

# **A New Path for an “Old” Church**

One WELS pastor’s experiences with Hispanic  
outreach

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For Professor James Korthals

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## Preface

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary trains generalists. It says so in the WLS catalog. With its broad curriculum the seminary trains men to be pastors in WELS congregations. The idea is that the graduates are fit for whatever form of public ministry according to their particular gifts. Still, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary fully recognizes that the pastor may lack some specialized skill, particular to his calling or form of ministry. The thought is that those abilities can be cultivated or learned as a man is called and the need arises.

A pastor is called to teach Old Testament at the seminary. He goes to the University of Wisconsin in Madison to enhance his Hebrew skills. A pastor gets called to be the administrator for Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services. Most likely he will need to receive more professional training in the area of counseling. A missionary is sent to Brazil, so he needs to learn Portuguese. Those situations are logical. A 140 year-old Lutheran congregation with a strong German heritage calls a pastor, and somewhat surprisingly he needs to learn Spanish.

This video is an interview with Rev. Karl A. Walther, pastor at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran in Watertown, Wisconsin. As Pastor Walther arrived at St. Mark's he found himself an unusual situation with no real paradigm to follow. Though he may not have realized it, this was pioneer work. For the first seventy years of St. Mark's existence services were held exclusively in German. Roughly seventy years later, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ability to speak German had almost completely faded. English had become the predominant language, but there was a new player on the scene. A small percentage of Watertown's population was exclusively speaking a language other than English. The interview follows Pastor Walther's work with Spanish-language

outreach at St. Mark's beginning with some background to understand the circumstances as he arrived in Watertown. It will focus on his ministry and the mission that St. Mark's as a congregation has carried out to the Spanish-speaking population of Watertown.

### Summary

Karl Walther grew up in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. Though born into the Wisconsin Synod, he attended public schools up until his Northwestern College days. He took two years of Spanish at Sturgeon Bay High School. However, Walther himself admits that his Spanish language skills had almost completely faded by the time he arrived at St. Mark's. During his time at NWC and WLS he never used his Spanish at all. One key experience in Walther's seminary days was his vicar year at the WELS congregation in Benton Harbor. His duties there included preaching and doing visits in German. Walther found that his German skills were lacking so had to do some intensive studying in order to be able to carry out his daily tasks in that parish. In doing so, he found that the Lord equips and strengthens his people in exactly the right way for their particular ministry. This truth stayed with him as he later began his task at St. Mark's. Walther commented about his vicar year, "I found that foreign language is 5% grammar and 95% guts. I wouldn't be here <at St. Mark's> if it weren't for the German vicar experience." Walther spent six years as pastor at Beautiful Savior in Topeka, Kansas.

In the early 90's the economy was bad in Mexico, but things were booming here in the United States. Nationwide people found that the Spanish-speaking population was growing. At this time Watertown experienced an influx of Mexican immigrants. Much to their delight the Mexican population found it to be *muy tranquilo*.<sup>1</sup> A few years later

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<sup>1</sup> Quite peaceful.

the 2000 census showed that about five percent of Watertown's population was Hispanic.<sup>2</sup> After realizing that no one in the community was reaching out to the Spanish-speaking population in Watertown, St. Mark's decided to expand its pastoral staff in 1993.<sup>3</sup> Walther arrived in 1995. Walther saw his call like this:

"I always construed my call to be a pastor at St. Mark's. You're going to preach like everyone else. You'll do liturgy like everyone else. You might teach some Bible classes, visit shut-ins. But each of us has his own area... My area was going to be outreach. That was half-English and half-Spanish."<sup>4</sup>

But Walther really had no handle on the Spanish language at that point. So in the summer of 1996, Walther attended an intensive six-week Spanish course at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. In the first days of the course he confesses that he was by far the worst student in the class. But Walther found strength and motivation for this intimidating task by looking to the divine call he had received. There were people in Watertown who spoke only Spanish whom Jesus had died for. But nobody was telling them the good news! When Walther arrived, no church in Watertown of any denomination was serving the Mexican population whatsoever.

As he began Walther found the harvest plentiful, but the cupboards were bare up to this point. There was no nucleus to work with. So they got started by advertising a Sunday evening Bible study for Reformation Sunday in 1996. They waited at the doors of a Parish Center. And they waited. But no one came. After some time they still were finding that the results were minimal.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.census.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> After Walther arrived St. Mark's had 3 full-time pastors (James Werner and Donald Sutton were the other two) and two part-time pastors (Cyril Spaude and Myron Kell).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the Job Description found in the addenda.

Yet all this time Pastor Walther was not alone. Adela Spaude, wife of the former Northwestern professor, Cyril Spaude, worked alongside Pastor Walther in this task. Hindsight would show that things may never have gotten off the ground without her. Mrs. Spaude found that opportunities to show Christian love were abundant. Because the Mexican population was very much in need, she began to befriend the Hispanic people of Watertown in practical ways. If a mother needed help enrolling her kids in the school system, Mrs. Spaude was there to help. Whether it was food, clothing, housing, immunization shots for their kids, Mrs. Spaude assisted them in whatever way possible. And her love won them over. Relationships were built. By June of 1997 they restarted Bible classes in the Parish Center, and since that time St. Mark's Lutheran has had the opportunity to share the gospel in the Spanish language every Sunday. In 1998 they began to have services in the church building. On Mother's Day of 2000, fifteen Hispanic adults become confirmed members of St. Mark's. Later on that year Mrs. Spaude was stricken by pneumonia and passed away.

By that time St. Mark's had realized that Mrs. Spaude's workload was becoming overbearing. After an extensive search and some difficulties in finding someone who had the appropriate qualifications, a candidate was found at Wisconsin Lutheran College. Rebecca Palacios was called to be a deaconess. She helped out with English as a Second Language classes. She served as a liaison between the Lutheran elementary school and the parents who did not speak English. In general, she was there to show Christian love and build bridges into the Mexican community. Her goal was simply to live by the gospel and to win an audience for the gospel. For seven years she served at St. Mark's until she stepped down to focus on motherhood. St. Mark's had used various methods of

evangelism to get started. They canvassed, advertised, and invited. But these two women and their love in the community was really what brought people to St. Mark's to hear the gospel.

Once the people came, someone needed to teach them and preach to them. Pastor Karl Walther did the preaching and teaching from the beginning. He found that many people arrived still carrying the baggage of both their Roman Catholic background and also the traditional Mexican superstition. He used simplified, sometimes interactive sermons in services. The group started out small, especially as one saw them seated in such a large church building. It is difficult to quantify the growth because no formal attendance was taken at Sunday services for over nine years. Outside of the Sunday services, Walther has found the best method for Christian instruction, almost without exception, was to go to the homes of members and prospects to give private Bible studies. Most confirmation classes were carried out this way. The Spanish service was broadcast every Monday evening on the city's public access channel. The LES also has been instrumental in bringing families to St. Mark's.<sup>5</sup>

But again, Pastor Walther was never doing the work all alone. In addition to the help of the deaconess, several English-speaking members helped learned a little Spanish so they could help out with Sunday School and music for the services. Walther found the WELS Multi-Language Publications to be a great resource.

In September of 2007, Dale Hella was called to be the part-time Spanish deacon. At the Thanksgiving Spanish service in 2007 the attendance was counted. 85 precious souls were in the pews of La Iglesia Luterana San Marcos. When one looks at the work that has been done at St. Mark's, a few things are evident. It is a group of primarily

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<sup>5</sup> In 2001 fourteen students at St. Mark's Lutheran School were of Mexican descent

young people simply coming to know their Savior better week after week. The Holy Spirit is working through the Word and through the love of his people. And all of this has happened in spite of the fact that Pastor Walther arrived with very little Spanish language skills and no paradigm to work with. A generalist was able to develop the skills that he was lacking, just as the seminary hopes its students will be able to do. The Lord used Pastor's Walther's training and gifts for the good of the church. He granted him capable and faithful co-workers. Pastor Walther thanks God for the blessing of being able to serve souls with the good news of Jesus, whether it is in English, German, or Spanish.

**ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL**

**JOB DESCRIPTION: (Pastor, English & Spanish Outreach)**

**JOB TITLE:** Pastor - English and Spanish Outreach

**APPROVED:**

**DATE:** 2/26/04

**GENERAL SUMMARY OF DUTIES:**

To preach the gospel of our Lord among us in its truth and purity, to administer the sacraments in accordance with the inspired Word of God and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as incorporated in the Book of Concord of 1580, and to establish and maintain sound Lutheran practice at all times;

To discharge toward all the members of our congregation the functions of a pastor, that is to watch over their souls in an evangelical manner; in particular to visit the sick and dying, to admonish indifferent and erring members and to be ever zealous for the winning of souls for Christ's kingdom;

**SUPERVISION RECEIVED:** The Pastor of outreach reports directly to the congregation, through the Church Council.

**SUPERVISION EXERCISED:** The Pastor of Outreach provides direct supervision for the Deacon/Deaconess of Hispanic Outreach

**TYPICAL PHYSICAL DEMANDS:** The position may require standing and walking for extensive periods of time. It also requires eye-hand coordination and manual dexterity sufficient to operate a keyboard, photocopier, telephone, and other office and computer equipment. It may also require a normal range of hearing and eyesight, sufficient enough to record, prepare and communicate appropriate sermons, studies and reports.

**TYPICAL WORKING CONDITIONS:** The majority of work is performed within a church or office environment; however, certain tasks are necessary to be performed outside. Certain tasks must be performed off-site, and therefore require an infrequent amount of local travel. Evening or weekend work is required frequently.

**MAJOR ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Preaches at weekly services;
- Instructs adults;
- Counsels members;
- Arranges each year's sermon texts;
- Visits hospitals and shut-ins;
- Teaches seventh grade parochial catechism and sixth and seventh grade public catechism;
- Arranges all Saviors Message classes;
- Teaches bible class;
- Teaches bible information class weekly;
- Prepares articles for monthly newsletter;
- Visits new members;
- Performs Evangelism visits to the community's unchurched;

- Preaches most Spanish worship services;
- Coordinates Spanish church ministry plans with deaconess;
- Weekly meetings/bible classes with Spanish leaders, such as:
  - Informational classes
  - Visits to homes
  - Generating daily scripture studies
  - Preaching in other churches
  - Presentation to groups and mailings;
- Conducts funerals and baptisms according to schedule;
- Officiates marriages, as requested;
- Preaches German worship service biannually;

**NON-ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Provides staff coverage

**QUALIFICATIONS: Knowledge, Skills & Abilities**

- Computer
  1. MS-Office (Word/Excel/PowerPoint)
- Oral and written communication skills
  1. Proper use of grammar, spelling and punctuation.
  2. Ability to communicate clearly and concisely
  3. Strong interpersonal skills.
- Interpersonal Relationships
  1. Ability to establish & maintain effective working relationship with members, staff and the general public.
  2. Treats every one in a loving and caring manor.
  3. Applies church and school policies and procedures.
- Personal Attributes
  1. Ability to plan and establish priorities
  2. Ability to identify problems and recommend solutions
  3. Ability to work under time pressures and meet deadlines
  4. Available evenings and weekends

**EDUCATION:**

- Complete proper training at schools and Confessional Lutheran Seminary to become an ordained Pastor.

**EXPERIENCE:**

- Minimum of 5 years of experience in a pastoral position.
- Demonstrates fluency in the Spanish language

**CERTIFICATE/LICENSE:**

- A valid Wisconsin driver's license is required.

**ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

*(Member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod)*

**215 North Sixth Street**

**Watertown, Wisconsin 53094**

**(414) 262-8500**

*April 18, 1995*

*Dear Karl,*

*We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you in your deliberations on the call he has given to you to be one of the pastors on our pastoral staff here at St. Mark's and to make a decision which will be in the best interest of our Lord's Church. If the Lord leads you to accept this call, you will be one of five. We will then have three full time pastors and two part-time pastors. You are being asked to serve as our outreach pastor and to work with our Spanish outreach efforts.*

*Since I have been working with outreach for the past 14 years, I will give you a brief description of what we are presently doing. We are always open to new ideas and ways of better sharing the Gospel of Jesus with the unchurched. Areas that you would be responsible for are: 1.) the Evangelists - we have three women and one man who meet once a month and call either by phone or personally on the new residents of Watertown. We subscribe to a service that gives us the names of the new residents in our community. We then send a letter welcoming them to our community and introducing them to our congregation. This letter is followed up with a phone call or personal visit, if we do not have a phone number. 2) the New Member Welcoming Committee - we have one man and five women who work on this committee. They assign sponsors to visit our new members and introduce them to the congregation. The committee also organizes and carries out three to four new member welcoming Sundays during the year. 3) the Greeters - we have 8 couples greet over a weekend, two couples at each service. I have always done the scheduling for each month. One reason I have not delegated this to someone else is it gives me the opportunity to at least have a phone contact with a couple hundred of our people every few months. 4) Video Ministry Committee - we video tape every weekend service and televise over our local cable channel on Monday evening. We also televise edited tapes of our Advent and Lenten services. In addition, we make a 3/4 inch tape which is used by our Synod's tape ministry and sent all around the world. 5) Spanish Outreach - we began Spanish Bible studies on Sunday morning with Prof. Sprain of NWC and some of his second year students. There is a field to be tapped in this area. We have over 300 Spanish speaking people in Watertown alone, many who speak little or no English. There is only one other church that we know of in our two county area that is doing any type of Spanish work - a Catholic church in Jefferson. Presently we have three*

men coming weekly to Bible study along with a fourth man who comes occasionally with his children. We have not had the time nor the staff to actively reach out to some of these people and personally visit them. We also have a Spanish mailing list with a few dozen names and addresses. 6) The Cradle Roll - at St. Mark's we baptize between 40 and 50 infants a year. We have one lady who takes the cradle roll for an entire year and then follows up on these children until they are three years old and ready to enter our Sunday School program. 7) Mass Media - we do a lot of advertizing in our local newspapers, on our local cable channel and occasionally on the radio. We are committed to getting the word out to our community and area about Jesus the Savior. 8) Phone Survey - we also are committed to helping mission churches throughout the country. We have a committee that coordinates phone surveys for mission churches that are starting up. For several weeks we run a phone bank out of our Parish Center with volunteers from our congregation and area churches dialing up thousands of homes.

In addition to overseeing the outreach work at St. Mark's, you would also be preaching about once a month. During the festival half of the church year it may be a little more. You would also take the liturgy one or two other Sundays during the month. When you preach for the Saturday and Sunday services, you also preach that sermon on the following Wednesday at a local nursing home. We also have approximately 100 shut-ins that are visited on a monthly basis and communed. With the addition of our two part-time pastors those shut-ins will be divided five ways, so you would have about 15 shut-in calls a month. The approximately 20 members in our two Watertown nursing homes are seen twice a month in connection with the two-a-month services held there. You would preach for funerals and weddings. We have between 30 to 40 funerals a year. We conduct funerals on a rotating basis with all five pastors in the rotation. We have between 20 to 40 weddings a years. We allow the couples the choice of picking from the three pastors whom they would like to serve at their wedding. The pastor who is preaching for the weekend is free from being up for a wedding at the same time. The part-time pastors will not take part in weddings. The three full time pastors conduct a once a year, two weekend (4 session) pre-marriage seminar for the couples planning marriage during the year. We also share the teaching of the 8th grade Christian day school catechism class and the 7th and 8th grade public school class. Each pastor teaches about two months and the Youth/Family pastor, Pastor Sutton, also teaches a course in spring to all 8th graders entitled, Handling Your Hormones. We rotate each year which pastor coordinates the confirmation service and all three pastors participate in the confirmation rite. The new third pastor and I are responsible for the Adult Bible information classes. At present we conduct a 20 week class during the fall and spring semesters. We also conduct a number of classes privately because of people's varied schedules. It is planned that the two part-time pastors will teach most of the adult Bible classes for members.

As a pastoral staff we meet every week for about 2 1/2 to 3 hours to study God's Word together, talk over the weekly and monthly schedules, discuss problem

*situations and report to one another on the various committees and boards we are working with and what is going on. We have found that this weekly communication has brought us close together and has helped to keep us on course. We also schedule several all day planning meetings during the year. During this time we work on pericope series, Bible class schedules and other special projects.*

*St. Mark's is a large congregation. We have about 3,000 souls. We are larger than Juneau, WI, the county seat of Dodge County. We have more people in our church than do the neighboring communities of Waterloo and Marshall. It is quite a challenge. The work here is always varied, interesting and fast paced. One of the greatest and most rewarding aspects that I personally have found is working with two other great pastors. (We are a wonderful team to work with! In fact, we have been together now for almost 10 years.)*

*We have a church administrator who handles most of the business details and the daily operations of the church regarding ordering and purchasing, dealing with vendors, etc. We also have an excellent secretary who does the bulletins (we submit the details to her), keeps up the membership list, etc. and another lady who does all the printing of bulletins, Bible class materials, etc. We also have a large group of volunteers who assemble the Sunday bulletins, the monthly newsletter, Bible study manuals, do the posting of attendance and offerings on the computer etc.. There are three computer stations in the church office and each pastor has a computer in their own office. We are linked together on a network.*

*St. Mark's has also been blessed with a Christian school with a pre-school through 8th grade. We have over 300 students in our school taught by 11 full time and two part-time teachers. We also have a full time administrator for our school. We are a member of the Lakeside Lutheran High School federation and have about 26 of our teens attending high school there. Since Luther Prep School is in Watertown, we have a fair number of teens attending that school also.*

*As to urgency in your coming immediately, Pastor Kell won't be retiring from full-time service until the end of August. Prof. Spaude will likely begin his work here approximately the beginning of August. Should you accept our Call, you would not need to be here until late July or early August. If there are circumstances necessitating your coming at a different time, we would work things out.*

*If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at my home 262-9150 or Don Sutton - 261-6438 or Mike Kell - 261-5421 or Chuck Spafford, our church administrator - 261-5194. I am on vacation this week, but will be back by 4/22 .*

*God bless you in your deliberations,*

*Jim Werner*

*H:newpastor 4/12/95*