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THE GEOGRAPHIC PARISH

A While rummaging through my old articles and essays recently, I came across the following.

B It bears special relevance to me today, since our national bishop, in attendance at a recent Pastors' Retreat, denied any meaning in the geographic parish. The automobile has rendered the geographic parish obsolete, she argued. You can drive past six Lutheran churches to attend the seventh Lutheran church of your choice.

C But I continue to hope that the Geographic Parish has some relevance. In fact, I am personally convinced that our cities are doomed unless the Christian churches within them begin to take some responsibility for the place they have been planted.

D The following article was written by me long ago – almost 20 years ago! – when I and two like minded colleagues set out to divide our twin cities – Kitchener-Waterloo (KW) – into Geographic Parishes, and distribute our results to all city Lutheran pastors.

E Not surprisingly, our map, and my commentary, were almost immediately ignored. But I persist.

F It did not seem necessary to include our map in what follows. But my hope remains. Perhaps the paragraphs below will inspire some pastors to re-think the responsibility their parish has towards its distinct geographic real estate.

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A PLAN FOR GEOGRAPHIC PARISHES IN KW
Paul Bosch for Neil Thomsen and Michael Hackbusch
JANUARY 2006

1 The attached map of KW represents the first draft of a plan for determining geographic parishes in KW Conference, Eastern Synod, ELCIC. You may ignore the map and draft-plan at once, if you wish; This is merely a suggestion from three of your colleagues.

- 2 Or you may consider the draft-plan and the following suggestions more seriously and even officially, running it by your own congregational Mission or Ministry Committee.
- 3 In light of the Waterloo Declaration, in due course, a plan such as that proposed here should be re-drawn so as to include Anglican congregations in KW.
- 4 It is the conviction of the three named above that our churches and our cities may profit with the intentional implementation of some such plan in every parish.
- 5 Using the map as guide, get to know the neighbourhood in which your church building is situated. Drive, or better, walk its streets. Talk with local neighbours and shop-keepers. Get a feel for its distinctiveness.
- 6 Make an appointment to meet your local Ward Councilor. The map was drawn up with careful reference to current local political Ward boundaries. Sound out your local Ward representatives on issues affecting your geographic parish. What are the concerns of its citizens? What is or is not being done by “city hall” in your parish?
- 7 Do the streets need repair? Are the leaves being collected, the garbage, the snow being removed? Are street lights functioning? Is the drinking water pure? Is there traffic congestion at any of its roads or intersections? Is the zoning system fair and are its standards being enforced equitably? Is there need for affordable housing in your parish? Are the poor or marginalized – the street people – being cared for?
- 8 What can your congregation do to help this specific neighbourhood into more vibrant health? Plan to meet regularly with your Ward representative.
- 9 Make an appointment to meet local Real Estate agencies. This map has been drawn up with reference to their boundaries as well. Discuss the same issues noted in 7) above. From this conversation, get a feel for the demographics of your parish.
- 10 Is it predominantly white collar? Blue collar? Immigrant? Old money? Student? Young professional? What are the specific aspirations, worries, or concerns of those who live here? What can your congregation do to improve the health and vitality of your neighbourhood?
- 11 Plan to meet regularly with Real Estate professionals in your parish. Make appointments to meet with local Police and Social Service personnel in your parish, to ask the same questions.
- 12 Most importantly: Train yourself and your people to take responsibility for the place where you have been put, and for all its people.

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