most communication with two nearby Wisconsin Synod congregations – Jerusalem and St. Philip's – that had overcrowded schools. While it is uncertain if any children from the

²²¹ Congregational meeting minutes, July 1, 1964; Church council meeting minutes, December 9, 1964; Church council meeting minutes January 5, 1965; March 15, 1965 letter to Principal Gronholz. Church council meeting minutes May 5, Special congregational meeting, June 27, 1965; March 29, 1965 letter from Pastor Knickelbein to the congregation. He relied up the following question to help he ascertain God's will when he received a call, "where can I do the most good, at my present place or at the new place or position?"

Jerusalem CDS ever attended St. Marcus School, the two churches tentatively agreed to conduct joint mission work in the neighborhood to gain students for St. Marcus.

Discussion with St. Philip's ended when the two congregations could not agree on an acceptable rate per student to be charged. Thus, by early 1966 the council added the requirement that children who are members of the church and want to be confirmed at St. Marcus had to attend grades 6-8 so that they "will have a better understanding of religion." The step of faith the congregation had taken to renovate the school to increase enrollment and eventually church membership had not yet resulted in growth in either.²²²

Despite the lack of progress in increasing school enrollment, St. Marcus Church was gaining new members. In addition to six new households that came to the church as confirmed members, ten adults and eight children were confirmed by Knickelbein in early June. Some of them, perhaps, were among the fourteen children, thirteen of whom were black, mentioned in the caption under the picture from the May 24, 1964 *Milwaukee Journal* that showed seven-year-old Venetia Shaw being baptized by Pastor Knickelbein. The caption noted that Venetia's sponsor was Doris Greuel, a white member at St. Marcus. The white members who remained in the congregation had embraced God's call to integrate it. However, as was previously predicted, the growth in new believers and members did not result in a sudden windfall. The congregation's financial struggles remained, despite letters from the pastor and additional envelopes in each member's "subscription box," a tool used to assist people in giving what they had committed. Given

²²² At times the council reached out to members to provide the church interest-free loans; Church council meeting minutes, March 8, 1964; Church council meeting minutes, April 1, 1964; Church council meeting minutes, May 6, 1964; Congregational meeting minutes, May 18, 1964; Congregational meeting minutes, September 28, 1964; Church council meeting minutes, December 2, 1964; Church council meeting minutes, December 9, 1964; Church council meeting minutes, February 1, 1965. During this time Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran Church only had white members and the congregation at St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church was all African Americans.

this reality, along with his also serving as principal, it is surprising that the congregation voted in October 1966 to allow Knickelbein to add yet another item to his growing list of responsibilities. Ephrata Lutheran, which was located at 220 W. Concordia Street, a mile and one half north of St. Marcus, needed a vacancy pastor while it called others for the full-time position. Knickelbein taking on this temporary position led to permanent changes at St. Marcus.²²³

Adding vacancy pastor at Ephrata Church to Knickelbein's many duties directly led to his resigning from St. Marcus and accepting a call to serve at a WELS congregation seventy miles north of Milwaukee less than three months after the beginning the new role. Trouble began almost immediately. The St. Marcus Church council used some of its meeting time in December 1966 to determine how the pastor would juggle commitments at both churches during the service-laden Christmas season. The issue was apparently more substantial than either the council or Knickelbein anticipated when the possibility of his serving as vacancy pastor was being considered. The tense situation was further complicated when each of the candidates who had been called to serve as principal of St. Marcus School declined the offer for unspecified reasons. At the same meeting when it became apparent that Pastor Knickelbein would have to continue serving as principal, the congregation learned of his having received a call to St. John's/St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cleveland, Wisconsin. Knickelbein had requested the council help him ascertain God's will by their

²²³ Church council meeting minutes June 3, 1964; *Milwaukee Journal* photograph, May 24, 1964; February 17, 1966 letter from Pastor Knickelbein to the congregation; Special Congregational meeting minutes, October 17, 1966. The voters had previously agreed to let him serve as vacancy pastor at St. Philip's, which would have been a natural fit given his history with the congregation. Ephrata, on the other hand, was a congregation full of elderly white members seemingly without a vision for how to engage its new neighbors. So while they could benefit from Knickelbein's expertise, it seems unlikely that they were actually in a position to put it into practice.

recommending to the congregation whether or not he should accept the call. He asked them for a straightforward “yes” or “no.” Curiously, they refused to abide by his request. Rather, they presented the congregation with a list of pros and cons to his staying. The list was fine, and presumably accurate. It was not, however, what Knickelbein had requested. As a result, he resigned on January 21, 1967, even though the congregation had unanimously voted for him to return the call, Lutheran-speak for not taking the job.

224

Despite the abrupt end to his tenure, St. Marcus Church had benefitted immeasurably from Paul Knickelbein’s leadership. Not only had the congregation survived when so many others in the inner core left or died, it had begun its journey to becoming a racially integrated congregation. The challenge was to find another man who could continue to lead the unique congregation. Once again, church members gathered to call a new pastor. As before, the names initially presented, which had been suggested by leaders from the WELS SE District, did not yield the man for the job. At a second meeting, the name of Paul Knickelbein’s successor was nominated from the floor, just as had occurred when Knickelbein was called twelve years earlier. There was one significant difference, however. When St. Marcus Church hired Knickelbein they found the right man for the job living and working just blocks away from the church. His successor, on the other hand, was currently serving on the other side of the globe. Once again, St. Marcus members believed that God had used the Lutheran process of “the call” to put his man in place.²²⁵

²²⁴ Congregational meeting minutes, November 1966; Church council meeting minutes, December 7, 1966; Congregational meeting minutes, December 19, 1966; Congregational meeting, January 16, 1967; Pastor Knickelbein resignation letter, January 21, 1967. Knickelbein agreed to stay on until April 3, 1967 to ease the transition to a vacancy pastor while the search for his successor began.

²²⁵ Special congregational meeting, April 24, 1967; Special congregational meeting, June 26, 1967.

Although Richard Seeger was currently in his tenth year serving in Asia – first as a Lutheran missionary in Japan and for the past year as a counselor to the Lutheran Chinese Church in Hong Kong – St. Marcus Church was not unknown to him. His grandfather did some of the construction work when the current structure was built and his family had previously been members. Ironically, the time he spent so far away from home had provided valuable training and life experience to enable him to serve with distinction when he returned. The Milwaukee his family previously knew had changed significantly, as had the neighborhood around the church and the congregation itself. Those changes would likely not have been any concern for a man who had lived as a racial minority for the previous ten years of his life, albeit as a missionary in a foreign country. Events would soon prove that Seeger sensed God behind his call to St. Marcus. He and his wife met with the church council on July 27, 1967 to ask questions about the call. Three days later Milwaukee joined what historians refer to as “the long hot summer of 1967” when over 150 race riots erupted in cities across the county. The epicenter of the Milwaukee riots – the intersection of North Avenue and Third Street – was one block from St. Marcus. Undeterred by mayhem like the city had never seen, the Seegers accepted the call.²²⁶

Both government officials and regular citizens in Milwaukee had worried for weeks about whether or not the city would succumb to the bedlam that had occurred that July in other cities across the country. Some assumed the city would escape such a fate, while others, like Mayor Henry Maier and the entirety of the city’s African American community, knew the “seeds” existed in Milwaukee too, though they would cite very

²²⁶ *St. Marcus News*, July 1967. It is unclear if Seeger himself had been a member or if the article was referring to his parents or grandparents; Congregational meeting minutes, September 11, 1967.

different underlying causes. Eventually, the city succumbed to the disturbing national trend and chaos reigned from Sunday July 30 at 9:45 PM until 2:45 AM the next morning. Different people gave the event different titles: the mayor called it a “civil disturbance,” civil rights leader Father James Groppi thought it a “revolution,” and newspaper headlines declared it a “riot.” Regardless of the descriptions, the facts remain the same. Much of the disturbance occurred along or near North Third Street, a “dilapidated business artery” that was “Main Street” for Milwaukee’s African American community. During those five hours two people – an elderly black woman and a white police officer – died, 70 were injured, and 180 arrested. The mayor declared a state of emergency and instituted a curfew, which lasted until August 9, and was initially enforced not only by the city’s police force but also the Wisconsin National Guard. Despite these efforts a third death occurred on August 2 when Clifford McKissick, an unarmed 18 year old black college student, was shot and killed by police. In the aftermath, the city’s white residents applauded the swift reaction by city government while Milwaukee’s African American community bemoaned the continued existence of racial disparities in education, housing, and employment along with a very poor relationship with the police department. Although Catholic Archbishop William E. Cousins implored Catholics in a live speech on August 6 that was carried on nine radio and four television stations that they had a sacred responsibility to eradicate racial prejudice in society, white Protestant leaders remained publicly silent.²²⁷

²²⁷ Frank Aukofer, *City With a Chance* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1968), 1-146; Jonathan A. Slesinger, *Study of Community Opinions Concerning the Summer 1967 Civil Disturbance in Milwaukee*, a report published on April 1, 1968 by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Office of Applied Social Research, School of Social Welfare and Institute of Human Relations, 1-38; Henry Maier, *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous: An Autobiography* (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1993), 63-92. Earlier in July 1967 riots erupted in Newark, New Jersey and Detroit, Michigan.

As Seeger would soon discover, or perhaps he already knew when he accepted the call, the congregation at St. Marcus had faith to match his when considering the location of the church and its God-ordained purpose there. Not only had pastor Knickelbein demonstrated divine resolve in his ministry to the neighborhood around the church, but so had John Chworowsky, who served as the vacancy pastor prior to Seeger's arrival. Writing after the riots, Chworowsky noted that the recent civil unrest had been a reason for concern, but not for fear. "Our protection as Christians does not come solely from police and curfews. It comes from our lord and Savior who has commissioned us to preach the soul-saving message of His death and resurrection." As Jesus was "more than able to deliver us from every trial" the congregation could respond to the riots with courage and determination, and to prayerfully rededicate itself to stay in the neighborhood. He encouraged people to put their money where their faith was and give using the special envelope provided to collect funds to assist the Seegers with the expense of moving from Hong Kong to Milwaukee.²²⁸

Pastor Seeger arrived in Milwaukee and began at St. Marcus in October 1967. He immediately followed in Chworowsky's footsteps by recognizing the potential for fear due to neighborhood deterioration, which had resulted in "some dangers," but sought to temper it by calling people to faith. In spite of it all, he encouraged his flock to stay and trust God. "I still hear the voice of the Savior speaking, -- 'take up your CROSS and follow me.' I'm sorry, but I just cannot get those words of Jesus out of my mind. They seem to me at least, to perfectly fit our present situation." Seeger's admonition harkened

²²⁸ *St. Marcus News*, August 1967. Letter from Pastor Buenger, September 27, 1967. The congregations at St. Marcus and Ephrata, where Seeger was jointly appointed, responded so generously to the call to give to offset moving expenses that the SE District office cancelled its planned meeting with the councils of the two churches, stating that the \$1,100 raised was a "reasonable and responsible amount."

back to a famous passage in the Bible where Jesus told his disciples that following him necessarily required a life of denying one's own desires and instead adhering to God's priorities. His leadership was both practical and spiritual. He fortified their resolve to attend evening meetings by sharing with them that he had parked his car in the neighborhood at night "many times" in the past month without incident. Significantly, he addressed the challenges of ministering in the neighborhood as taking part in a spiritual battle. "Don't let the devil keep you away from the Lord's house by putting fear in your heart." He knew that their continued presence in the aftermath of the riots would communicate the importance and reality of their relationship with God. "It is good for our neighborhood to have the people see that Christ means something to us." He explained that their words alone to residents of the area would not be effective if the very people they hoped to reach with the gospel did not see the members of St. Marcus being "a good example." Without that witness, the strategy of using the school to reach the neighborhood would be jeopardized.²²⁹

Up to that point, St. Marcus's investment in the school and its plan to use it as a way to build relationships with African American neighbors so as to grow the congregation was working, even in light of the congregation's continual fiscal challenges. Seeger reminded the congregation that "the Day School is doing very well." About half of the students, 47 of 97, are from outside the congregation. As was the hope and plan, eight students from the school "were added to the book of life" in November 1967. Seeger challenged the congregation to "support it with all their might" as the very best "missionary method" to the neighborhood that he could imagine. Furthermore, he noted,

²²⁹ *St. Marcus News*, October 1967; *St. Marcus News*, November 1967.

“the people in our immediate neighborhood also realize what we are trying to do there.”

The statement seems to include not just the families that send their children to the school, but the community at large, as was born out by the fact that the St. Marcus Church and school buildings suffered very little damage during the riots. St. Marcus school was effectively building relationships with the neighborhood and thereby giving the church credibility.²³⁰

Seeger and the church leadership leaned into this reality the following summer by scheduling a “rather intensive” neighborhood evangelism campaign. The first stage of the plan was seven weeks of neighborhood canvassing beginning in the middle of May. They intended to reach “every house in our area” and, as a result, some children from the families visited would attend vacation Bible school (VBS) that summer. VBS was to be followed by more canvassing to invite children to Sunday School, and “if we have room and other conditions are favorable, into our parochial school.” St. Marcus’s plans, however, did not focus solely on the area’s children. While this was taking place, the church’s evangelism committee was being trained to reach out to the adults in the community. Seeger “hoped and prayed” that the result would be that they “add many more lost souls to His church.” By June, it appeared like that would indeed be the case. Six adults were receiving instruction from the pastor and the evangelism team had made 23 calls. At least ten people had attended at least one service at St. Marcus since being

²³⁰ *St. Marcus News*, December 1967; Church council meeting minutes, October 4, 1967; Draft of a letter written in May or June 1970 from the principal of St. Marcus School, Mr. Hagedorn, to Pastor Bridges of Epsworth Methodist Church, located at the intersection of N. 2nd Street and W. Garfield Avenue, a block away from St. Marcus; As was mentioned in the Introduction, Cross Lutheran also attributed a decrease in property damage to the fact that as they reached out to the neighborhood around their church, the neighbors took notice and felt accepted.

called on and one individual had been to church every Sunday since being contacted by the evangelism committee.²³¹

While Seeger's attention during his first months at St. Marcus was understandably focused on reassuring his congregation of their mission in light of the unrest in the neighborhood, he soon settled into a regular rhythm of more typical pastoral duties. These included making home visits to members who attended church services very infrequently, and, presumably gave little to nothing to support the church budget. He also went to see the elderly, who were often unable to attend regularly despite a desire to do so. Finally, he visited those who were sick, either at home or in the hospital. Seeger's prioritization of visitations was seemingly very important to the congregation's lay leadership, and possibly the communicant members as well. Previously, the church council refused to give Pastor Knickelbein a direct recommendation regarding the call he received to Cleveland, WI, as he had requested, and instead provided the congregation a list of pros and cons to of his leadership at St. Marcus. The first item on the list of cons was that "delinquent members are not being called upon by the pastor and the church council feels that better results would be obtained by the pastor's visiting rather than a layman." Accordingly, Seeger regularly reported the numbers of each type of visit he had completed in the monthly *Saint Marcus News* and at each month's church council meeting.²³²

The purpose in the first type of visit was initially to introduce himself and to invite people to once again attend Sunday service. He first acquainted himself with

²³¹ *St. Marcus News*, May 1968; Congregational meeting minutes, June 9, 1968; *St. Marcus News*, June 1968.

²³² Church council meeting minutes, January 4, 1967.

delinquent members in October 1967, when he visited twelve families, “most” of whom started to attend worship services once again. The next month he called on 15 such families in the hopes that they too would “return to the Lord’s house and will continue faithful to Him who redeemed them.” Members learned at the December 1967 congregational meeting that three adult and one child were “taking instructions” from Pastor Seeger in preparation to become members. By February, the practice of visitations had grown into a full-blown strategy to maintain membership by drawing absent members back into regular attendance or increase membership through people converting to faith. He offered instructional classes on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings as well as on Tuesday evening before Bible class, which was attended by 35 people. By June he provided a month by month tabulation of total visits – 64 in January, 54 in February, etc. – and noted that the evangelism team had also made 23 calls. Some visits, though, could only be done by the pastor.²³³

Pastoral visitations also served to bring spiritual comfort to elderly and hospitalized members. Shortly after Seeger took over at St. Marcus two members died, which likely made very clear the importance of the pastor including in fellowship those who cannot attend the weekly service. When visiting shut-ins and those who were sick, Seeger offered to administer communion. As people approached death, either due to old age or illness, it was especially important that they be reminded that Jesus had done for them what they could not do for themselves. Many of those he visited took him up on the offer and, not surprisingly, he also reported these numbers to the council and congregation. For example, in February and March 1968, Pastor Seeger visited 25 people

²³³ *SM News* October 1967; *SM News* December 1967; Congregational Meeting minutes, December 1967; *SM News* February 1968; Congregational meeting minutes, June 9, 1968.

in the hospital and 20 shut-ins, serving communion to three of those hospitalized and four of the shut-ins. As the practice continued, participation rates increased. By June, all but two of 34 shut-ins took communion, and six of fifteen hospitalized members received the sacrament. Seeger understood that face-to-face time with him, faithfulness to remind people of their need for God, and a robust evangelism plan would serve the congregation well as it sought to stabilize membership.²³⁴

No matter the man serving as pastor, at St. Marcus a Biblically-faithful, spiritually-growing congregation was more important than a large one. As such, meeting minutes never express displeasure when new members are added one month, but other members leave the next. In fact, the process was common. In December 1968, there was cause for joy as five men were accepted as new voting members at that month's congregational meeting. A month later the congregation gained a member who received a peaceable release from Garden Homes Lutheran Church. That same month, however, three people asked to be stricken from the membership roll and in April Pastor Seeger asked to remove from membership Mr. Arthur Johnson and his fiancé Miss Jane Clark because they were scheduled to get married "at a church not in fellowship with our Synod." Two others were also removed in April, in addition to the Bloom family being granted peaceful release to Divinity Divine Charity. Non-attendance, and the typically corresponding fact of not giving, were also cause for being removed from membership, as both the Kilberg family and Patrick Brosseau discovered from the letters they were

²³⁴ Church council meeting minutes, January 3, 1968; *SM News* February 1968; *SM News* March 1968; As had always been the practice at St. Marcus, the number of members who took communion at the actual church building on a communion Sunday were tracked and publicly reported. Just as previous generations had read and heard encouragements about the importance of taking communion, so too did members at St. Marcus while Seeger was there.

sent in May. While the neighborhood around the church had changed, and with it the race of some of its members, St. Marcus remained a congregation where the pastor and lay leaders expected active members interested in deepening their relationship with God through regular church involvement.²³⁵

From Seeger's understanding, neither the spiritual maturation of members nor the numerical growth of the congregation were benign occurrences. Rather, as taught in the Bible, St. Marcus was in the midst of a spiritual battle. He reminded readers of the *Saint Marcus News* to not let the devil keep them from coming to church. The next year, he offered the congregation not only a more in-depth assessment, but encouragement as well. "I can imagine that someone is pretty upset over the gracious work the Lord Jesus is doing here at St. Marcus. That someone is the devil. Without fail, he will try to discourage us, to make us lessen our efforts and to make us indifferent. But we know this roaring lion, and we know him well. The Savior will never permit him to harm us as long as we, by His grace, remain faithful to His Word." Given this reality, he urged his flock to greater attendance at Sunday service and weeknight Bible school, to faithfully receive the Sacraments, and to become more active in the men's club and ladies's aid and guild. He also promised that a youth group would be started soon. As befitting his role, Pastor Seeger also offered counseling to his parishioners. The fact that by October 1969 he was busy with "lots of counseling" was an indication to him that members of the congregation were under "vicious attacks" because the church as a whole refused to be scared of the violence going on in the neighborhood around the church. For those not needing to speak

²³⁵ Congregational meeting minutes, December 1968; Church council meeting minutes, March 4, 1968; Garden Homes Lutheran was located at 2450 W. Roosevelt Drive. Divinity Divine Charity, the result of a merger between two WELS congregations, was in north suburban Whitefish Bay.

with him individually, Seeger urged them to “keep yourselves close to the Redeemer” by regularly reading the Bible in order to hear “His Word of Life” and to “come often to Lord’s Supper.” These disciplines, Seeger knew, would help members view the lies the “Great Deceiver” tells them as “laughable.” It is a telling description from a man who found great delight in being pastor at St. Marcus Church.²³⁶

Two months after arriving at St. Marcus, Seeger shared “a confession” with the congregation. It had been a long time since he had “such pleasure in doing my work.” At his previous postings in Japan and Hong Kong he revealed that it was “a struggle” to get people to “love the Lord Jesus and His work.” In his brief time at St. Marcus, however, he noted that just a visit from him or another leader in the church to share some words of encouragement was all that was needed for people who had been lax in attendance and giving to begin doing both. He thanked his “dear Marcusaners” for making his ministry among them “such a joyful one.” His wife and children shared in the joy of being at St. Marcus, especially the simple pleasure of singing their favorite hymns in English “for a change.” To his open expressions of joy, Seeger added humor to his communications with the congregation. He joked about the amount of weight he gained in his first year with them, about making the church secretary, Edna Vitense, type so much, and playfully commented that he hoped his kids would still recognize him after he had had busy months of travel preaching throughout the metropolitan area. He teased the congregation that he enjoyed “being sneaky” by hinting at, but not outright sharing, some good news he had recently received. Upon returning from a family vacation in northern Minnesota

²³⁶ *SM News* November 1967; *SM News* August 1968; *SM News* October 1969; April 1975 letter from pastor Seeger to congregation.

where he caught no fish, he asked if anyone in the congregation could instruct him in that pursuit before his next vacation! ²³⁷

This foundation of joy and humor enabled Seeger to build a friendly relationship with the entire congregation and thereby earn the right to be heard when he had to challenge them. He implored “ALL THE MEN OF THE CONGREGATION” to come to the school at 9 AM on a Saturday to take care of the many repairs that were necessary. Similarly, he often utilized tough love to coax better attendance and more giving out of the congregation. “The Lord has been very good to us. Our attendance is still increasing, and we certainly thank Him for that. BUT is there any reason why we should not have an average attendance of 300 each Sunday?” He answered his own question by noting that some members evidently thought that Jesus was “kidding” when he encouraged ALL His children not to “forsake meeting together.” He then scolded those who had not been attending regularly, saying, “you are the ONLY ONES at fault.” Another time, in response to attendance of only 180 for a guest preacher on a Sunday when he was preaching at another church, Seeger reprimanded the congregation with “Shame on you, Marcus!!!” Attendance, however, was increasing. 1968 attendance for the summer months – June through September – was over 3900, 900 more than the previous year and 200 higher than any year since 1964. Yet tough love was required because lagging attendance not only led to spiritual malaise but also inevitably resulted in decreased giving. ²³⁸

²³⁷ *SM News* November 1967; *SM News* April 1968; *SM News* September 1968; *SM News* October 1968; *SM News* December 1968; *SM News* August 1969.

²³⁸ *SM News* June 1968; *SM News* September 1968; *SM News* October 1968; *SM News* April 1969.

While money was never a metric used by St. Marcus to measure its success, it was, practically speaking, required to carry on its mission of preaching the gospel to the lost in their racially transitioning neighborhood. Not only was there never any extra, there often seemed to not be enough. Months before Seeger's arrival, the congregation voted to "borrow money from any available fund so that the salaries may be met." Things did not magically improve, though he was sure to let the congregation know of their need to give, not just sacrificially, but at all. "In the second half of October, your gifts for the work of the Lord left so very much to be desired. Maybe everyone had special expenses that month or something...I was amazed to see how many of you are not helping at all and how many seem to be doing the very least possible." Seeger estimated that giving of \$2,000 per month would allow the congregation to meet all of its obligations, though he earnestly hoped for more. The congregation paid over \$2500 in interest payments on the school renovation loan in 1966. Seeger viewed this as a wasteful use of resources when with some generosity the debt could be retired earlier, allowing the saved money to be put to productive use elsewhere. Seeger initially expected that gifts or interest-free loans from members would be the avenue that made debt retirement possible. In the end, those options were supplemented by gifts to the congregation from an unexpected source.²³⁹

The possibility of St. Marcus receiving outside financial assistance was first mentioned at the September 6, 1967 church council meeting. Minutes note that Miss Ellen Otto had told the council that a trust fund had been established to assist Lutheran congregations operating under financial duress. That evening the group voted to send a letter to the Seibert Foundation explaining St. Marcus's financial situation and requesting

²³⁹ Congregational meeting minutes, March 13, 1967; *SM News* November 1967; *SM News* December 1968; *SM News* March 1968.

to be considered for help. Seemingly, they would have been a good candidate. The August 1967 financial report noted that the congregation's total debt was approximately \$50,100. Almost six months later, in February 1968, Pastor Seeger met with a Mr. Helwig from the foundation, who informed him that it was "very possible" that St. Marcus would be selected as a grant recipient. Helwig's insight was accurate and the next month the congregation learned that the Seibert Foundation, which "believed we are doing very good work here," had approved the congregation's request. The \$10,000 grant would be used to pay all outstanding bills, with a small amount left over. Seeger, as was his nature, encouraged his flock to see it all as an outpouring of God's mercy upon them, because God realized that debt is depressing and leads to discouragement. Seeger also sought to ensure that the foundation learn of the positive impact its donation had made ²⁴⁰

In his November 1968 letter, Seeger credited the money received from the foundation for numerous statistical gains as well as reminding his contacts there of St. Marcus's continuing needs. Attendance had improved from 11,064 in 1967 to 12,415 in 1968. Likewise, 473 more people took communion in 1968 than the 955 participants in 1967. Seeger credited these realities with other positive trends underway at St. Marcus. "It goes without saying, that whenever there is a revitalized interest in the Lord's Word and His sacrament, there is also a marked increase of activity in other areas of His work."

²⁴⁰ Church council meeting minutes, September 6, 1967; Church council meeting minutes, February 7, 1968; "About Us: History," last accessed, February 3, 2020, <https://www.siebertfoundation.org/About-Us.htm>. The Seibert Foundation was funded from the fortune of Mr. Albert F. Seibert, owner of the Milwaukee Electric Tool Company. In 1952 Seibert chose to donate his interest in the company to the foundation bearing his name in order to fulfill the promise he made to God when the company struggled to survive during the Great Depression. The foundation does not allow outside access to its archives and efforts to have a foundation employee answer questions about the relationship between it and St. Marcus were pleasantly denied, due to limited staff availability and the amount of time they estimated it would take to conduct the research. Thus, all of the information about the ongoing assistance provided by the Seibert Foundation to St. Marcus Church comes from St. Marcus's archives; Congregational meeting minutes, March 10, 1968; *SM News* March 1968.

Financial generosity was one such area. In September 1967 the congregation's total indebtedness – operating deficit plus bank loan balance combined with the balance of loans from members – stood at \$50,616. Over the course of the subsequent twelve months, that total had fallen over 54 percent to \$23,226. The foundation's gift accounted for less than 37 percent of the staggering \$27,390 decrease. Seeger credited the progress to the zeal, dedication, and sacrifice of St. Marcus members in addressing the challenges facing the congregation. Yet despite this progress, Seeger noted that St. Marcus still faced “some rather thorny problems.” The operating deficit was slowly growing. The boiler plant for the church and school likely needed replacing and preliminary estimates ranged from \$5,500 to \$6,000. The school required approximately \$4,000 in masonry repair. On top of all that, the church roof had recently started to leak. Over the years the congregation had been unable to set money aside for such repairs. He then pivoted and shared that the \$35,000 annual cost of operating the school is largely responsible for keeping the congregation from being in “rather good shape.” Prior to ending the letter by extending “the most heart-felt thanks” for their initial gift, Seeger made his ask. “If the Lord Jesus should again move you brethren to extend a helping hand to St. Marcus, we would indeed be very appreciative.” The foundation granted the congregation additional \$10,000 grants in February 1969 and in early 1970. Its years of faithfulness in the midst of difficult circumstances made St. Marcus a worthy recipient. ²⁴¹

The task of growing an integrated congregation in the midst of a troubled neighborhood in a city where riots the previous year had laid bare the frustrations of its

²⁴¹ November 27, 1968 letter from Pastor Seeger to Mssrs. Grede and Helwig at the Seibert Foundation; February 17, 1969 letter from Pastor Seeger to Mssrs. Grede and Helwig at the Seibert Foundation; September 24, 1969 letter from Pastor Seeger to the Seibert Foundation.

black residents was so important that Seeger was right to share the load as much as possible with members of the congregation. A year after he arrived, the pastor heralded that a “dedicated group” of Marcusaners had joined the evangelism team. He encouraged the rest of the congregation to pray for them and consider joining them as they visit the “unchurched” and “those unfortunate sheep who have strayed from our Savior’s protecting arm.” As always, the school was a crucial and effective component in the congregation’s strategy. Fifty of the eighty-nine students in the 1968-1969 school year were from families that were not members of the congregation. Seeger and the new principal, Mr. Hagedorn, recognized the opportunity that lay before them. On a field trip to Chicago for seventh and eighth graders, the students visited not only the crowd-pleasing Museum of Science and Industry and Alder Planetarium, but also the Afro-American Museum. The ministry of the school to the neighborhood and its residents resulted in folks who recognized the church’s genuine care beginning to attend. In October 1968, there were eleven people in the adult instruction class. Although the growing interracial character of the congregation was based on intentionality, Seeger’s numbers regarding evangelism calls or attendees in adult instruction classes, for example, were never qualified by race. Rather, given the changing racial makeup of the neighborhood around the church and the purposeful outreach to all who lived there, it is reasonable to assume that the reported numbers contained both Caucasians and African Americans. In thanking the Seibert Foundation for their second gift, Seeger wrote that “we promise, with the Savior’s gracious help, and without which we must fail, to do all in our power to bring more of His black children, yea all of whatever color or race, into His Kingdom.” Three adults and four youth were confirmed on Palm Sunday that year. A

picture of the event shows Pastor Seeger with three black children, one black male adult and one white female adult.²⁴²

Church growth and Sunday morning attendance grew symbiotically. Attendance at Easter services in 1969 “was the best for a great number of years.” Seven people joined the congregation in May, and four more adults were receiving instruction at the school with others being instructed in homes. Some of those were likely among the nine new adult members who joined in June 1969. Seeger touted this growth, which was more than enough to offset the fact that there were still some people leaving St. Marcus at this time, in a letter he wrote the congregation in July of that year. “I’m sure you’ve noticed, but I just want to give you some figures which will indicate how much Marcus is G*R*O*W*I*N*G.” Annual attendance was up by almost one thousand people from the previous year and more than 2,200 from the same point in 1967. More people were taking communion and giving to the Synod had also doubled. Eighty students were registered for the upcoming vacation Bible school, over 20 more than the previous summer. The fact excited Seeger. “Just think what this means as far as the souls of those kids are concerned.” The growth in all areas made it easy for Seeger, who was also now involved with the Wisconsin Synod’s Inner City Evangelism Committee, to turn down a call to serve as a missionary in Honolulu, Hawaii. The congregation wholeheartedly agreed with the decision. They noted that “since he arrived new life and hope has been instilled in St. Marcus and if he were to leave the congregation would in time be dissolved.”²⁴³

²⁴² *SM News* August 1968; Congregational meeting minutes, September 8, 1968; *SM News* November 1968; *SM News* October 1968; Seeger February 17, 1969 letter to Seibert Foundation; *SM News* March 1969; March 30, 1969 photograph of confirmation class.

²⁴³ *SM News* April 1969; Church council meeting minutes, May 7, 1969; *SM News* June 1969; July 1969 letter from Pastor Seeger to the St. Marcus congregation; Church council meeting minutes, September 1969.

Seeger belonged at St. Marcus and it flourished under his leadership. After prayerfully considering and declining that call, he shared the following with his flock. “I can honestly say I have never felt more called by the Lord than I do now.” His dedication was paying off. The congregation had patiently waited for years for the school to consistently funnel people to the church. By September 1969 he shared that “each Sunday, more and more children of our day school, together with their parents, are showing their faces at Sunday worship services.” He called this reality “a joy” and noted that “finally, the school is beginning to feed back into the church as it should.” Seeger continued to serve as pastor of St. Marcus for another ten years, during which the church continued to grow in every way. Perhaps the following passage from his 1998 obituary best summarizes both the congregation he inherited and the cultural moment in which he did.

The members of St. Marcus are grateful to Pastor Seeger for his significant ministry during his twelve years in Milwaukee. During the summer of 1967 Milwaukee’s near north side was torn by race riots. King Drive (3rd St.), perhaps more than any other part of Milwaukee, was hit hard by violence and vandalism. The vacant parsonage at 212 E. North Ave. was burglarized and entered twice by arsonists. Members fled to the suburbs, church attendance was falling, and a debt of \$41,000 left over from the 1964 school renovation dragged on.

Pastor Seeger’s arrival and strong leadership gave new confidence to the congregation. In five years the debt was paid off, church attendance rose again, the school’s enrollment stabilized, and the congregation viewed its location and ministry with new energy. Though the riots had led some in the city to despair of racial integration, Pastor Seeger was firmly committed to a multi-racial congregation.

It should come as no surprise that Seeger’s tenure at St. Marcus played out as it did. For him, the opportunity to serve in a multiracial neighborhood after having learned firsthand the what it felt like to be a racial minority and foreigner while in Japan and Hong Kong,

the assignment truly was a call from God. Early in his tenure he wrote the following to his congregation. “Listen to the voices of those who have gone before us at St. Marcus – voices of illustrious Christians who by His grace have washed their robes in His blood – voices saying to us, ‘Preach the Gospel!’, ‘Be faithful to Him Whom we also served!’, ‘Build the Kingdom!!’ O Marcus, Marcus may God ever use you as a beacon of light in our present-day spiritual darkness.” Seeger, and Paul Knickelbein before him, rescued and grew St. Marcus from a congregation that could have reasonably left or died into one that embraced and included both white and black Christians and that continues its vibrant ministry forty years later in the very same location. ²⁴⁴

* * *

Were St. Marcus’s historical legacy to depend solely on the words found in a beloved pastor’s obituary, one could forgive those who wished for independent verification. Fortunately, the success of St. Marcus was recognized during Richard Seeger’s tenure as part of a rigorous study commissioned by the Wisconsin Synod, largely funded by the Seibert Foundation, and performed by the business consulting firm Anderson/Roethle and Associates. The “Planning Program for Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Center City Churches” was published in December 1977. The 154-page report encompassed extensive data from twelve congregations in “center city Milwaukee or transitional neighborhoods.” Cumulatively, those congregations had 7,000 members. Seven of them also offered a Christian Day School as part of their program of education

²⁴⁴ *SM News* September 1969.

and evangelism. The report makes clear that the Synod valued the history and potential future of those local bodies but was realistic about the difficulties they faced. “During recent years, there has been high mobility and a continuing shift in the racial makeup of these congregations. Due to declining membership, there is increasing concern about the ability to finance the parishes and schools in future years from parish income alone.” In order to address those realities and ascertain the future feasibility of each congregation, Anderson/Roethle and Associates were tasked with making recommendations based upon the data they collected.²⁴⁵

The data gathered about each congregation and school by the business consultants demonstrated both depth and breadth. In all cases, the information was collected with the assistance of the pastor, the principal, if applicable, and lay leaders. This was done to not only assure access to all necessary materials, but also to build relational trust so that the recommendations to individual congregations provided by Anderson Roethle and Associates would be more likely to be implemented at the completion of the study. The report delineated twelve specific objectives:

1. Study Evangelism Programs and Worship Statistics
2. Update Current Budgets
3. Conduct Cost Analysis
4. Compile Demographic Data
5. Develop Enrollment Projections
6. Develop Financial Projections
7. Review Stewardship
8. Analyze Data
9. Develop Long Range Plans
10. Provide for Participation

²⁴⁵ “Planning Program for Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Center City Churches” by Anderson/Roethle and Associates, December 1977. While it is difficult to ascertain the reputation of Anderson/Roethle and Associates, their office location at the time of the study may provide a clue. As it is today, in the mid 1970’s 811 E. Wisconsin was prime commercial real estate.

11. Present Written and Verbal Reports to the Congregations
12. Encourage Commitment and Cooperation

To meet these objectives, it collected data about the congregations and schools, as well as the neighborhoods in which they were located. Membership data was gathered from 1970 and 1974-1976 and organized by race, age, and geographic distribution of members' residences. It included active membership, additions to and deletions from membership, and the age distribution of members. The race of leaders in each congregation was also tabulated. Additionally, stewardship figures from 1976 were used to determine congregational income, the average gift size, and a breakdown of the number of giving units within a scale of the amount given. Enrollment numbers for each school from 1972-1973 to 1977-1978, along a racial breakdown of those figures from 1976-1977 made up the bulk of school data, which also considered the church membership of parents and percent of eligible children enrolled. Schools were assessed on the basis of tuition and fees, the cost to educate each pupil, and the student to staff ratio at each school.²⁴⁶

After thoroughly analyzing the information collected, the Synod asked Anderson Roethle to make recommendations for each congregation and school. Income and expense summaries were tabulated for both. Congregational membership trends, age/sex profiles, and an examination of personal donations were also important criteria. These summaries formed the basis of a recommendation to each congregation and school about the changes they ought to consider in order to remain viable. When appropriate, they recognized congregations and schools that had already instituted practices believed to be beneficial. Although the report did not sugarcoat anything, it gave reason for optimism on

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the whole. It noted that general feelings are “rather positive and supportive of the Synod’s efforts in the center city.” Despite the fact that there exist “many problems” that “must be faced” in the upcoming five years, “optimism is warranted in at least ten of the twelve congregations.” Generally speaking, the study highlighted six areas of strength for the congregations collectively. They had decided to stay and had a clear understanding of their role as “missions.” In most cases membership decline had stopped, and a few congregations were growing. Most of the projected financial deficits were not overwhelming. Some churches had developed effective evangelism programs. The churches have had success in adding black members and placing them into leadership positions. Finally, and significantly, “the churches have chosen to retain a rather fundamental Gospel approach to reaching the center city rather than experimenting with numerous social programs.” The consultants recognized that the approach “appears to be successful” and is “proving to be attractive to the black populations in the center city.”²⁴⁷

Statistically and experientially St. Marcus stood out as the model congregation of the twelve studied. The “sub community” around the church was 88.8% black. Of the congregation’s 316 confirmed members, 86, or 27.2% were black, which was higher than all but St. Philip’s, which had been born out of the WELS “colored mission.” 67 of the 97 children regularly attending St. Marcus Christian Day School were black. The congregation brought in \$73,731 in 1976, which equated to \$252.50 per adult member, and \$239.38 per communicant member. Both of these figures were higher at St. Marcus than all of the other churches in the study. Not only did members contribute financially, but they also were actively involved. Over 58% of St. Marcus members attended Sunday

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

service each week, the second highest percentage of the twelve churches studied. The consultants considered all of this in light of what they had learned about St. Marcus's neighborhood. They noted it was "located in an area of the city with one of the highest poverty levels and lowest levels of income." The area's average income was almost twenty-five percent lower than the neighborhoods surrounding the other churches in the study. Furthermore, from 1970 to 1975 the neighborhood lost 3,200 residents, a drop of 21%.²⁴⁸

The report did not simply let the numbers themselves tell the story. It heaped praise on St. Marcus, noting that it deserved "to be complimented" for its many "unique and outstanding programs." Of all the churches studied, it was "a leader with respect to stewardship, church attendance, and retention of membership." The consultants directly linked these realities to "the spiritual commitment and growth of members." Whereas the reports for other churches contained "many suggestions" that needed to be implemented in order for them to remain viable, for St. Marcus it determined "the principal focus should be on continuing the present enthusiasm and thrust of the congregation and ensuring that present programs are maintained at their current level." It has been said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. The "Planning Program for Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Center City Churches" ended its presentation about St. Marcus with the following. It speaks for itself in terms of validating the leadership that Paul Knickelbein and Richard Seeger provided in the tumultuous decades of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s.

Because this church is outstanding in several ways, it is an example of how a Lutheran church can operate successfully in the center city. We suggest that the congregation be available to others as a model to share the

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

factors which have resulted in this ministry. Because of the successful nature of the congregation, we encourage the Wisconsin Synod or other agencies to be prepared to help this congregation if outside assistance is needed in the future. The congregation is strongly committed to helping themselves if at all possible, and would seek outside assistance only if it were clearly needed.

The Priorities and Strategies passed down from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, when put into practice by two men uniquely prepared for their role as pastor of a church in a racially transitioning neighborhood, allowed the previously all-white congregation at St. Marcus Lutheran Church to recognize that their new black neighbors were just like them, humans in need of a savior. The result was a racially integrated church whose vibrancy was recognizable to all who studied it.

CONCLUSION

On March 1, 1959 the congregation at St. Marcus Lutheran Church voted to follow the recommendation of the church council and accept their first African American members, sisters Rose and Zora Waller. At two separate meetings in February, the church council deliberated over how to respond to the Waller sisters' request to become members. It was a discussion the council knew was eventually going to occur when they decided in 1955 to call Paul Knickelbein as pastor. When Knickelbein met with the council to discuss the possibility of his being hired at St. Marcus, he asked how they would respond if an African American sought membership at the church. His question was the impetus behind changing the church's policy from referring them to St. Philip's Lutheran Church, an African American congregation in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod located a few blocks away, to welcoming them as members. It was not, however, St. Marcus's first step toward becoming a racially integrated congregation. In 1953, during the tenure of Knickelbein's predecessor, the congregation voted to accept African American children as students at St. Marcus Christian Day School, the church's most vital outreach ministry. These were not decisions unique to St. Marcus, or even Milwaukee. Protestant congregations in industrial cities across the country were deciding, or had decided, how to respond to the arrival of African Americans to previously all white neighborhoods around their churches. Not many historians, however, have paid much attention to the question, and consequent decisions, in the years that followed.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ As far as has been discoverable, St. Marcus was the first, or one of the first, previously "all-white" congregations to accept African Americans as members in Milwaukee. Virginia Walker-Riley joined Cross Lutheran Church, at the time a Missouri Synod congregation, 1821 N. 16th Street, as a member at some point in 1959.

Although historians have dedicated themselves to understanding the contours of race relations in America's cities in the twentieth century, almost none have sought to consider it from a religious perspective. Rarely have an individual's spiritual beliefs, or those of the church they attend, been utilized by historians as a category to comprehend the decisions they made when presented with an opportunity to interact with a population group of a different race. A few histories of the Social Gospel incorporate race as a focus. However, but they do not examine individual churches and the role theology played in each institution's decision to remain in, or move away from, their racially transitioning neighborhood. While one historian has investigated how the Catholic Church in the urban North responded to African Americans, no historians have done so for Protestant churches. This study addresses that void.

Protestant churches are a particularly worthwhile subject for a few reasons. Unlike Catholic churches, Protestant churches were not centrally administered, a reality that affected both building ownership and theological beliefs. As such, they enjoyed freedoms not available to their Catholic counterparts. Very practically, because each Protestant congregation owned its own building, they had full autonomy to decide to stay or leave as African Americans moved into the neighborhood. Additionally, while most Protestant churches officially ascribed to the same theological beliefs, not all implemented them with the same rigor or in the same ways. This flexibility played a huge role in deciding whether to welcome or to shun African Americans. Furthermore, individual Protestant churches' encounter with race in the twentieth century urban North was typically not the first time their denomination had wrestled with, and possibly split over, racial issues confronting the nation. Denominational history exerted considerable

influence over the decisions made by churches in Milwaukee. Some were hindered, others unencumbered. The role of the Protestant church, and the role of religious conviction in the lives of individual members, is fertile ground for historians who want to understand all the complex, and possibly conflicting, motivations for how white Americans have interacted with their fellow citizens of a different race.

The comparatively late growth of Milwaukee's African American population makes the city a great location to study the response of Protestant churches to the arrival of African Americans. Prior to WWII the city's small contingent of black citizens was forced to live in a residential area filled with aging properties just north and west of downtown. Most of Milwaukee's white residents never interacted with them. Fueled by the Second Great Migration, the number of African Americans in Milwaukee grew and the lack of housing options in the area to which they had historically been relegated forced them to move east, north, and west into previously all-white neighborhoods. This process occurred as the baby boom increased demand for newly constructed single-family homes in the suburbs. The pervasive existence of racially discriminatory real estate practices allowed for the widespread flight of white Milwaukee residents – and Protestant church members – from the city to its suburbs. The reality that many members no longer lived in the neighborhood around the church was one of the factors that influenced the how each congregation responded to when African Americans became neighbors of the church.

One year after beginning his “Churches in Transition” series, *Milwaukee Sentinel* religion editor James M. Johnston wrapped up the series with an article titled “Core Churches War on Human Blight.” While the article served primarily as a way to

summarize the series, the title is instructive. Solutions to a problem inevitably begin with identification of the problem. “Human blight” as a concept was widely defined, in actions as well as sometimes in words, by the churches highlighted in this study. Garfield Avenue Baptist Church defined “human blight” as something to be avoided. It did so first in words and then with actions. The problem, as clearly articulated in meeting minutes, was that “colored” people were attending church and asking to become members. The congregation’s eventual solution was to sell its building at 210 W. Garfield Avenue and relocate to Wauwatosa, an overwhelmingly white suburb far away from the areas covered in Johnston’s series. Kingsley Methodist Church, on the other hand, agreed with the assessment of other Methodists churches in the North and recognized that “human blight” was often caused by the illegitimate actions of those with power. As such, and as demonstrated at the two “Methodism and the Inclusive Church” conferences held in Milwaukee in 1956 and 1958, “human blight” was an affront to God and worth studying in order to solve. In the end, however, implementing a piecemeal solution via programs proved to be the incorrect answer. St. Marcus Evangelical Lutheran Church did not see “human blight” as something to be feared. It was also not a problem that required sociological study to determine the ideal course of action to mitigate symptoms. Rather, as they understood the Bible, human blight was simply the natural result of human sin. God had already provided a solution to the problem of human sin – the perfect life, sacrificial death, and atoning resurrection of Jesus. These varying identifications of “human blight” led to diverging attempts to address it.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ James M. Johnston, “Core Churches War on Human Blight,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 8, 1964, page 10.

A point in time comparison is a useful way to examine the processes that led Garfield Avenue Baptist Church to escape to suburban Wauwatosa, while Kingsley Methodist outsourced the operation of programs housed in its building but refused to build relationships, and St. Marcus simply sought to “preach the gospel” to their new neighbors. Examining the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of each congregation in the early months of 1959, around the time St. Marcus welcomed the Waller sisters as their first black members, provides a natural snapshot of why these three churches responded so differently to the arrival of African Americans in their respective neighborhoods. Despite all three generally adhering to the same Biblical doctrines, the ways in which those beliefs affected their futures were widely divergent.

By early 1959 Garfield Avenue Baptist Church’s “colored problem” was over ten years old, having first surfaced during the April 1948 meeting of the congregation’s Advisory Board. Despite having built a new building at 210 W. Garfield Avenue in 1950-51, leadership at the church never seemed to be settled about their long-term prospects at that location. At the January 28, 1959 quarterly business meeting, a gathering open to the entire congregation, the issue of staying put or relocating once again surfaced as it had periodically done. While discussing the need for additional Sunday School classrooms in the “new” building, some among both the leaders and lay people in attendance expressed concern over the possibility of purchasing the lot just north of the church for expansion. “Changes in the neighborhood” and the recommendation to once again “check on population trend,” both polite yet hardly veiled ways of describing the impending racial transition of that entire area of the city, were offered from the floor as reasons not to expand the current structure. These were not unexpected reservations given that church

leadership had been in regular contact over the past decade with officials from the city to ascertain where the city's African American population would likely be arriving next. Despite the concerns raised in January, at its March 8, 1959 meeting, the Advisory Board unanimously passed a resolution to expand the current building while also giving full support to those in the congregation who had for a few years desired to start "a branch work" west of the city. Yet just months later, the Advisory Board was once again debating whether or not to stay put or move the church out of the neighborhood. By the summer of 1960 they were studying the results of a congregational survey about the issue. In January 1961, the congregation voted to leave. Curiously, for a church making such a big decision, there is no evidence that leaders engaged in sustained, rigorous Bible study to assist them in their decision making.

In Spring 1959, Kingsley Methodist's engagement with African Americans was still highly theoretical. The neighborhood around the church had not yet begun to racially transition as it had near Garfield Baptist and St. Marcus; the 1960 census recorded no black residents in tract 70. In spite of there seemingly being no urgency, there is evidence that some in the congregation recognized the need to begin considering how the church would respond in the future. In April 1959 Dr. Howard Offut, perhaps the most accomplished African American musician in the city, spoke about Negro Spirituals to the high schoolers in Kingsley's Methodist Youth Fellowship. He was likely invited by his friend and Kingsley lay leader, George Hampel. Hampel and his wife, Wilma, were the impetus for educating the Kingsley congregation in the hopes that such preparation would result in Kingsley being a racially inclusive congregation. In October 1958, Wilma spoke to the Friendship Builder's group about how housing was a legitimate area of concern

and activity for Christians. She and George both had leadership roles in the “Methodism and the Inclusive Church” conferences. In March 1961, the Rev. William Blake was assigned to Kingsley and also sought to educate the congregation, especially through his leadership of a study open to all adults of *Edge of the Edge*, a book about the need for “white” churches in cities to embrace non-white neighbors.

Perhaps all this learning was simply offered too soon. By the time African Americans began to move into Kingsley’s neighborhood in significant numbers in the late 1960s, the Hampels had been living in Iowa for over five years due to a job transfer and Blake had retired. His replacement was over seventy and had neither the energy, nor the necessary experience, to lead a congregation that needed to welcome African Americans into membership in order to survive. The widespread suburbanization of Kingsley’s white members only exacerbated the mixed messages they had been sent by the fact that until 1968 the Methodist Episcopal Church’s national structure was still officially segregated. These realities mitigated all the teaching by the Hampels and Rev. Blake and resulted in a congregation that was satisfied to give money to have a part time employee run programs out of their building but wholly uninterested in having personal relationships with, and welcoming into membership, the African Americans living near the church in the 1970s. The June 1980 dissolution of the congregation had been preordained by their unwillingness to do things “with” neighbors, favoring instead to paternalistically do things “for” them.

St. Marcus didn’t understand Johnston’s “human blight” as something to fear or something *they* could fix through social programs. Rather, based on their understanding of the Bible, human blight, simply the cumulative result of human sin, could be

addressed. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, of which St. Marcus was a member, had since its inception understood Jesus's mandate to "preach the gospel" as a Christian's most important responsibility. Their solution to "human blight" was to tell all humans about what they believed God had done for them to make a relationship with God possible. As the residents around the church transitioned from German-speaking immigrants and generations of their offspring to African Americans, leaders and the congregation at St. Marcus did not panic. Instead, they sought to become friends. Inviting African American children to attend their Christian Day School was an ideal strategy for beginning relationships. Once black children were attending the school, St. Marcus rightly assumed some would begin to attend church with their parents, who would eventually become members. And they did. St. Marcus identified a spiritual problem and supplied a spiritual solution. As a result, the church became racially integrated. It remains so today, in the same location. Continued ministry at their historic location is a reality St. Marcus has in common with a few of the other congregations covered almost 50 years ago.

James Johnston's 1963 *Milwaukee Sentinel* "Churches in Transition" series told the stories of thirty-four churches as they responded to the Milwaukee area's changing residential landscape. Johnston's reporting focused on how each congregation was responding to the demographic shifts that had occurred around them. It was an insightful and important inquiry. In previous generations every one of the churches featured, regardless of denomination or location, had been a neighborhood church that drew its members from the blocks near it. The Catholic and Protestant congregations in the series resided in one of four general areas – downtown, the "lower Eastside," the southside, and

the inner core – that had changed significantly since each individual church was founded. While looking back at the series from present day reveals some remarkable findings, it is worth noting that Johnston’s series was not intended to be an exhaustive study of all of the city’s churches. Thus, although there appears to have been a stark difference between the perseverance of Catholic congregations – all five are still operating in 2020 at the same location they were in 1963 – and Protestant churches, the difference really has more to do with the downtown, rather as opposed to inner core, location of the Catholic churches about which he wrote. In fact, of the churches covered in the series only those located in the inner core have changed dramatically. Seven of nine downtown congregations, both southside churches, and all but one congregation on the “lower eastside” are still serving in the same place they were in 1963.²⁵¹

Numerically, the “Churches in Transition” series was dominated by those churches located in the inner core. All were located in areas that had already undergone, or were assumed to soon undergo, the widespread flight of young white families to “residential suburban areas.” As the number of Milwaukee’s African American residents increased, they outgrew the small area of the city just north and west of downtown where they had been forced to live, and began to expand into previously all-white neighborhoods to the east, north, and west. Some historians argue that their moving in was one of the main impetuses for the suburban relocation of the white families. Each

²⁵¹ Johnston, “Churches.” There are no obvious similarities between the three churches from downtown or the “lower eastside” that no longer exist. First Methodist Church was razed in 1966 to make way for freeway construction. The First Baptist Church was destroyed by a fire in 1974. The congregation continued to meet in rented spaces until dissolving in 1980. St. James Episcopal Church closed in 2017, after which it was redeveloped into a wedding and events venue. Almost all of the other churches in the downtown, southside, and “lower eastside” locations seem to be operating today as they were in 1963. Of note, both St. Stephen’s Lutheran Church, 1136 S. 5th Street, and St. Martini Lutheran Church, 1500 S. Cesar E. Chavez Drive, now offer both English and Spanish services.

church sought to understand and respond to this change in its own way. Examining what happened to each congregation in the ensuing fifty-six years helps to put the decisions of Garfield Avenue Baptist Church, Kingsley Methodist Church, and St. Marcus Lutheran Church into perspective.

All of the Protestant congregations in the inner core highlighted in Johnston's series stayed where they were and attempted to navigate the racial transition of the neighborhood around their church. On the surface, this reality makes Garfield Baptist Church's decision to leave two years prior to the publication of "Churches in Transition" seem especially rash. However, as was the case with Kingsley Church, some of the congregations were located in neighborhoods where demographic change occurred much later than it did in the neighborhood around Garfield and St. Marcus. The results were mixed for all these congregations. Cross Lutheran, the Central United Methodist Church, Redeemer Lutheran, Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, Christ Presbyterian Church, and Resurrection Lutheran are still operating today at the same location they were in 1963 with varying levels of vibrancy.

Some congregations eventually made the decision that they were no longer interested in staying in their historic location, or perhaps were financially unable to do so, and relocated to a community they assumed would be more conducive to their continued operation. After having invested over \$140,000 on improvements to their church and school in the 1950s, in 1966 Zion Lutheran Church moved from 2030 W. North Avenue to Menomonee Falls, a northwest suburb. They sold their building to a black Baptist Church. In 1973 Immanuel Lutheran sold its building to a black Seventh Day Adventist congregation and merged with a St. Peter's Lutheran. This new congregation began

meeting in the far northwestern corner of the city. Memorial Lutheran, itself the result of a 1948 merger between two congregations, sold its building to a black Baptist church when it moved to north suburban Glendale. Not all of the congregations, however, were able to stomach leaving.

Some of the Protestant congregations in Johnston's series continued to meet until they could no longer do so based on declining membership, decreased giving, and the high cost of maintaining aging buildings. Hope United Church of Christ disbanded in 1979 and sold their building to a black Missionary Baptist congregation. Friedens United Church of Christ dissolved in 1988, two years after selling its building. In the early 1990s Epiphany Lutheran Church dissolved and gave its building and all other assets to All Peoples Lutheran Church. Similarly, in 1991, Grand Avenue Congregational Church sold their historic structure to the Irish Cultural and Heritage Center for \$1. After the transaction the congregation met in the building for a year before folding. St. Andrews Episcopal Church held on until 2005, when it closed. After 125 years at 2454 W. McKinley Blvd, in 2013 Bethlehem Lutheran held two final services, one for current members, the second for current and former members.

In 1963, all of the churches that Johnston wrote about agreed to share their stories with the rest of the Milwaukee metropolitan area. At the time, all were doing their level best to be what they thought the residents of their neighborhood needed them to be. Fifty-six years later, it is clear that most were unable to overcome the widespread suburbanization of their members. Perhaps they were additionally hindered by denominational legacies that made doing so a steep uphill climb. Likely, most did not have the good fortune to have one pastor, let alone two, able to successfully shepherd an

all-white congregation to recognize the wisdom in doing all they could to embrace the reality that their existence depended upon them welcoming their new African American neighbors as equals in church membership. In his final article, Johnston noted that were it not for the effort and dedication of the pastors, leaders, and members at the churches about which he wrote, the series would have been titled “Churches in Decline.” In hindsight, the original series was aptly titled; all of the churches remained in transition long after publication. A “white” congregation welcoming African Americans as members is in transition. A congregation in the city choosing to relocate to the suburbs is in transition. A congregation merging in order to survive, or failing to survive despite its best effort, is similarly in transition. While all looked forward spiritual eternity, all lived in a transitory world.

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