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THE VANGUARD

... THE CHURCH IN HUMAN RELATIONS

Volume 4, Number 2

February, 1957



A confirmation class — in Houston, Texas

THAT THE CHURCH MAY LEAD In the South

Long before the Supreme Court had begun to hand down the breath-taking decisions on civil rights such as the one of May 17, 1954, and before many of us had known or even heard of the word "integration," Negroes and whites were attending mass together in Mobile and in New Orleans. In a certain semi-rural community of Texas, a Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor was looking about for guidelines and techniques to help him assimilate Negroes into the full fellowship of his Caucasian congregation. His Negro neighbors, the landowners of the community, were already friendly and some of them had begun to attend his services. The son of a pastor of the Missouri Synod reports that more than thirty years ago his father, then a minister in the State of Texas, had many Negroes in a

predominantly Caucasian congregation. They were fully accepted by the congregation and participated in all of the church's activities, including, of course, the most important participation—the Holy Communion. This would be unusual even today—in Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and other points north of the Line.

An encouraging example for those of us who boast that we are either north of the Line or south of it may be found in the story written by Betty Westrom and published in **The Lutheran Companion** in October, 1956. It is with the gracious permission of Dr. E. E. Ryden, editor of the **Companion**, that this article is being presented to our readers in a condensed form.

"When a Negro family recently joined the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church in segregated Houston, Texas, the event made news. Even **Time** magazine cited

(Continued on Page Three)

A LOOK AROUND

By Martin H. Scharlemann

1. AN OPEN FORUM

Between semesters a special Synodical institute was held at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for all students. In this institute the various departments and boards of Synod were given the opportunity to present their respective programs. An open forum on human relations was a scheduled feature of the institute. In it Dr. William Kramer of the Board for Parish Education and Dr. Carl Meyer of Concordia Seminary presented their views on the significance of the St. Paul resolution on this subject.

The formal presentation was followed by questions from the students in attendance. It soon became evident that the need for continued discussion of this matter is of crucial importance. It was news to many of the men, for instance, that in several metropoli-

tan areas some congregations had stayed out of a Preaching-Teaching-Reaching mission because they might have had to face the problem of inviting members of non-white races into their houses of worship. Incidentally, the President of our Association, the Rev. Walter Heyne, acquitted himself well at this forum. He had the chance—and took it!—to talk about LHRAA and to distribute copies of *The VANGUARD*.

2. A GOD-GIVEN PROBLEM

It becomes increasingly evident that God Himself has given our church this question of human relations to lead us deeper into an understanding of the dimensions of His redemptive work. We have had to give more thought to the whole concept of the church than we might otherwise have devoted to this crucial aspect of the Gospel. For, surely, there must be something wrong with our understanding of the nature of the church when congregations find themselves unable to join in a PTR mission because they would find it difficult to ask persons with a different pigment of the skin to worship with them. Something has gone awry when that happens.

All of this brings up a far-reaching problem: What is the nature of a Lutheran pastor's call? Is he called to a place or to a group of people? If this question is once settled, much will follow by way of consequences. It has been our traditional position, implied rather than expressed, that a man is called to a certain group of people. But that view has its source in a situation where the population was rather stable. No city pastor today serves the same group after he has been at a place for any length of time. The turnover in most metropolitan churches is so rapid and so complete that it becomes literally impossible for him to say, after ten years, "These people called me." For chances are that only a handful of those who once had a hand in his call are left. Yet it often happens that he stays at the place unless his congregation has resolved to relocate because it is in a changing community. This is a very strange inconsistency, which will be resolved only by some constructive thought on the subject of the pastoral call.

3. A REMINDER

Occasionally Billy Graham says something that is worth calling attention to. Some months ago, for instance, he was asked his views on segregation and integration. One paragraph of his reply, given in *LIFE* of October 1, 1956, is worth special attention: "The Bible requires neighbor-love alongside the love for God, and neighbor-love strikes far deeper than what usually passes today as 'an end of segregation' and 'community integration.' The Christian layman must speak out against the social ills of our times, but must be careful to speak with the voice of the Biblical prophets and apostles and not in the spirit of secular and secularizing views."

Integration Techniques

In this column we have brought to the attention of our readers the necessity of knowing the will of God as it pertains to communicant integration and, its concomitant, doing the will of God. We have shown, further, that education in this field of the church's interest must be a continuous process but that integration itself must begin when God gives the opportunity. This time it is our intention to begin to outline more specifically a parish program for education toward communicant integration.

The approach here suggested assumes that the pastor of a given parish is not only convinced that communicant integration is in accordance with the will of God but that he as the shepherd of the flock and as a "called servant of the Word" is determined with God's help to translate words, theories, and principles into deeds and action. In other words, that he is determined to integrate.

The Pastor's Stand

Since education, at least in this field, has as its goal motivation to action, the pastor's attitude must be made crystal clear from the very beginning: He is unequivocally opposed to segregation in the church; he is committed to a program of complete integration in the church. He is opposed to the one and for the other, not merely because he was "born in Maine

and studied in New York City," but because his understanding of and obedience toward the Gospel of salvation has worked this conviction in his heart. His attitude is simply a humble submission to the Word and the will of Christ his Lord.

When will the pastor make his attitude known? To ask the question is to answer it. Or, since his attitude and his submission to Christ are one, the question might be worded: "When will the pastor begin to make his submission to Christ known?" That will be at the very beginning of his ministry, or, if he did not hold those convictions at the beginning of his ministry, he will make his attitude known as soon as God has worked repentance in his heart for having made a distinction among men in the house of God which God does not make.

In making his attitude known to the congregation, the pastor will couch his words in evangelical language; at the throne of God he will seek a spirit of humility; he will endeavor to radiate love toward those who may not as yet understand; he will try to be tactful and not stand in the way of the Spirit of God. But in all that he does and says in making his attitude known to his people, his purpose will be to make his attitude **known**, not to hide it. The honor of Christ is at stake. He (the pastor) will not vacillate. His attitude is the Christ-wrought attitude which must be known and clearly understood by all.

Also in this aspect of his ministry he cannot be a "blind leader of the blind." He must have vision if others are to follow him. His members know this. For this reason they have called him to be their shepherd. And normally, when a degree of rapport has been established, the congregation expects the pastor to take a stand on vital issues in which God has spoken. For this reason they come, week after week, to hear him. Yes, in a sense, they have entrusted their spiritual care into his hands. Though Christ is the great Shepherd of the flock, the minister is the under-shepherd.

It would be naive to suppose that all the pastor has to do to educate his people for an all-out

program of communicant integration is to make his own personal, uncompromising attitude known. Nevertheless, this is one of the first basic steps to be taken. It is a big part of the educational process and one that must season the whole program.

This technique in the integration process is not given at this time as a directive to pastors—though some may find in it a guideline for a God-pleasing approach. It is directed toward the pew rather than the pulpit. Christian people should know that when their pastor speaks to them of their opportunity and responsibility of inviting and welcoming into the fellowship of the church and at the Communion Table all people for whom Christ died, he is acting as a real shepherd of the flock, leading them on the way that Christ would have them to be led.

Further techniques in the program of education in this column next month.

THAT THE CHURCH MAY LEAD

(Continued from Page One)

the event as an evidence that Southerners are increasingly willing to wrestle with their prejudices.

"Laundryman Carl Williams, his wife and their two children, Dianne, 19, and Clarence, 13, were the first Negroes to overcome their hesitancy and decide on actual membership in the Houston church.

"Many other Negroes have been attending Sunday school and worship services at the rambling tan stucco church, which adjoins a predominantly Negro residential district. It is expected that they will soon follow the lead of the Williams family into actual church membership.

"Augustana's pastor, the Rev. Paul T. Seastrand, could never be typecast as a fire-breathing reformer. A quiet, bespectacled man with a scholarly manner, Pastor Seastrand came to the parish in May 1948. At that time the edge of the Negro residential area was five blocks away from the 20-year-old church. When the movement of

Negroes in the direction of the church began about four years ago, the pastor could feel a tide of uneasiness sweeping through his congregation.

Should They Pick Up and Run?

"What are we going to do?" asked the members. Conditioned by long years of living in a social pattern where segregation is the norm, their first impulse was to 'pick up their church and run' to a new location.

"But Massachusetts-born Pastor Seastrand, convinced that church segregation is un-Christian, began quietly to lay the groundwork of a new attitude, to show his people that it was their Christian responsibility to stay and serve their community. He knew that a public pronouncement of his convictions could not be postponed for long.

"It was in January 1954, at the annual meeting of the congregation, that he first made his views known. 'Some of our Negro friends may politely ask if they may come into our church on Sunday morning to worship,' he said. 'Certainly Christian love has no answer but kindly to grant the request.'

"Two members registered their protest publicly at the meeting, and other members maintained a somewhat strained silence, but nothing further was said. Pastor Seastrand did not immediately begin to invite Negro neighbors to church, wanting to allow the first pronouncement to settle before taking any further steps.

A Fourth of July Manifesto

"July 4 of that year was selected as the Sunday on which he would preach a sermon on the church's responsibility to the community. He confesses that he faced the prospect with some uneasiness,

knowing that his opinions were opposed to those of some of his closest friends.

"Appealing to them on the basis of Scripture, and pointing out that historically the church has always been inclusive in its fellowship, he clearly labelled racial segregation with the word 'sin.'

"Needless to say, it was an attentive audience,' Pastor Seastrand recalls. 'Obviously and understandably, not all were convinced, but I believe they were impressed with the fact that here were moral implications which could not be evaded by relocation.'

Two Negro Women Respond

"At the January, 1955, congregational meeting, Pastor Seastrand again plugged for integration, and the congregation agreed that the parish worker should issue a general invitation to everyone in the community to worship at Augustana. On March 27, 1955, two Negro women responded to the general invitation and showed up for the Sunday worship service. Although the morning passed without incident, there was a crescendo in the murmurings against integration.

"As the weeks passed and other Negroes began spasmodic attendance at Augustana, opponents began casting about for a graceful 'way out' which might still leave their consciences untroubled.

"If they come, we'll have to let them worship, but don't invite them,' some said; but the pastor refused to become a part of this sort of evasion.

"At a board meeting the suggestion was made to relocate the church, but the motion was defeated two to three.

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Something Men Can't Decide

"An attempt was also made to put the question of Negro membership to a congregational vote. With characteristic firmness, the pastor reminded them that such a decision was not the prerogative of a Christian congregation.

"The prerequisites for membership in the Church of Jesus Christ have nothing to do with the color of a man's skin but rather with a sincere profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour," he reminded them. "To vote on whether or not the Negro should be admitted to membership is to presuppose that he can be excluded because of his race. For such ideas there is no room in the realm of Christian faith and fellowship." **No Flood-gate**

"Negro neighbors have not flocked to Augustana church. Restrained by the traditional pattern of segregation, they have held back. Suspicion and mistrust which have been a part of their life for generations are not quickly erased.

"By the end of 1955, the racial issue had caused 18 confirmed members to drop their membership in Augustana Church; but during the same time 26 adults became new members.

A Period of Soul-searching

"The statement of one of the board members, a native-born Texan, illustrates the soul-searching which was going on. 'I don't believe that anyone has found this struggle more difficult than I,' he said. 'I was born in the South and have acquired the prejudices that readily come with the climate of segregation. But I thank God that I now not only recognize what is the right thing to do but am willing to accept it.'

"When the time for this year's annual meeting came around, tensions had begun to ease around the church. Pastor Seastrand was confident of support, and spoke boldly: 'We of the Church err when we differentiate between people culturally, economically, or racially. Jesus saw people as people, and He saw every soul as one to be welcomed into the inclusive fellowship of the Kingdom ... I plead for your partnership in this evangelism outreach, not for my sake, but for the sake of Christ, who, when He died, excluded no one from His redemptive love.'

Gets Unanimous Approval

"When the application for membership of the Williams family was unanimously approved by the Church Council, Pastor Seastrand was able to breathe easily for the first time in two years. This summer's Vacation Bible School had an enrollment of 100—with 75 of them Negroes, and there are other signs that Augustana Church will not retreat from its position.

"Augustana's congregation is strengthened because the people have come through a testing of their faith. Assured by the teachings of Jesus Christ, they have come to agree with Pastor Seastrand that 'we may be able to remove ourselves geographically from this problem ... but we can't move ourselves away from our moral and spiritual responsibilities.'"

Why, humanly speaking, was this congregation in Texas able to integrate while tens of Lutheran churches in cosmopolitan cities of the North and West have until now been unable to do it? You may find the answer in the fore-

going article. If not, a reprint of an article written by Pastor Trinklein of New York and available free upon request from **The VANGUARD** office may give you the answer.

MISCELLANEA

"Questions Answered," a six-page folder presenting answers to specific questions about the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America is available for free distribution. The folder answers such questions as: What is the LHRAA? What is the "modern race problem" with which the Association is concerned? Why should Christians be concerned? What are the functions of LHRAA? Who can join? What's in it for you?—This is a revised edition of a folder of the same title published previously.

For obvious reasons this issue of **The VANGUARD** is being sent to all pastors of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the Southern District, the Texas District, and the Florida-Georgia District.

A human relations institute under the sponsorship of the LWML of the Minnesota District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is scheduled to be held at Concordia College in St. Paul, Minn., Sunday, March 31, beginning at 3:30 p.m. This is the first of a series of such institutes to be scheduled in the state under the same auspices. The office of LHRAA is assisting the LWML in organizing and developing this statewide project. — The LWML has subscribed to **The VANGUARD** for all pastors in the Minnesota District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

LUTHERAN HUMAN RELATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana

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EDITOR: The Rev. Andrew Schulze, Valparaiso University.
Editorial Office: Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana.

EDITORIAL STAFF: The Rev. Walter Heyne, The Rev. Walter Lang, Professor Martin H. Scharlemann.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY: The Rev. Andrew Schulze,
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