THE ETHNIC CHURCH AND IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION:
SOCIAL SERVICES, CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND
THE RE-DEFINITION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

by

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# ABSTRACT

Consideration of the significance of religious institutions in the experience of immigrant settlement is, at best, marginalized in immigration and church history literature. The limited amount of research that has been carried out is limited in time frame and/or by its lack of consideration of the wider social service functions of the church. It is rarely recognized that for new immigrants, churches can function as critical access routes to the host society or as protective cultural communities. Churches provide stability in unfamiliar territory through the creation of a sense of community, a sense of place and an extended family of support. This research seeks to understand how the church has served the German ethnic and immigrant community; how the church has aided cultural preservation as well as immigrant integration; and finally, how some churches have re-defined themselves in the face of member 'assimilation,' generational changes and neighbourhood transition. For some churches, their mission has been extended beyond their original German ethnic community to local neighbourhood residents, predominantly of Asian origin. Unstructured interviews with over twenty-five church leaders from ten German ethnic churches in Vancouver suggest that for many immigrants, the church provided stability and acted as a centre of social networks through which, for example, employment and housing were found. However, the position of the church in maintaining culture is significantly more complex; often dependent upon various factors including church age and the histories of immigrant congregations. This research demonstrates that churches have significant but generally unrecognized impacts on the immigrant settlement experience and that ethnic churches can, but do not necessarily, play supportive roles in maintaining culture. Churches that have recognized the social changes impacting their congregations have found new models of mission to integrate new immigrant communities.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

During our annual visits to Vancouver my family always stayed at my mother's oldest

sister's house in East Vancouver in the heart of what was, in the 1950s and 60s, the German

neighbourhood. My grandparents were ethnic Germans who immigrated to Canada in the 1920s

from Russia, and first settled, like many ethnic Germans, in Winnipeg. My grandparents and

their children moved to Vancouver in the late 1950s and bought a house on 49th Avenue just off

Fraser Street. My aunt consequently purchased a home only a few blocks to the south where she

still lives. The whole family attended the church at the end of the street. It was the social centre

for every member of my mother's family. The church housed a German speaking congregation,

but by the late 1960s it had become 'Canadianized' (compared with the other German churches)

with English as its language of worship, although most of the members remained of German

heritage. I remember visiting my aunt's neighbours and church friends across the street, across

the back lane, next door and around the corner to take over some extra garden tomatoes or to

deliver something for the church luncheon on Sunday. Many of my aunt's neighbours were a

part of her church community and the larger German immigrant population.

In the last ten to fifteen years there have been enormous changes in the South Vancouver

neighbourhood. Fewer and fewer of my aunt's neighbours are the German people she has known

and most are new immigrants from South and East Asian countries. It was during the 1980s that

'For Sale' signs became increasingly common on neighbourhood front lawns. Around the time of

Expo'86, when my family was visiting, stories were told in my aunt's living room about the buses

of Asian investors seen driving up and down the streets of East Vancouver; business people

picking out properties on which they would make offers to purchase. My aunt's neighbours are

now almost all South Asian and Chinese immigrants who have bought or are renting homes along her transformed street, where close to half of the war-time stucco bungalows have now been replaced by larger, more exotic looking fenced in houses. My aunt attends the church at the end of her street, as do most of her friends and while many have moved away, a core remain active. The church of course has lost a lot of members over the years as the neighbourhood has been emptied of its German cohort, but it has made a decision to try to minister to its new neighbours regardless of their nationalities or origins. The story of the German ethnic church is the subject of this thesis. It examines ten churches, all begun by German immigrants in South Vancouver, and their historical roots, developments and present ministries. More generally the thesis is about ethnic churches and their place in neighbourhoods that experience ethnic transition. The ten institutions it studies have been facing enormous challenges in ministry, some because they still cling to their original cultural identity, and others, which have shed their ethnic heritage, because they are looking for means to evolve into multicultural or 'Canadian' churches.

This thesis aims to bring together several strands of research on the themes of religion, ethnicity, immigration and neighbourhood by examining the role that the ethnic church has played in the German community in Vancouver. On a general level it examines the role that religious institutions play in immigrant settlement and more specifically investigates the significance of the church in the German community. It also considers the changing role of the church in a neighbourhood that has experienced an out-migration of Germans and in-migration of several other ethnic groups. Research was carried out through a literature review, by examining census data, by selectively analysing church records, and through qualitative interviews with church leaders and pastors in the German ethnic churches. The thesis investigates three themes: the church as a provider of social services; the church as a venue for

maintaining an ethnic culture; and the church as an institution experiencing and constructing a new cultural identity.

The rationale for choosing the German population is threefold. As the greatest period of German immigration to Vancouver was just prior to and after the Second World War, the churches established at the time of arrival are now aging thus providing a longer term perspective on the role of the church in balancing ethnic preservation versus social integration over several generations.[1] Second, the spatial dispersion and social integration of the German population has increasingly deprived the churches of their ethnic constituency, and led to deep and sometimes anguished reflection on their present and future ministry. Third, and more personally, this is a community to which I had access through my extended family but which I could study without feeling compromised as I have not actively participated in it. The focus of the research is on the churches and less on the German community as it extends beyond the church. Though a substantial amount of time is devoted to German immigration and settlement in Vancouver, it is necessary to establish this context in order to examine the role of the church within that community and to understand both the generalities of the role of the church as well as the particular circumstances that may only be characteristic of the German churches because of historical events.

The church as an institution that aids and affects immigrant settlement is a topic that has been overlooked in much of the work on immigrant integration and ethnic churches[2] but there

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[1] The research is a part of a larger study on ethnic churches in Vancouver funded by the Metropolis Project. Two other studies by Dr. John Zimmerman (Carey Theological College) and Dr. Edwin Hui (Regent College) are respectively studying the Korean and Chinese churches in the Lower Mainland. These two groups of ethnic churches will provide an alternative perspective through documenting social services and cultural preservation in much more recently established churches. The Chinese and Korean churches are currently at much earlier stages of their life cycle than the German churches discussed here.

[2] See Warner (1998) for greater elaboration.

has been some more general research examining the influence of religion in the experience of immigration. Palinkas (1989) examined the significance of the church for Chinese immigrants in the United States, Williams (1988), the integration of Indian and Pakistani religions into the American urban landscape, while in Warner's (1998) edited book over a dozen transplanted religious communities and groups are presented by various American researchers of religion. There are several reasons why research presented in this thesis is valuable in the context of the larger body of literature on ethnic churches. While several authors have reported on the significance of the ethnic church in immigrant life (for example Min 1992; Henry 1994; Kantowicz 1995) few have examined the ethnic church from a long term perspective. As Mullins (1989) notes, religion often influences the maintenance of ethnicity but few researchers have analyzed the "long-term effectiveness of ethnic churches as agents of cultural preservation" (Mullins 1989:5). Part of the uniqueness of this study is that it profiles an ethnic community over a longer time period than most studies are able to offer; the age of my case study churches range from thirty to over seventy-five years. As a result of the age of these institutions, they have had the opportunity to move through a life cycle of growth, development and decline. Thus their experiences over the long term open a valuable window through which to view the church's experiences in dealing with generational changes and local neighbourhood transformation.

A second contribution of this thesis is its comparison of cultural issues across church denominations that have the same immigrant base, thus allowing for an examination of the influence of denominational bodies on the preservation of culture within the church. Nagata (1986; 1987) was the only other author to explore the role of churches in the integration of South-East Asian immigrant groups by comparing different denominational policies or attitudes.

In most of the world there is a close geographic relationship between religion and

ethnicity. Indeed geographers of religion, though they are few, have attempted to draw

relationships specifically between landscape and religion, examining social, cultural and

environmental associations and effects. Religion as a human institution and the relationship

between religion and human and physical settings have dominated the literature of the geography

of religion (Park 1994; see also Isaac 1961, Sopher 1967, Kong 1990). Drawing a link between

religion, geography and immigration is quite natural because migration is the primary vehicle for

the diffusion of religion and religious institutions at varying scales (Park 1994). Park identifies

ways that religious landscapes are altered through migration; first, when groups are driven to

new territories by religious persecution and second, when groups who are motivated to migrate

for socio-economic reasons carry their religious beliefs and institutions to their new homeland as

a part of their cultural identity. Integrating the theme of immigration with ethnicity and religion,

several calls have been made, most commonly by sociologists (Hexham 1993; Kivisto 1993) but

also by Park (1994), to consider ethnicity in studies of the sociology of religion and examine the

role of immigration and ethnicity in Canada's religious landscape. Park (1994) claims that the

relationship between religion and ethnicity, "which can strongly influence both religious

persistence and cultural assimilation" must be considered in the context of "the impact it has on

the integration of immigrants into their new society. This is reflected in a variety of ways,

including social integration, social mobility (particularly upwards), and social stability" (157).

Many researchers argue that there is an elevated significance of religious institutions for

immigrants. Moberg (1962) believes that though Old World religions have "promoted

ethnocentrism and hindered assimilation, they also have contributed to social well being,

preventing...social disorganization, reducing problems related to immigration, and profoundly

influencing the churches that received immigrants" (456). In a new environment, religious

institutions can act as stabilizers, presenting opportunities for social networking both within and outside of the transplanted ethnic community. Bankston and Zhou (1995) further elaborate on the significance of the religious institution for immigrants:

> *Church or temple membership is a prime source of identity and motivation because it is a focus for organizing the social relations of a group. First-generation immigrants perceive the ethnic religious institution as the one element of real continuity between their country of origin and their new home and also as an effective strategy for linking their American-born or American-reared children to the ethnic group while acquiring acceptance in the host society (524).*

In a thesis which deals with issues of ethnicity and immigrant adjustment there is the need for certain terms to be defined and while the definitions I wish to use are by no means universally accepted, they serve to clarify for the purposes of this thesis. *Culture* is probably one of the most ambiguous and problematic terms; in this thesis it is used interchangeably with customs, heritage, tradition, and ethnic traits. *Culture* embodies the languages, religions, laws, symbols, beliefs and associations among individuals and groups as expressive in church, family, club or informal group membership which are common to people of like origin. *German culture* is thus used in the broadest sense to define the attributes of an ethnic group of Germanic origin peoples. Using the term 'German' homogenizes German speakers, German ethnics and German born who may not necessarily have all of the common traits of 'culture' as defined above. As will be discussed, the term *German* is problematic as the origins and experiences of the Germans in Canada (and before arriving in Canada) are widely varied (see chapter two). While there may be no essential German culture, and while recognizing that Germanness is expressed differently by individuals depending on their history, experience of immigration to Canada, their dialects, place of origins, political views, or church denominational backgrounds, there is the need to speak of 'German' for productive discussion to occur. When reference to the German ethnic

community is made it describes the network of ethnic institutions, the ethnic neighbourhood, individuals and groups.

There are two other terms which require definition and differentiation: *assimilation* and *integration.* Assimilation describes the process by which an ethnic group moves toward homogenization and disappears within a dominant culture. Assimilation is basically what has occurred with the German population in Canada. In Vancouver there are small traces of German culture, food, history and/or way of life but most Germans have blended in with the Canadian mainstream. Integration is something different and describes the interactive contact of a minority population and the mainstream society in a process that combines the qualities and characteristics of each population. Integration is the greater goal of the multicultural church which seeks not to blend and assimilate members of new cultures into the dominant culture of the church but instead to allow each ethnic culture to be reflected within the church community. This then allows the church to change and reflect the ideas and styles of new members of different ethnicities and become a community of communities.

"Ethnic churches flourishing" (Todd 1997) was the recent title of a *Vancouver Sun* article profiling the growth and expansion of mono-ethnic Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese and Punjabi congregations in the Lower Mainland. It could well have been a newspaper title from the 1950s when immigrants to Vancouver were plentiful and most ethnic communities were centred around their respective ethno-religious institutions (see Waldhouse 1961). German immigrants to Vancouver established seventeen ethnic churches, all of them in the South Vancouver neighbourhood where German residential concentrations were the highest. The church held tremendous significance for the immigrants. Here they found social services to smooth their transition to Canadian life, language assistance for themselves, and German schools

for their children. Church was where relationships for business and pleasure were cultivated into life long friendships. It was where reminders of the homeland and the familiar sounds of the German language were welcomed. As immigrants improved their socio-economic standing and their children entered the home-ownership stage, they were forced to look beyond the German neighbourhood and buy homes and property in the suburban areas of Vancouver. Slowly the German neighbourhood lost its geographical focus and new immigrant groups began to transform Fraser Street to reflect their own identity. With virtually no German community left in the area, the German churches still stand in their original locations today; several still seek to preserve the German language and culture of the homeland. Of the ten churches that are profiled here, eight still hold worship services in the German language and in half of the churches, the German members are the financial backbone of the church. But these churches have almost lived through their first life cycle; some have completed it and are moving into new areas of neighbourhood mission, while others are now contemplating their insecure futures. Children have moved away and no longer speak English. They feel little connection to a German church that is based on a culture and liturgy unfamiliar to them. All of the churches experienced some degree of conflict and tension over whether or not to allow for English language worship services on Sundays. Introducing English meant the beginning of the loss of German but it was the only way the church could maintain the attention of its young people. One of the men I interviewed shared his thoughts on the preservationist attitude of his church and the present experience of the Chinese churches who are now at the life cycle stage of language conflict:

> *I smile about what I think I see going on over there [in the Chinese church that*
> *meets right beside us] because it's exactly what I went through as a child of*
> *immigrants living in the church that was hoping it was going to protect their*
> *language...I'm old enough to remember the battle in my home church about*
> *whether we would have English in the church...they started to have English*

*Sunday School for the kids but I remember sitting through German services that meant absolutely nothing to me and I didn't want them to mean anything to me.*[3]

The thesis begins in chapter two with a review of the patterns of immigration and settlement of Germans in Canada and Vancouver. It discusses the challenges of the use of the term 'German' in Census enumeration and then examines the distribution of the German population in Vancouver using data on German ethnic origin, German home language use and German place of birth. Maps of these three variables over five decades provide evidence of the disappearance and dispersion of the German population in Vancouver. Chapter three addresses first the research methodology, then examines several church models around which churches are geographically and ethnically classified. The remainder of the chapter reviews briefly the stories of each of the ten German churches. The fourth chapter discusses the theme of the role of the church in social service provision and includes discussion on the informal roles of the church and the significance of the church as a place of belonging. The fifth chapter develops this latter theme, examining the role of the church as a promoter of ethnic heritage and a reminder of things German, compared with the church as an institution facilitating and aiding immigrant adjustment to Canada. The chapter also investigates the role of the denominational church bodies as they influence the church's mission to reach out to Germans alone or people of all national and religious backgrounds. Chapter six investigates how the ten churches have experienced change and their own adjustments to generational succession as well as neighbourhood transition. A concluding chapter seeks to review and integrate these findings and suggest potential areas of further research.

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[3] All quotations without references are from interview transcripts. Interviewees have not been identified expect in some cases by general characteristics of church denomination, gender or affiliation in order to maintain anonymity.

# CHAPTER TWO

## ARRIVING IN THE PROMISED LAND: THE HISTORY OF GERMAN IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN VANCOUVER

The role played by the church within an immigrant community is determined in large part by the needs of that community and the events surrounding the circumstances of their immigration. Of course immigrant needs are dynamic as new cohorts of immigrants arrive under varying circumstances. Before examining the role of the church in the German immigrant community it is necessary to briefly review the history of German immigration to Canada, most specifically to Vancouver. At the local scale within the city it is also imperative that changing patterns of settlement be considered over time. As will become evident in later chapters, the unique differences between the cohorts of immigrants arriving during distinct periods of history with varied experiences in Europe have had significant impacts on the courses of life histories of the German immigrant churches in Vancouver. Churches have split apart, borne new daughter congregations and have been heavily impacted by the pre-Vancouver histories of German ethnic immigrants and their changing settlement patterns in the city. This chapter will briefly look first at the problematic category of German, then at the various waves of German immigrants to Canada and finally will examine the residential settlement patterns of Germans in Greater Vancouver, in particular, the core neighbourhood in South Vancouver where the oldest German community established itself.

## 2.1 COUNTING 'GERMANS'

To count 'Germans' or to speak of 'German' immigration is a complicated and problematic task. Using published Statistics Canada data three useful variables have been chosen to examine the Germans in Vancouver: I) German ethnicity, ii) Germany as a place of birth and, iii) German

home language use. Each variable misses or misrepresents the Germans in some form but examining the three variables, in combination with other reports, provides a valuable portrait of the community. The German ethnicity variable is probably the best variable to use when representing all German ethnics but it is affected by inconsistencies in how the question of ethnicity is asked in census questions and how it is counted in subsequent census years. There are also issues to be discussed later around the willingness to identify oneself as German in the face of much hatred in the years following the Third Reich. Place of birth is a useful variable but ignores all of the Germans born outside of Germany. Germans are a heterogeneous mix of nationalities as a result of their diasporic settlement in vast agricultural areas of Russia and Eastern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries which lasted almost 200 years. Germans may also be counted using German mother tongue or home language statistics but these numbers underestimate the German population of Vancouver as they report only those families who chose to continue speaking German in the home. After the war a good number of immigrants sought to disassociate themselves with all things German and as a result, studies show that German immigrants adapted to English faster than any other language group.

Several authors of works on German immigration to Canada have dealt with these issues at a broader and less quantitative scale and their observations add to the list of reasons that statistical data are problematic. As McLaughlin (1985) notes, "the shifting geo-political boundaries of the German states prior to their unification and the twentieth-century conflicts between nationalism and ethnicity have played havoc with the concept of a common German identity" (3). It is difficult to imagine the complexity of factors weighing on the psychological mind set of German immigrants as they arrived in Canada and began to negotiate their new identities - as Germans? German-Canadians? Dutch-Canadians? Austrian-Canadians?

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Friedmann (1952) in reviewing the status of German immigration to Canada in a Federal

Government report well encapsulates these complexities:

> *The problem of German immigration obviously has certain unique aspects. They stem predominantly from the psychological effects of the recent world war in which Germans were, for the second time in this century, the enemies of the British Commonwealth of Nations. They stem also from the extraordinary political and psychological complications which the collapse of the Nazi regime, the total military occupation of Germany by her conquerors, the subsequent split between the Allies, the consequent division of Germany into two separate states, and the mass exodus of millions of Germans from eastern Europe into Western Germany, have produced (4).*

The author of a thesis comparing ethnic groups in Vancouver in the late 1950s points out

that German origin statistics display large discrepancies and a lack of regularity from one census

year to the next prohibiting an analysis of changes in the years prior to the 1950s (Waldhouse

1961). She identifies two reasons for the difficulties in studying the Germans, particularly in

British Columbia. The first is,

> *due to the fact that the German speaking people include not only people born in Germany and Austria, but also those of the Mennonite faith born either in Russia or Canada who still speak German, ethnic Germans of Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, plus such small minorities coming from other parts of Europe, North and South America (ibid, 164).*

The second reason relates to the self-identification of German immigrants. Waldhouse explains

that:

> *The two World Wars and the removal of non-naturalised Germans to the interior [of British Columbia], had repercussions that led many to conceal their identity, especially those who had not come from Germany. This partially accounts for the German population of the city [of Vancouver], as recorded in the census volumes, declining from 2,826 to 1,117 during the ten years between 1911 and 1921 (ibid, 65).*

There are several category labels which identify groups of Germans who arrived from

different origins under different immigration status designations. The **displaced persons** were

those immigrants who were forcefully or voluntarily moved from their homeland to Germany

where their labour was needed and exploited. Most of these immigrants were national Russians, Poles, Bulgarians, Letts, Latvians, Hungarians, Czechs and Yugoslavians. The **Volksdeutsche** were those born and raised in Eastern Europe but were of German parentage and spoke the German language (for the Mennonites this was a low-German called *Plattsdeutsche*). Finally, the **Reichsdeutsche** were the original residents of West Germany, whose population doubled with thousands of refugees entering the country from East Prussia, Mecklenburg, Saxony and Thuringia (Sturhahn 1976:56). Despite their differences, all of these groups fall under the census category label of 'German'. The differences in values, language, culture and history of these groups are hardened and ingrained. As will be discussed, one of the only unifying characteristics of these groups is their German mother tongue. For some of the German churches in Vancouver this was enough to bind faithful believers but in other churches it caused divisions and acrimonious feelings.

Despite these within group differences, this thesis will use the term 'German' to describe all of these immigrants with diverse national origins except when these differences were reflected in church structure and evolution. As Gumpp explains in her thesis on German Canadians, because most post-World War Two immigrants were born in Germany and the overwhelming majority of German immigrants (including refugees and displaced persons from East Germany and other Eastern European States) emigrated from West Germany, the category 'German' is used in both the broader ethnic as well as the narrower national/geographic sense (Gumpp 1989).

## 2.2 GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

The history of German immigration to Canada begins in the 1750s and is broken down by McLaughlin (1985) into four distinct waves. Between 1749 and 1870, German immigrants

settled primarily in the regions of Upper and Lower Canada with a particular concentration in what is now Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario (then Berlin). The second wave of immigrants arrived between 1870 and 1914 and many of these immigrants settled in Western Canada, primarily Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. In 1900, 25,000 German speaking settlers were reported in western Canada and by 1914 the number multiplied six-fold to over 151,000. The third wave of German immigrants arrived between 1914 and 1939. Whereas until this time the Germans were favoured as immigrant settlers, they now became the enemy and were forced to close their German schools and German speaking churches. Many Germans in Canada anglicized their surnames and/or chose to record other countries as their place of birth to hide their German roots for fear of attack and vandalism. This is evidenced in the 38.7% decrease in the German population in British Columbia between 1911 and 1921 (Table 2.2).

In 1923, immigration restrictions against Germans were repealed and tens of thousands of Germans, mainly those fleeing Russia, arrived in Canada in the later half of the 1920s. In 1931, the Canadian census recorded 473,000 people of German origin in Canada, 60% of them in western Canada (with 44% from Russia, 18% from Austria-Hungary, 18% from US, 12% from Germany[1]). Though immigration restrictions had been lifted, hatred against Germans was still quite prevalent. German immigrants were guarded in using their native language even in the home, and as a general result there was less attempt made by these immigrants to maintain their German culture and tongue.

The final wave of immigration stretches from 1939 until the present. Within this period

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[1] These proportions may seem surprising to some but were characteristic of pre-World War Two immigration. After the Second World War the majority of immigrants were from Germany proper. The 18% from the United States reflects the acute anti-German prejudice after World War One.

there are of course several smaller waves as German immigration increased significantly in the 1950s and then began declining in the very late 1950s and early 1960s. Between 1946 and 1971, Froeschle (1992) reports that immigration to Canada from Germany, Austria and Switzerland totalled 412,000 persons (this includes the 'stateless' *Volksdeutsche*). Though return migration figures are necessarily estimates, he believes over one-third of the 412,000 returned to Germany leaving a total net gain of 250,000 Germans to Canada.

As mentioned, the migration of Germans to Canada peaked in the 1950s (Table 2.1) and at that time Germans became the third largest ethnic group in Canada after the British and the French, representing between 5 and 8% of the national population (Froeschle 1992). The composition of these 'Germans' who immigrated as refugees and displaced persons by place of birth origin is reported by McLaughlin (1985) as: 60% from Germany, 30% from the now Polish parts of Eastern Germany, and 10% from Czechoslovakia, Romania and the rest of Eastern Europe. In addition to these European German immigrants there was a secondary migration to Canada by a group of German speaking Mennonites who first immigrated to South America after their disenfranchisement from Russia. Many of these immigrants were denied access to Canada in the 1920s and 1930s because of health reasons. They were accepted to South America where their own German culture remained strong but was modified as they were acculturated with the Spanish speaking South Americans in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. It was in the 1970s and 1980s that many of these German and now Spanish speaking immigrants moved to Vancouver and the Lower Fraser Valley where many of their relatives had been living for several decades. They were a distinct group among the Mennonites because they had adopted new cultures and traditions alongside their Mennonite heritage but the closeness of the Mennonite people meant that most of the South American Mennonites were welcomed and accepted into

Vancouver's well established Mennonite churches. Due to the method of recording immigration data, there is no statistical data available to reflect this immigration of German speaking Mennonites from South America but one of my interviewees had immigrated from Paraguay and several interviewees at the Vancouver and Culloden MB churches spoke of their fellow members who came to Vancouver as part of this immigrant cohort.

In the 1951-71 bracket, almost 60% of the German immigrants to Canada were married or widowed, 40% were between 25 and 34 years old and, most had achieved relatively high levels of formal education (McLaughlin 1985). Many of these post World War II immigrants were sponsored by Canadian relatives (Gumpp 1989).

Census figures reported for the last 30 years show an increase in the number of Canadians of German descent; in 1971 there were 1.3 million, by 1981 1.7 million and by 1986 almost 2.5 million[2]. Examining language statistics the trend would seem to be the reverse as the number of people reporting German as their mother tongue has declined steadily from 560,000 in 1971 to 438,000 in 1986 to 424,000 in 1991. Rapid assimilation by the Germans is evidenced then in these national mother tongue statistics; by the 1980s the rank of German had fallen from third to fifth place behind English, French, Italian and Chinese (Froeschle 1992:17).

The factors motivating German immigration to Canada varied for different waves of immigrants. The primary motivations influencing the final two waves were: economic, the desire to reunite with relatives and friends overseas and for many, expulsion from their home country and fear of subsequent war (Friedmann 1952). As Gumpp (1989) elaborates, "even more

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[2] Caution must be exercised in reading these figures as ethnic definitions have changed. Since the 1981 census Canadians have been permitted to record both multiple origins as well as 'Canadian' origin. Additionally, ethnic origin may now be traced both through mother and father whereas prior to 1981, only paternal ethnic origin was reported.

important were the concrete problems of survival: shortages of land, demographic pressures caused by the reception of millions of refugees in West Germany, high unemployment, and lack of housing and food" (10). Canada then appeared as a welcoming host to German immigrants and "the land of opportunity", attractive because of, "its expanding economy, rapid industrialization...an abundance of land, political tranquillity, and a high degree of individual freedom" (Gumpp 1989:10).

### Table 2.1: German Immigration to Canada, 1901-1970

| Years | Total German Immigration | Percentage of total Canadian Immigration |
|---|---|---|
| 1901-1910 | 20,942 | 1.28 |
| 1911-1920 | 18,200 | 1.08 |
| 1921-1930 | 72,980 | 5.96 |
| 1931-1940 | 4,850 | 3.09 |
| 1941-1950 | 15,978 | 3.23 |
| 1951-1960 | 235,637 | 14.99 |
| 1961-1970 | 75,523 | 5.21 |

(from McLaughlin 1985)

### 2.3 ROLE OF CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS IN GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

Church organizations have played a significant role in aiding and facilitating German immigration and settlement to Canada. The involvement of national organizations in conjunction with local churches has had a substantial impact on both the numbers of immigrants and their adjustment to Canadian life. As Gumpp (1989) explains:

*Canadian churches became instrumental in arranging for the transfer of German ethnic immigrants. The churches enjoyed the trust of both the Canadian authorities and the German-Canadian public, they could organize the movement through already existing international networks, and they had the financial resources - supplied by German and non-German members - to extend monetary*

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*assistance to needy emigrants (30).*

Prior to their role in the actual movement of immigrants, church organizations played a role in making immigration to Canada possible for particular groups of Germans after World War Two. Gumpp (1989) reports that:

> *the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees, whose humanitarian concern with helping displaced persons and refugees was widely respected, also advocated a reconsideration of Canada's existing immigration regulations...the Council questioned the validity of the concept of 'German national,' and pointed out to the Canadian government that every German-speaker who was resettled during the Third Reich had German citizenship automatically conferred upon him or her (19).*

Church organizations were denominationally based, and often times temporary, thus making the reports of statistics on the numbers of immigrants aided by such organizations a difficult task. The North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Society settled 6,335 people between 1951 and 1973, (over 80% of these between 1951 and 1955) (Sturhahn 1976; Renfree 1988). Other denominational bodies of Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite churches organized similar immigrant societies. Between 1923 and 1928 the Mennonite Board of Colonization settled 19,000 immigrants, primarily Russian Mennonites, helping them to find jobs and then pay back their travel debt (Interviews). The railway companies worked closely with several church organizations including the Lutheran Immigration Board, the Canadian Lutheran Immigration Aid Society, and the Association of German Catholics to organize travel, and determine payment plans.

## 2.4 GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

The very first German settlers to British Columbia arrived during the Gold Rush days in the mid 1800s (McLaughlin 1985) but the German origin population in British Columbia did not

reach a substantial size until after World War Two. In the inter-war period, during the great depression and the drought of the 'dirty 30s,' a number of German Prairie settlers migrated to Vancouver in search of employment. By 1951, there were 55,000 people of German origin in British Columbia. As more German Prairie immigrants learned of British Columbia's milder climate, the German origin population more than doubled from 1951 to 1961 (Table 2.2). In 1961, of the 120,000 people of German origin, it was estimated that 60% were pre-World War Two immigrants, often referred to as the 'old-timers', and 40% were post-World War Two immigrants (Waldhouse 1961:166). The majority of the British Columbia destined German population settled in Vancouver but other popular areas included the Interior and the Lower Fraser Valley area (particularly for Mennonites).

## Table 2.2: Population of German Origin, British Columbia, 1901-1971

| Year | Total number of Germans | B.C. Germans as a percentage of total population of Germans in Canada |
|------|------|------|
| 1901 | 5,807 | 1.8 |
| 1911 | 11,880 | 2.9 |
| 1921 | 7,273 | 2.4 |
| 1931 | 16,986 | 3.5 |
| 1941 | 22,407 | 4.8 |
| 1951 | 55,307 | 8.9 |
| 1961 | 118,926 | 11.3 |
| 1971 | 198,310 | 15.0 |

(from McLaughlin 1985)

## 2.5 GERMAN IMMIGRATION TO VANCOUVER

Waldhouse reported in her 1961 thesis that the Greater Vancouver population of German

origin was approximately 65,000 however this would later appear to be an overestimation. The 1961 Canadian Census reported that the German ethnic origin population of the Vancouver Census Metropolitan area was 51,000. Waldhouse estimated that 65% of the German population lived in the City of Vancouver and that the break down of these inhabitants was: 60% German political origin, 20% Austrian origin and 20% ethnic Volksdeutsche from other countries (Waldhouse 1961:165-66). Again these percentages are difficult to verify and are generally 'guestimates' provided by leaders in the German community. She also notes that,

> *The German population in Vancouver includes a very large number, approximately 41 percent, of 'Newcomers,' or post Second World War immigrants. These, in contrast to the 'Old-timers,' were selected by the immigration authorities largely on their mechanical and industrial skill and ability to earn a living in Canada. Many of those in Vancouver arrived in the eastern provinces first and later came to Vancouver by internal migration. The direct migration to British Columbia reached very large proportions for the three years 1952 to 1954, then it declined during 1955 and 1956, to increase again in 1958. (Waldhouse 1961:169-70).*

## 2.6    SETTLEMENT PATTERNS OF GERMANS IN VANCOUVER

Moving away from the overall numbers of immigrants it is important, particularly for our purposes, to examine the settlement patterns of the Germans in Greater Vancouver. For reasons mentioned above, only patterns from 1951 to 1991 are discussed; the census data prior to these years are problematic in their consistency of questioning and also in the discrepant numbers they provide. Settlement will be discussed using data on German ethnic origin, Germany as a place of birth and German home language use. German ethnic origin data will primarily be used to describe patterns of settlement and the additional two variables will be used to understand the differences in settlement patterns between the pre- and post-World War Two immigrant groups.

Factors contributing to the settlement patterns of the German population in Vancouver reflect: urban development, socio-economic characteristics, the desire for home ownership, the

availability of transportation and the cultural and economic importance of the ethnic

neighbourhood (Gumpp 1989). Prior to 1951, Germans in Vancouver represented less than 2%

of the city population and were concentrated in small numbers in the West End-Robson Street

area of the Downtown and in the Vancouver South neighbourhood (Gumpp 1989) around the

existing German speaking churches. According to the 1951 census, Vancouver had 19,328

residents of German ethnic origin (3.6% of the city's population) (Figure 2.1A). These residents

were clustered in the Vancouver South neighbourhood, where they comprised 10-15 percent of

the population, but were also over-represented in the newly incorporated cities of Richmond and

Surrey. The Vancouver South neighbourhood emerged as the centre of German organizational,

religious and economic life and was home to the Vancouver Alpen Club, the Edelweiss Credit

Union, German shops and services as well as five German speaking churches. The German

community was bounded, "on the north by King Edward Avenue, on the east by Victoria Drive,

on the south by the North Arm of the Fraser and on the west by Cambie Street" (Siemens

1960:82). Without widespread car ownership, transportation issues were important

considerations in residential location, particularly for those immigrants arriving prior to the

Second World War. A mapping of the membership of the first Mennonite Brethren church in

Vancouver revealed a close grouping around the church, a significant finding considering the fact

that the "concentration that was achieved resulted from the efforts of the individual buyer to find

property close to that of the others of his group...since the area into which they came was already

largely occupied by residences" (Siemens 1960:128). Indeed the clustering of most Mennonite

families followed the locations of Mennonite churches (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). Despite the fact

that maps of the German population clearly reveal the South Vancouver neighbourhood as the

German centre, "there was no real German [residential] concentration after World War II in

# Figure 2.1: Percentage of the total population of German Ethnic Origin, by Census Tract 1951-1991

A) 1951

N

■ >15.00
■ 10.00-15.00
▨ 7.50-9.99
▨ 5.00-7.49
□ <5.00
□ No Data

Scale (km)

0    5    10

B) 1961

N

■ >15.00
■ 10.00-15.00
▨ 7.50-9.99
▨ 5.00-7.49
□ <5.00
□ No Data

Scale (km)

0    5    10
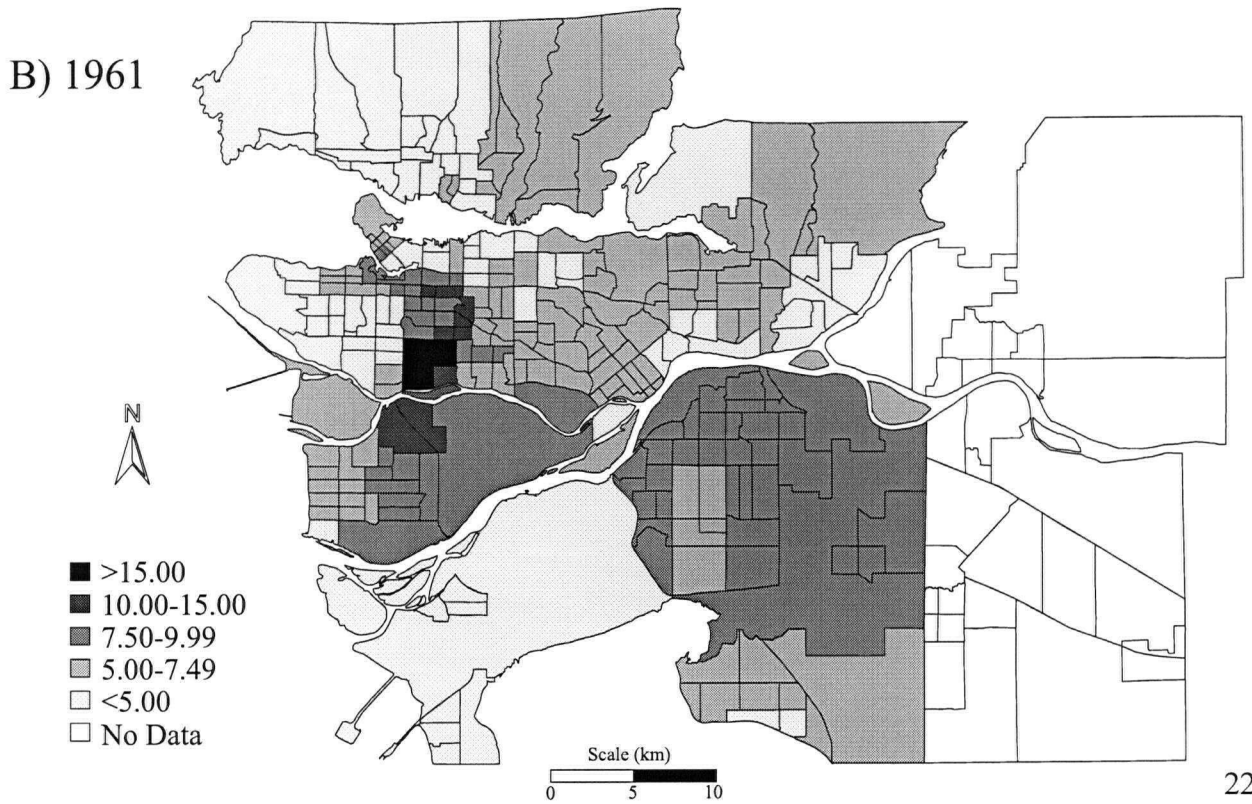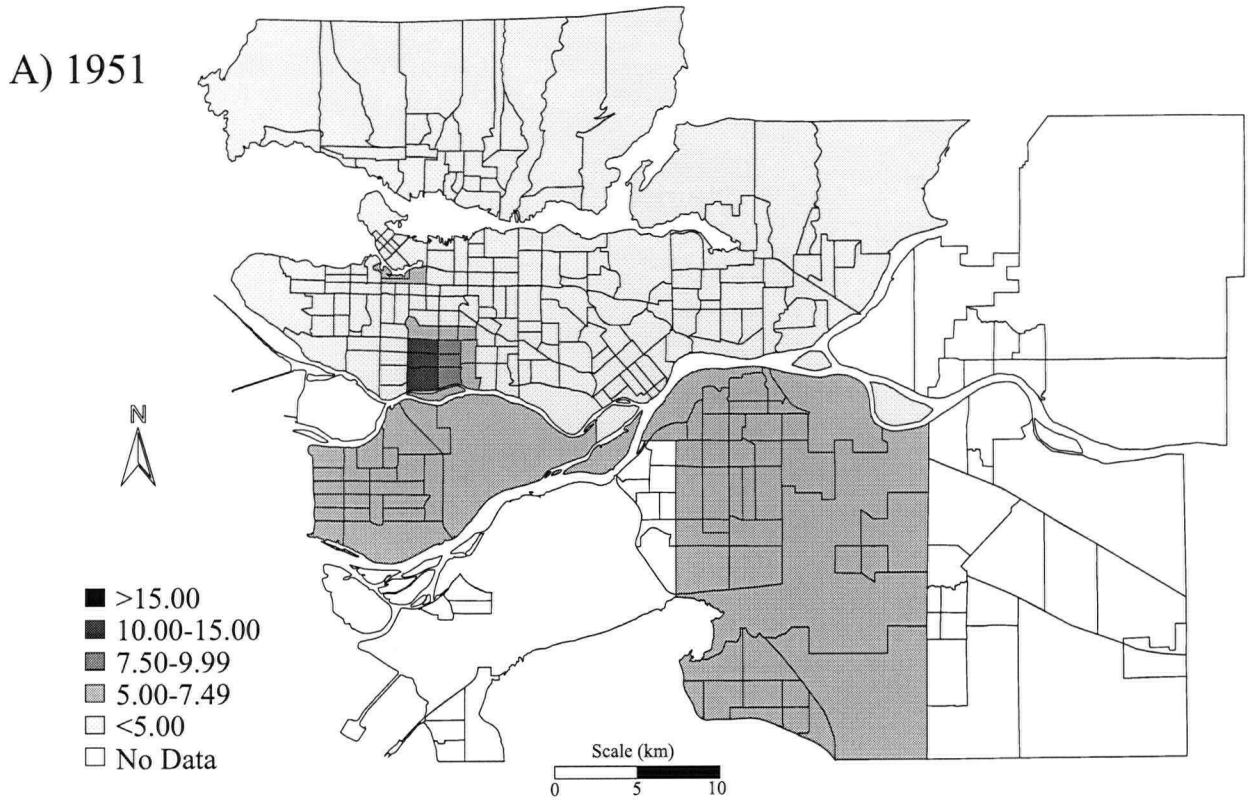
Source: Statistics Canada, Census Division, 1951 & 1961, Vancouver

**Figure 2.2: Concentration of Mennonite Population in South Vancouver, 1960**



CONCENTRATION OF MENNONITE
FAMILIES IN SOUTHEASTERN VANCOUVER
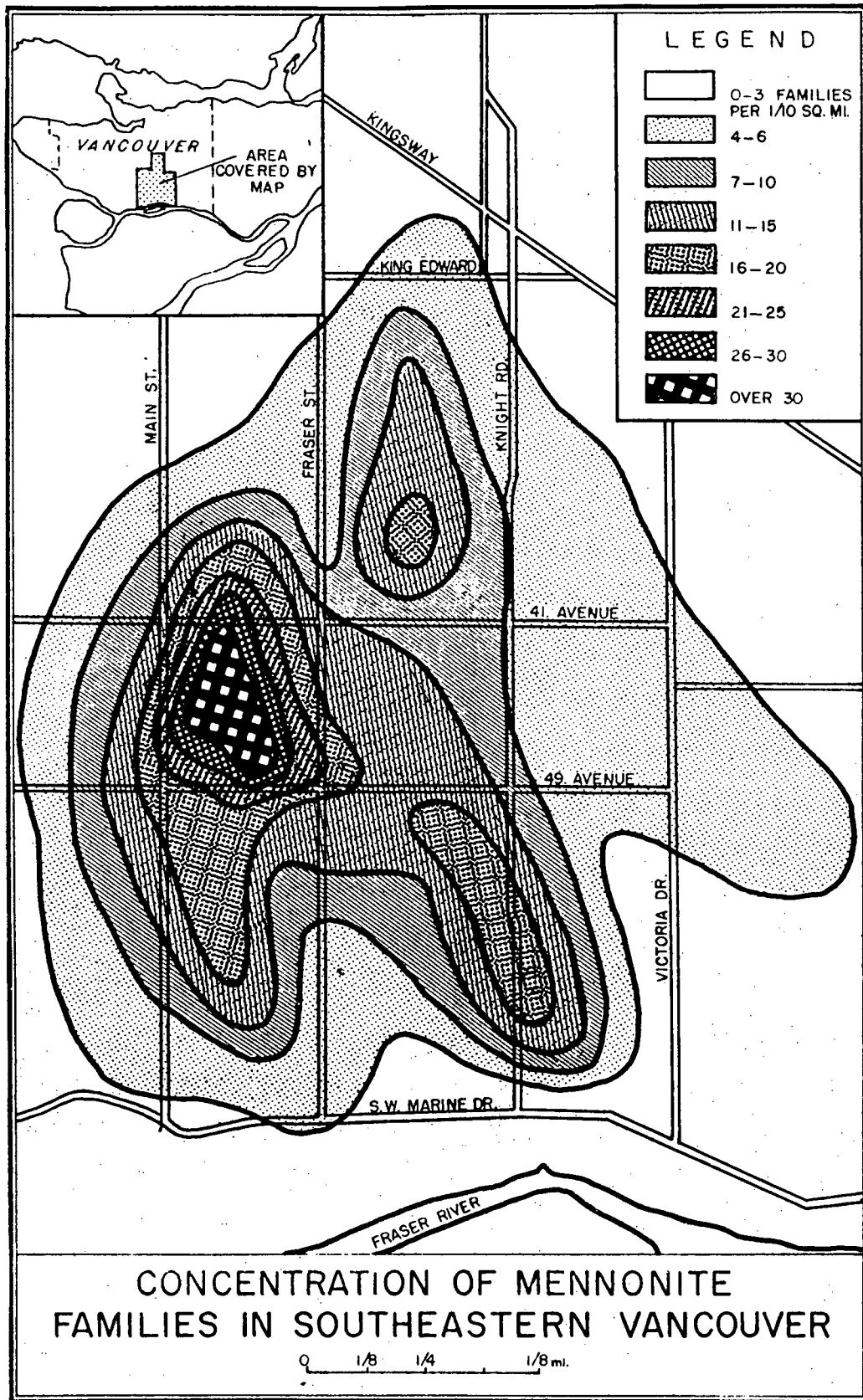
Source: Siemens (1960: Map 17)

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# Figure 2.3: Residential Pattern of Church Members of Two MB Churches, 1960
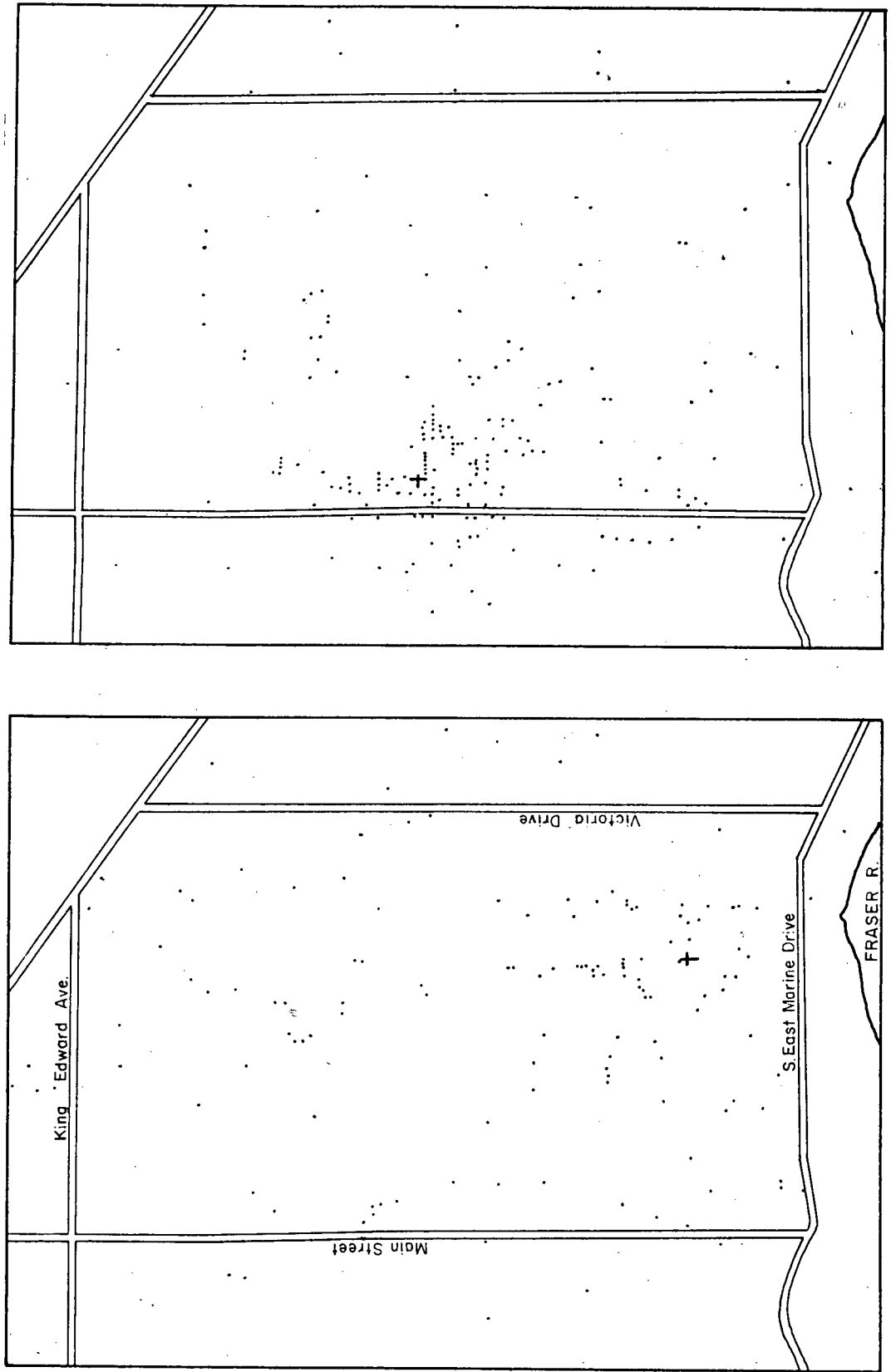


One dot represents the household of one of the following: a family; a widow or widower with or without children, residing in the family home; several siblings living together at one address. Churches are represented by crosses. For location within Vancouver refer to MAP 17.

Source: Siemens (1960:Map 18)

Vancouver as they exist for other ethnic groups. The German population quickly acquired their own residences in Vancouver and in the 1960s in the suburbs of Vancouver" (Doerrenbaecher 1981:14).

In 1961, the German ethnic population of Vancouver rose to 51,056 (6.5% of the Census Metropolitan Area). In three of the census tracts in Vancouver South, over 20% of the population was of German ethnicity (Figure 2.1B) indicating a significant concentration. In the decade leading up to this census, the largest influx of German immigrants arrived in Canada necessitating the establishment of several more German speaking churches as well as the expansion of ethnic businesses in the district. By 1971, the population of German ethnicity had increased to 89,675 (8.3% of the Vancouver region) and the same census tracts of Vancouver South recorded one in four inhabitants as ethnic Germans (Figure 2.1C). Important to note however, in both the 1961 and 1971 maps are the darkened areas of the suburban regions of Surrey, Richmond, North Vancouver and Coquitlam. Between 1961 and 1971 there was an increase in the German population in almost every census tract (Dorrenbaecher 1981). Using raw numbers to compare census tracts, Dorrenbaecher found that the highest gains were in West Vancouver, Delta, and southwestern Burnaby. Other areas with significant gains were Port Moody, Coquitlam and parts of North Vancouver as well as Burnaby, west Surrey and Richmond (ibid). These increases in the German population coincided with overall total population increases in these areas.

In 1981, significant settlement pattern changes appear. The total German ethnic population declined for the first time to 73,955 (now only 5.8% of the Vancouver region total). The reasons for this are difficult to conclusively determine but are likely the result of return migration because of the improved German economy as well as natural decrease as the

# Figure 2.1: Percentage of the total population of German Ethnic Origin, by Census Tract

C) 1971

N

■ >15.00
■ 10.00-15.00
■ 7.50-9.99
■ 5.00-7.49
□ <5.00
□ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10

D) 1981

N

■ >15.00
■ 10.00-15.00
■ 7.50-9.99
■ 5.00-7.49
□ <5.00
□ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10
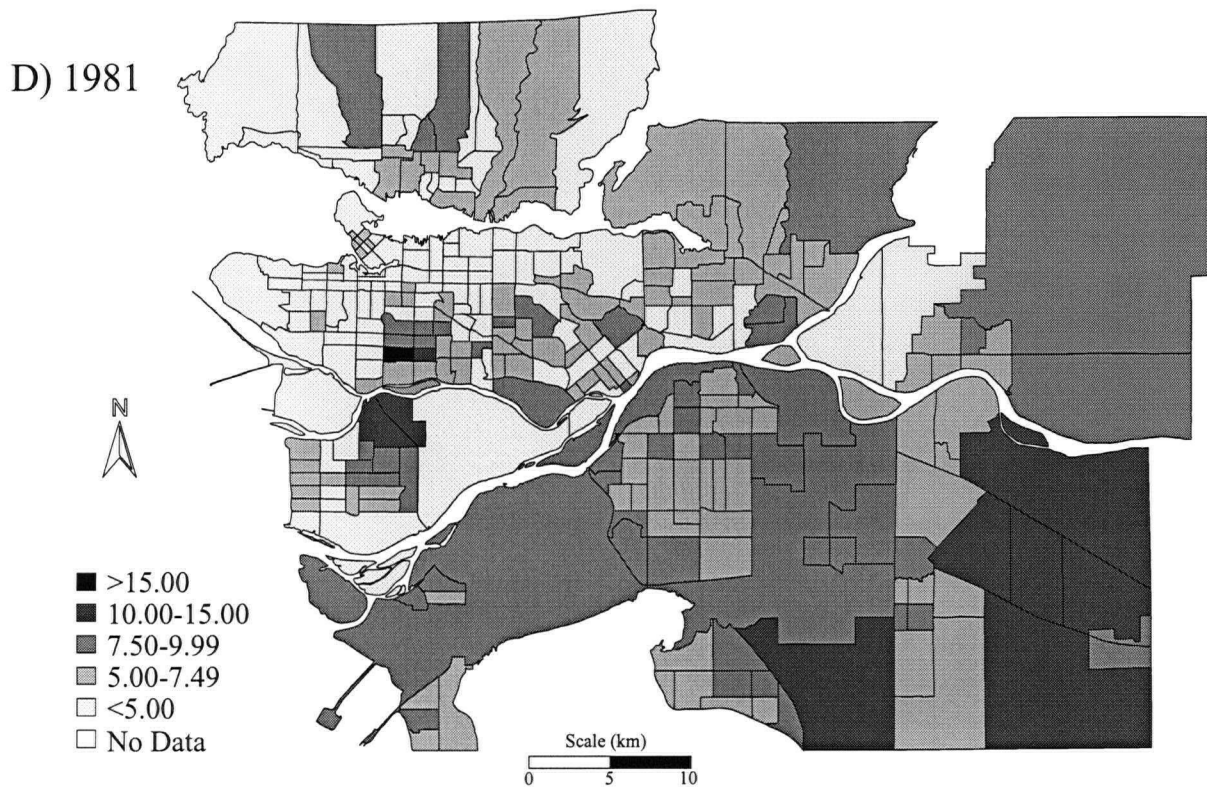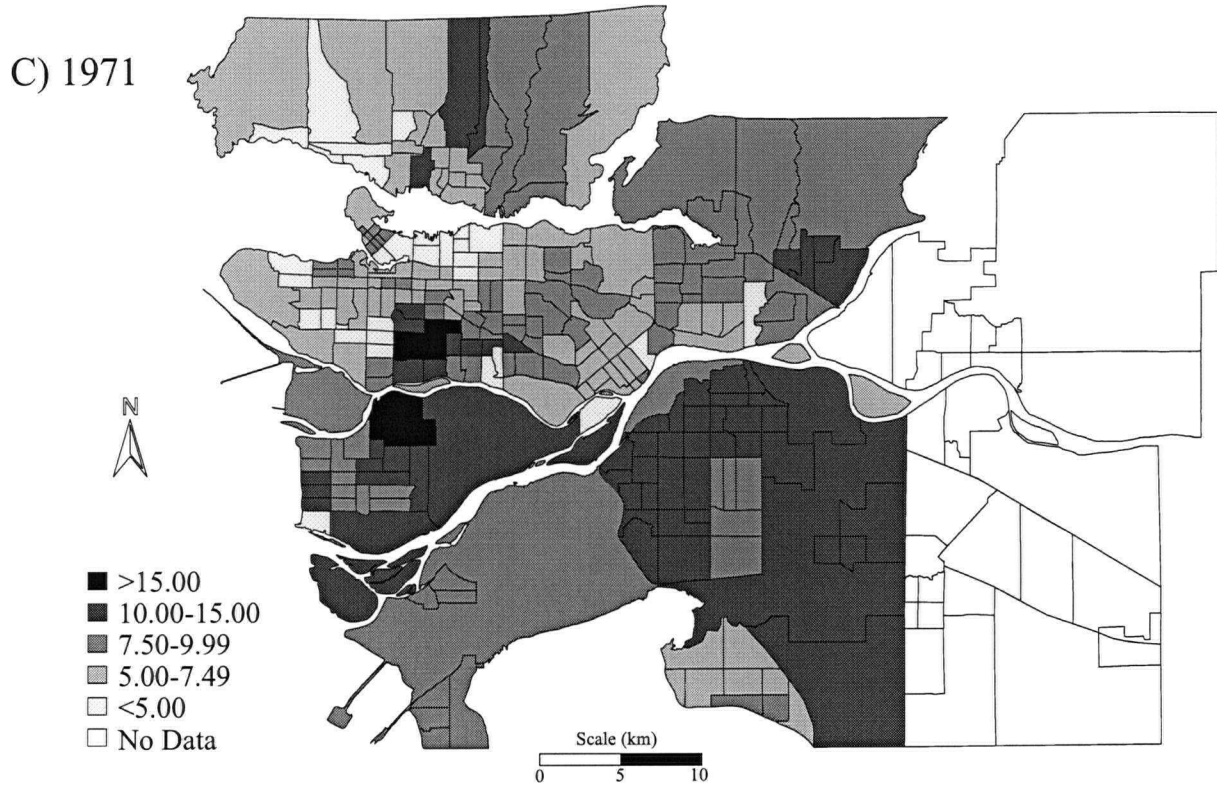
Source: Statistics Canada, Census Division, 1971 & 1981, Vancouver

immigrants from the inter-war period reached their most senior years. The most significant reason for the decline was the new method of recording Census ethnic origin wherein respondents were given the opportunity to identify multiple ethnic origins [3]. Two patterns in the 1981 map are worthy of note (Figure 2.1D[4]). First, the original Vancouver South neighbourhood saw a significant decline in its German population. Second, in contrast the peripheral areas of the city (Delta, south Surrey, Langley, Maple Ridge, Coquitlam and some areas of North and West Vancouver) show continued or increased percentages of Germans. By 1991 the German population had declined again to 62,100 and almost a complete emptying out of the South Vancouver neighbourhood is evident (Figure 2.1E). In fact the 1991 map shows a remarkable disappearance of Germans, an observation deserving further examination. The 1996 map shows a similar pattern (Figure 2.1F). Before discussing the changing settlement patterns at a more localized scale a brief look at maps of German home language use and place of birth data for Germany may help to decode some of the complicated settlement patterns revealed.

As a result of inconsistencies in the availability of published data at the census tract level, only data for 1971, 1981 and 1996 were available for place of birth and 1971, 1981, 1991 and 1996 for home language. The mapping of this data, however, provides additional insight into the German community not provided in the ethnic origin data. The home language maps (Figure 2.4A, B, C & D) lend evidence to the arguments by Gumpp and Doerrenbaecher that the use of the German language was strongest among those living in the traditional German neighbourhood.

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[3] Previously only paternal ethnicity was recorded. Additional problems are mentioned with regard to the listed options of ethnic groups that one could check off. For example, in some years Austrian and Swiss were listed as separate groups and other years they were not. Respondents were either responsible to fill them in as 'other' categories or simply choose another option that they felt was closest to their ethnic origin. These discrepancies naturally led to inconsistencies in reporting.

[4] A reminder that the 1981 and 1991 maps include only those indicating single origin as German.

# Figure 2.1: Percentage of the total population of German Ethnic Origin, by Census Tract

E) 1991

>15.00
10.00-15.00
7.50-9.99
5.00-7.49
<5.00
No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10

Source: Statistics Canada, Census Division, 1991, Vancouver

Gumpp (1989) reports that when,

> *comparing the number of residents who usually spoke German in their homes with the number of German ethnics in every given census tract, one discovers that the highest ratio occurred in Vancouver South, where up to every second German-Canadian appears to have maintained the ethnic tongue in the private sphere. Germans in the suburban areas displayed a much lower propensity toward employing their mother tongue in their homes even though they often were recent immigrants (116).*

Gumpp attributes the persistence of the German language in this neighbourhood to the high

concentration of Germans in these census tracts and to the accumulation of ethnic institutions

# Figure 2.1 F: Percentage of the total population of German Ethnic Origin, by Enumeration Area, 1996
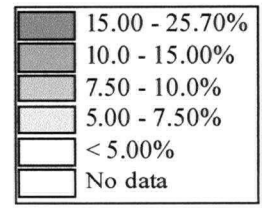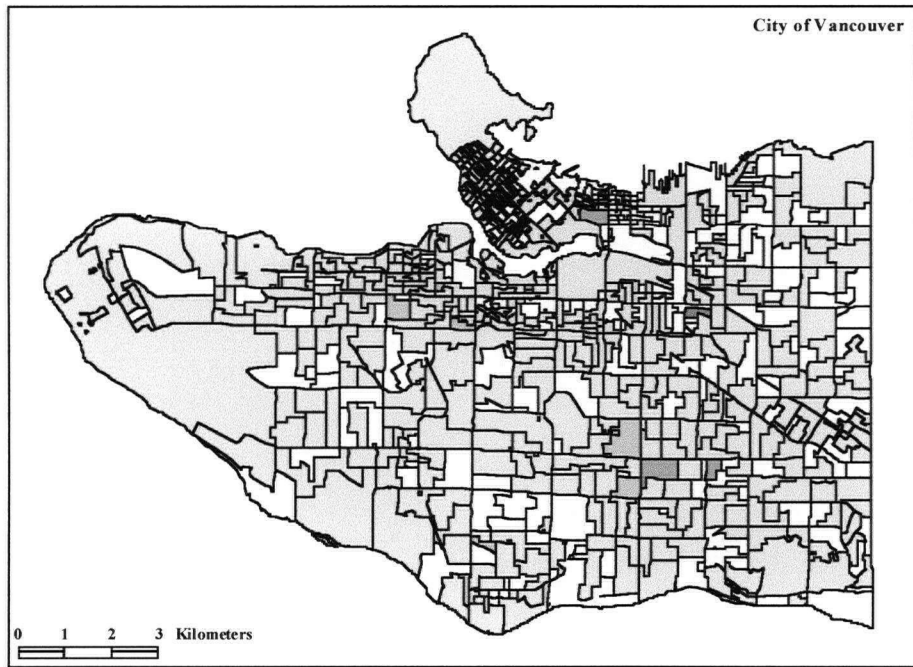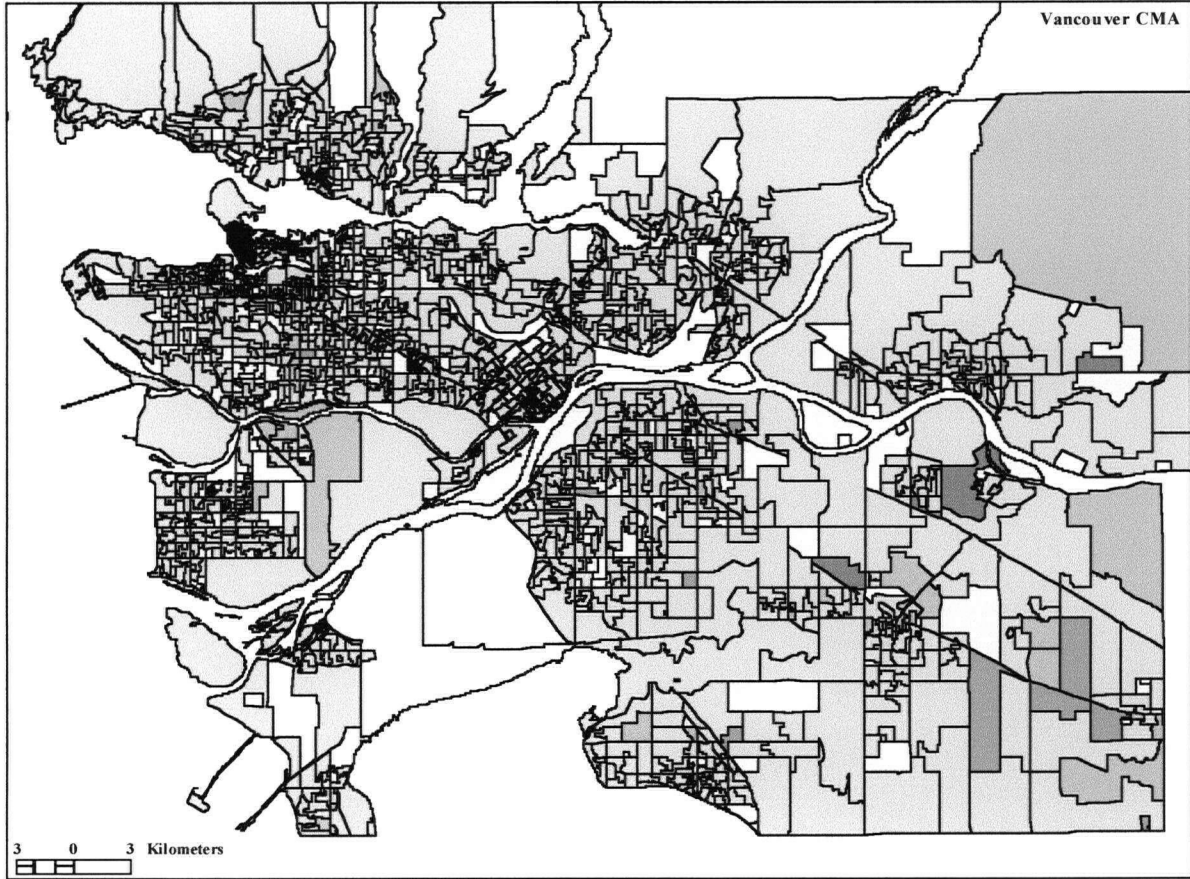


Vancouver CMA

3   0   3   Kilometers



City of Vancouver

| | |
|---|---|
| | 15.00 - 25.70% |
| | 10.0 - 15.00% |
| | 7.50 - 10.0% |
| | 5.00 - 7.50% |
| | < 5.00% |
| | No data |

0   1   2   3   Kilometers

N

Source: 1996 Canadian
Census Data. The
Vancouver CMA and
the City of Vancouver.
Projection: UTM.
GC & DH

29

# Figure 2.4: Percentage of the total population using German language in the home, by Census Tract 1971-1991)

A) 1971

N

■ >3.00
■ 2.00-3.00
■ 1.00-1.99
□ <1.00
□ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10

B) 1981

N

■ >3.00
■ 2.00-3.00
■ 1.00-1.99
□ <1.00
□ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10
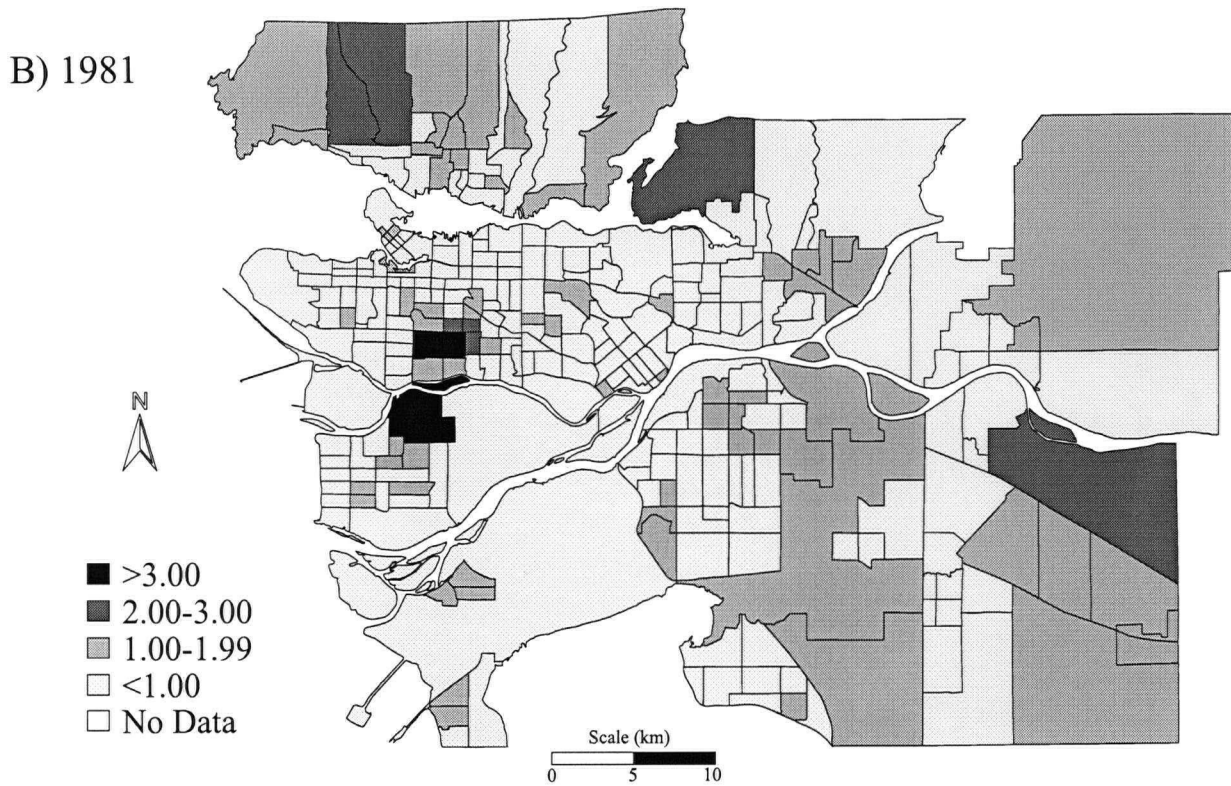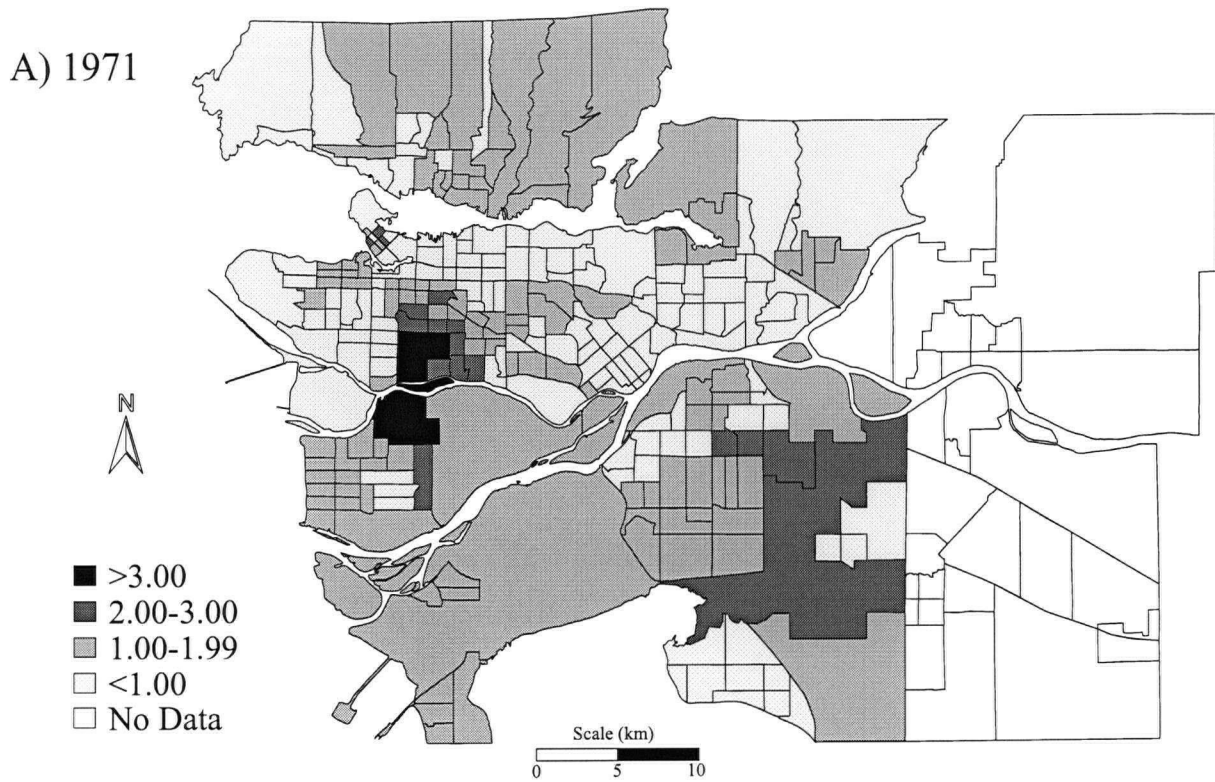
Source: Statistics Canada, Census Division, 1971 & 1981, Vancouver

Figure 2.4: Percentage of the total population using German
language in the home, by Census Tract



C) 1991

N

■ >3.00
■ 2.00-3.00
▨ 1.00-1.99
☐ <1.00
☐ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10
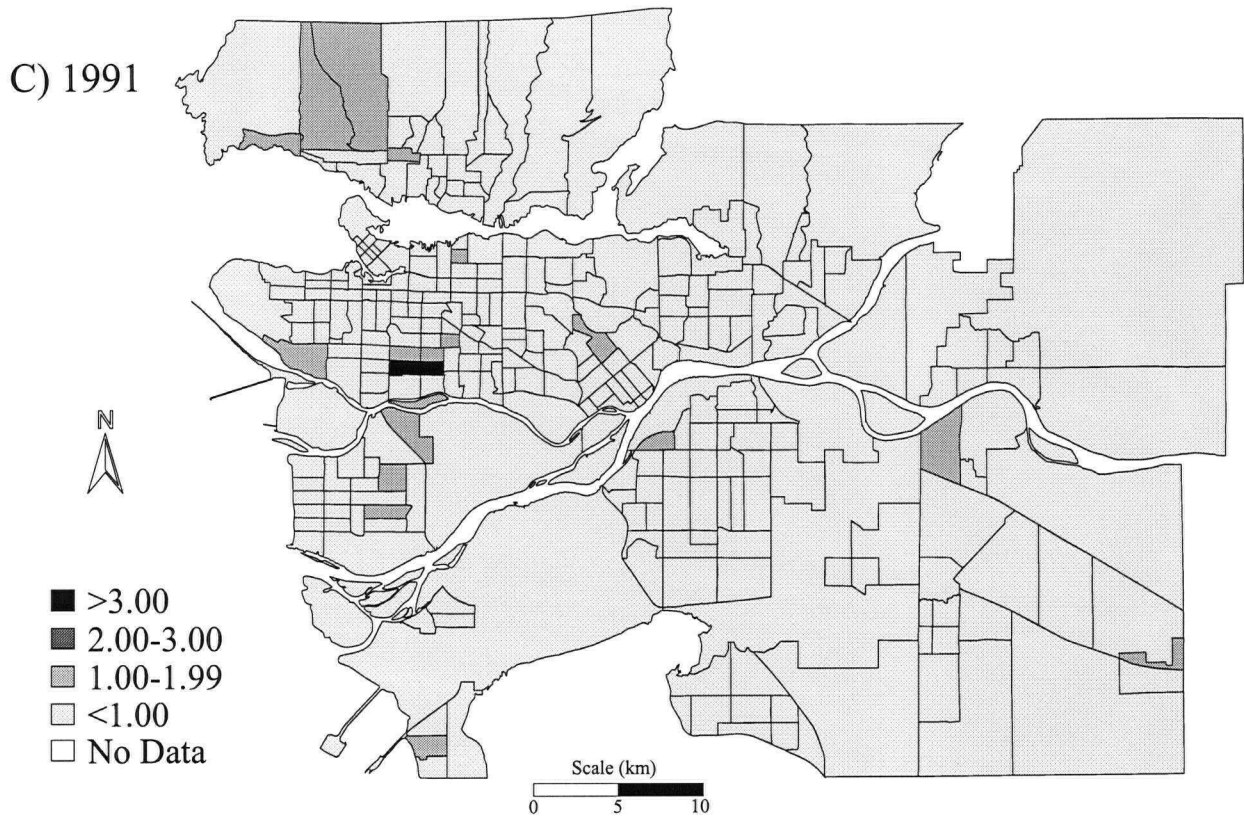
Source: Statistics Canada, Census Division, 1991, Vancouver

which encouraged the use of the German language by both foreign and Canadian-born Germans.

Overall there is a general decline in the number of census tracts recording more than 2%

of the population using German in the home, but even with the declining German population

there are still a few census tracts where German is more prevalent than anywhere else in the

Greater Vancouver area and they remain predominantly in the traditional German

neighbourhood. A recently produced map in the *Vancouver Province* identified the top three

home languages in each of the municipalities and cities in Greater Vancouver and highlighted the

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suburbanization and exurbanization of the community (Dec. 3, 1997, pA22). Using 1996 census data, German home language was reported as the third most common language in Mission and Abbotsford after English and Punjabi. The map also reported the top three mother tongue languages (English was always first). German mother tongue was ranked third in West Vancouver (after Chinese), third in Pitt Meadows (after Punjabi), second in White Rock, second in the City of Langley and Langley District, second in Maple Ridge and third again in both Mission and Abbotsford (after Punjabi)[5].

The place of birth maps for 1971, 1981 and 1996 count only Germans born in Germany (Figures 2.5A, B & C). Though this limits their representation of the German community as a whole, the maps do provide support for the observation that the more recent immigrants (those most likely to be born in Germany) prefer suburban residential locations. In 1971 there are several pockets of census tracts with higher than expected percentages of the population born in Germany. Most notable are those in the traditional neighbourhood but also many census tracts in North Vancouver, several in Richmond and a few in Surrey and Coquitlam. By 1981 there are virtually no German born people left in the traditional neighbourhood and interesting (but minor) concentrations in North and West Vancouver as well as in Port Moody and Coquitlam. A similar but more extreme pattern is notable in 1996. Using special cross-tabulation census data Gumpp (1989) reported that,

> *of the pre-1945 arrivals recorded by the 1981 census authorities, 8.8% still lived in Vancouver South census tracts. By comparison, 4.0% of the 1945-54 immigrants, 3.0% of the 1955-1964 arrivals, 2.1% of the 1965-70 immigrants and only 0.5% of the 1970-1980 German-born newcomers were living in the traditional German neighbourhood (62).*

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[5] Discrepancies between the home language and mother tongue rank positions of German reflect the assimilation of Germans who may have learned German at birth but who now communicate in the home using English.

# Figure 2.4 D: Percentage of the total population using German language in the home, by Enumeration Area, 1996



Vancouver CMA

3    0    3   Kilometers

City of Vancouver

3.00 - 21.10%
2.00 - 3.00%
1.00 - 1.99%
< 1.00%
No data

0    1    2    3   Kilometers

N

Source: 1996 Canadian
Census Data. The
Vancouver CMA and
the City of Vancouver.
Projection: UTM.
GC & DH

33
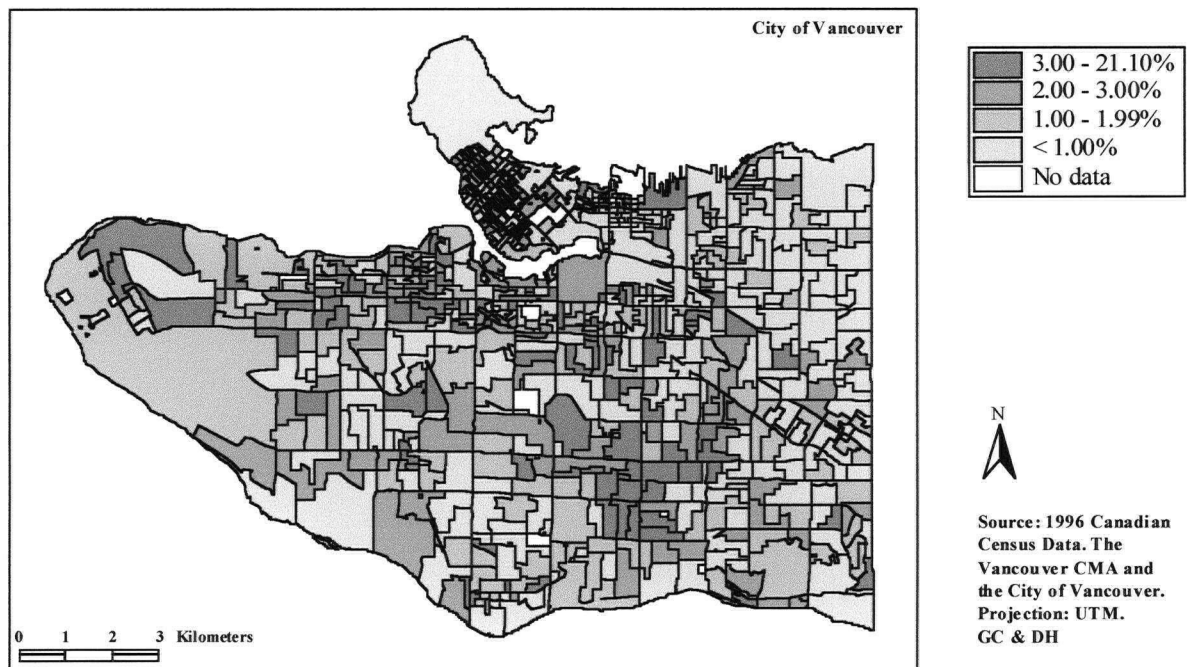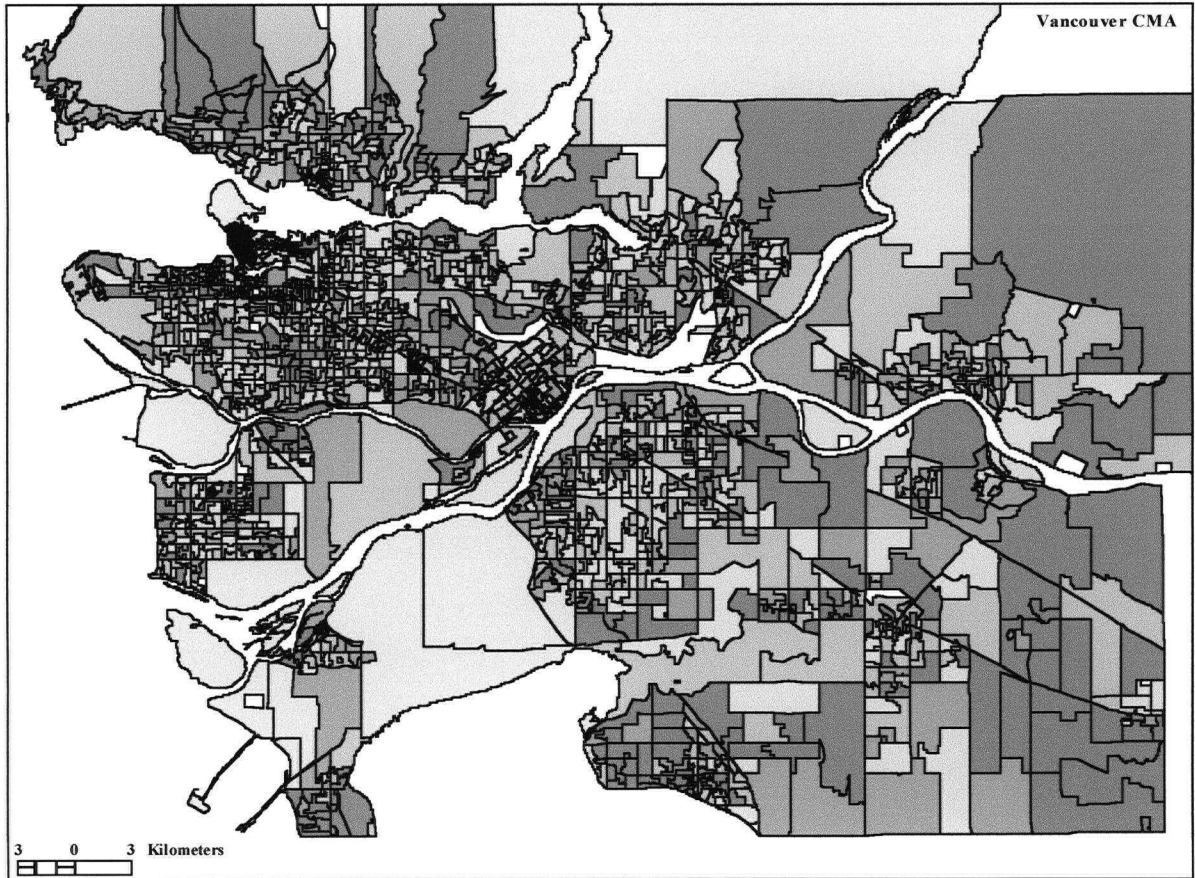
# Figure 2.5: Percentage of the total population born in Germany, by Census Tract, (1971-1981)

A) 1971



> ■ >3.50
> ■ 2.50-3.50
> ■ 1.50-2.49
> □ <1.50
> □ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10

B) 1981



> ■ >3.50
> ■ 2.50-3.50
> ■ 1.50-2.49
> □ <1.50
> □ No Data

Scale (km)
0    5    10

34
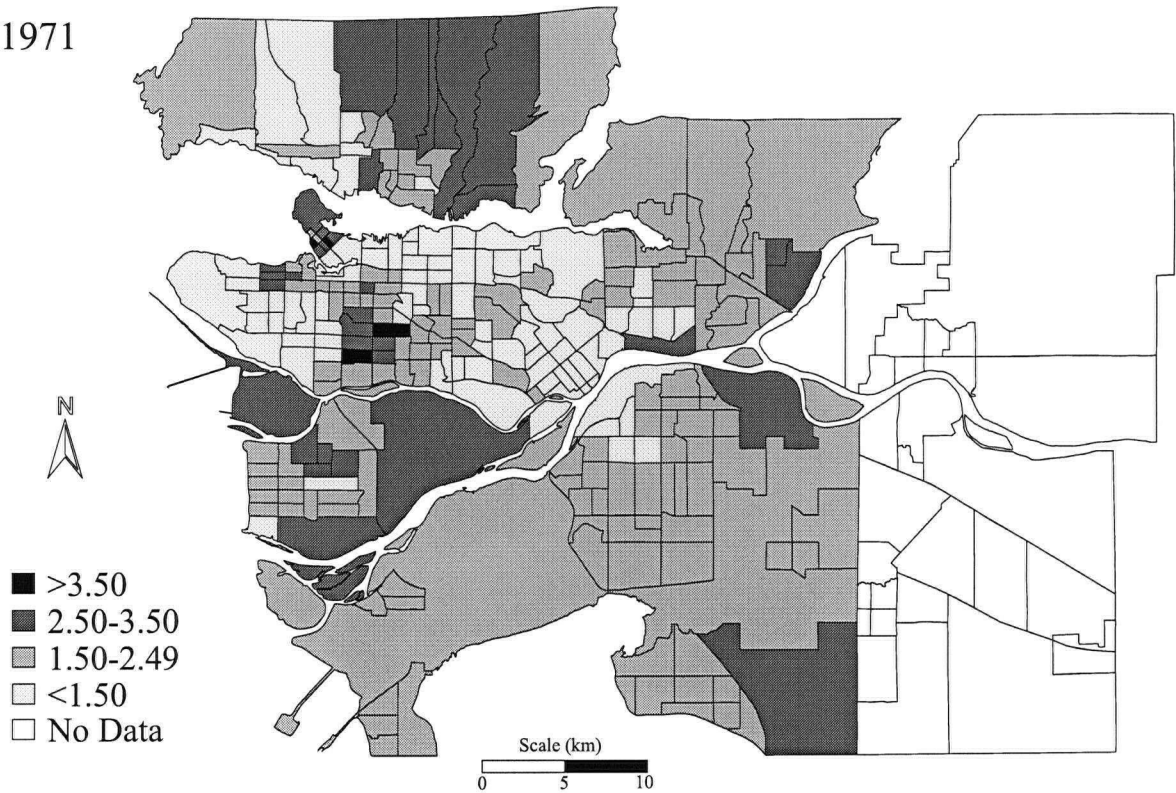
Source: Statistics Canada, Census Division, 1971 & 1981, Vancouver

# Figure 2.5 C: Percentage of the total population born in Germany, by Enumeration Area, 1996



Vancouver CMA

3    0    3  Kilometers

City of Vancouver

3.50 - 20.00%
2.50 - 3.50%
1.50 - 2.50%
<1.50%
No data

N

0    1    2    3  Kilometers

Source: 1996 Canadian
Census Data. The
Vancouver CMA and
the City of Vancouver.
Projection: UTM.
GC & DH
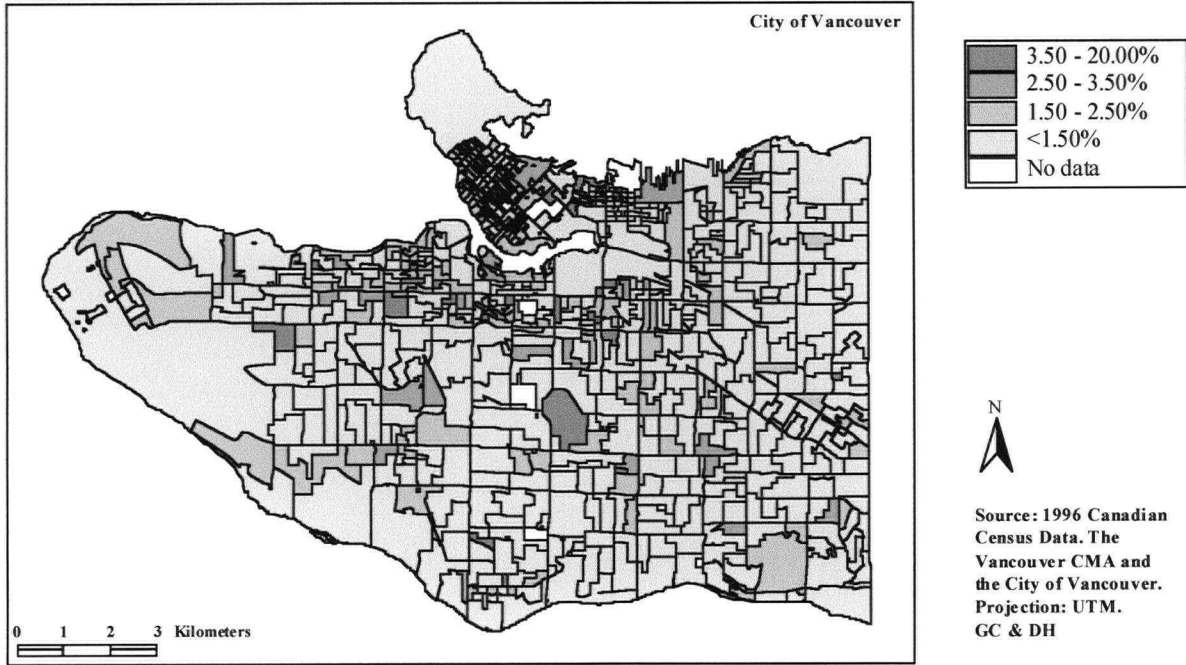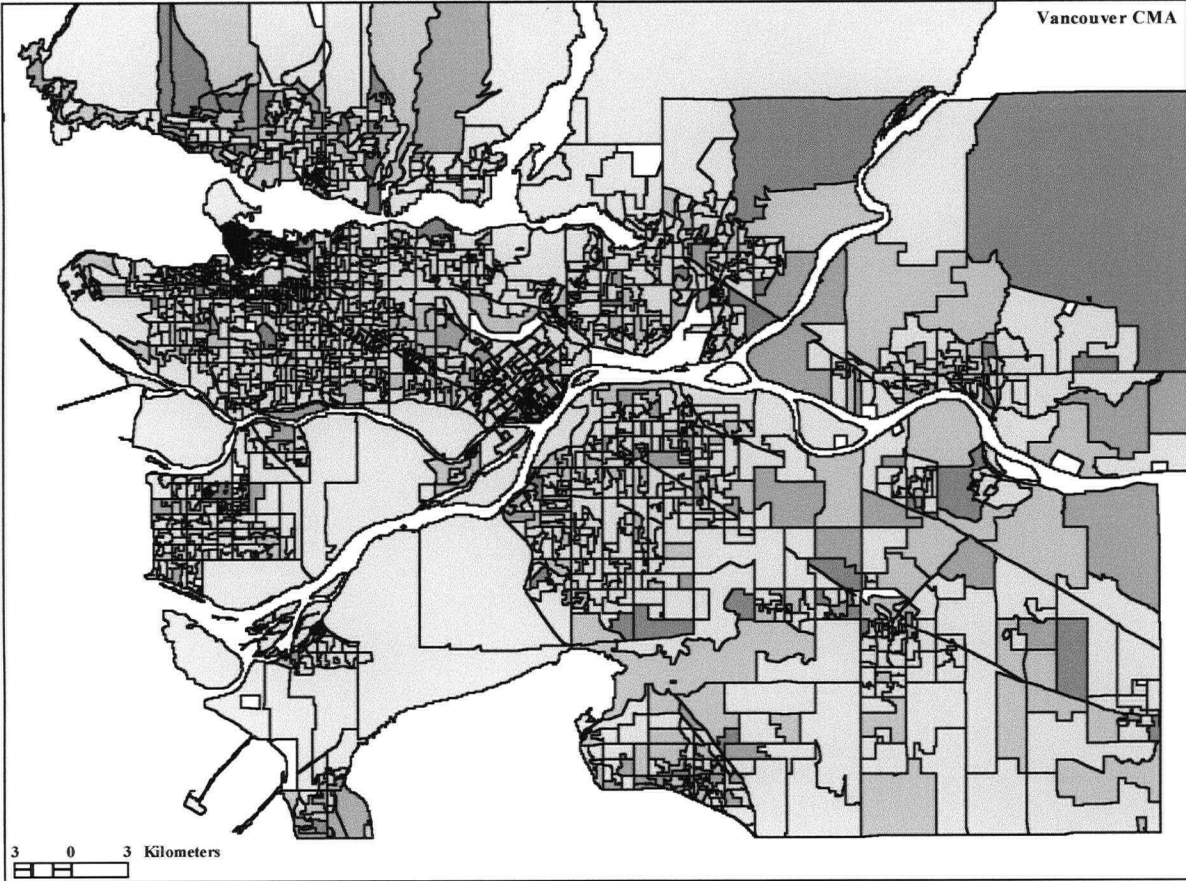
## 2.7   CHANGES IN THE SOUTH VANCOUVER NEIGHBOURHOOD

Prior to the Second World War, "the most dense and persistent German cluster [was] found in the Vancouver South area, a residential district of predominantly single family units. It appealed in particular to employees in the secondary industries, service personnel and shop-owners, and less so to professionals or technicians" (Gumpp 1989:61). Though it had the largest concentration of Vancouver's German population, the South Vancouver area was not necessarily the major intake area (other than to meet immediate needs in the short term) for the post World War Two immigrants. As demonstrated by the place of birth maps (Figure 2.5), the majority of the ethnic Germans in Vancouver South were actually born outside of Germany. The more recent German-born immigrants, "had a particular preference for North and West Vancouver and parts of Richmond" (Gumpp 1989:62).

Despite the fact that the traditional German neighbourhood declined as the residential choice for post World War Two immigrants, its concentration of pre-War German immigrants, ethnic stores, and German institutions meant that the German mother tongue was preserved for several decades and for the second generation in the postwar era. There is little doubt that its stability as an ethnic neighbourhood was due in part to the interaction facilitated by its German churches which, unlike some other ethnic institutions, engaged its membership on at least a weekly basis[6]. The persistence of the ethnic neighbourhood network is particularly interesting when one considers the distance developing between the old established centre and the new suburban residential patterns. The most recent arrivals, those one would assume to be most likely to speak German, most often located in the suburban areas yet they continued "to patronize

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[6] Gumpp (1989) pointed out that German clubs tended to attract members only for special events whereas the churches gathered members on a much more regular and frequent basis.

ethnic institutions in the old ethnic neighbourhood as well as the new ethnic halls, restaurants, schools, and businesses established in the suburbs" (Gumpp 1989:72-73).

During the 1970s the centrality of the Vancouver South neighbourhood began to fade for Vancouver's German community. Doerrenbaecher (1981), who interviewed several key informants in the German community, concludes that there are two major reasons for this decline. He argues that the first is due to the out-migration of the second generation who were now marrying and having families. Their departure stunted the continued growth of the community. The children of immigrants chose more rural or suburban areas of Greater Vancouver in part to get away from city life but more importantly because of the high cost of housing in Vancouver proper. This really is a part of the larger trend of suburbanization that was affecting the city as a whole and was followed with vigour by both the German immigrants and their children. Gumpp (1989) identifies four factors that promoted the settlement of Germans in the suburbs. The first is simply that Vancouver was growing so rapidly both spatially and in total population that many seeking housing were forced to look to the outlying areas. The second factor relates to the demographics of the Germans, "the vast majority belonged to average income, middle-class occupations in the manufacturing and service industries, and therefore were attracted to the middle-class housing market in the suburbs" (70). The Germans preferred single-detached residences and were willing to move to find them; there was virtually no desire to segregate or concentrate as a group (Doerrenbaecher 1981). Related to this, the third factor is the propensity of the German-born to prefer home ownership and the suburban areas were the areas with the greatest opportunities. The final factor influencing suburbanization, and part of the explanation for the 1971 and 1981 ethnic origin maps displaying considerable growth in suburban areas, relates to Canadian immigration policy changes in the 1960s and 1970s. The

policy favoured, "professionals, highly skilled manual immigrants and entrepreneurs," which meant that, "the upper income brackets were more strongly represented among German arrivals of the late 1960s and 1970s than in earlier years" (Gumpp 1989:72). These immigrants preferred the North and West Vancouver areas which were recognized as the "new, expanding high status residential areas" (ibid, 72).

The second element identified by Doerrenbaecher affecting the decline of the German population in Vancouver South was a push factor due to the in-migration of new immigrant groups to the neighbourhood. Beginning in the mid 1960s there has been a continued inflow of an East Indian population to the Fraser Street-South Vancouver neighbourhood focussed around the Sikh temple on Marine Drive just east of Fraser Street. Germans ceased to be the dominant majority group as the population of Asians increased from 4.0% to 14.4% between 1961 and 1971. In 1981 the Indo-Pakistani population represented 7.2% of the area and the Chinese population rose to 25% of Vancouver South residents (Gumpp 1989:64). This factor perhaps paints the Germans as racist or at least uncomfortable with their non-white neighbours. There is little research to sustain either claim as it is possible that the out-migration of Germans may have had as much to do with their potential cash-windfall from selling their properties (which had multiplied enormously in value from the inter-war period) as with being uncomfortable with the changing social geography of their neighbourhood.

## 2.8 CONCLUSIONS

Germans have a long history of immigration to Canada. Understanding the differences in immigrant cohort groups, their migration patterns and circumstances of immigration and finally their substantive size as an ethnic group, is necessary to help contextualize both the settlement

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patterns in Vancouver and the chapters to follow on the evolution of their ethnic churches.

Relative to other large ethnic groups in Vancouver such as the Italians, Chinese or South Asians, the Germans have demonstrated little continuous residential segregation or clustering, particularly after the late 1950s. Their high degree of residential assimilation is in part due to the circumstances under which they left their homeland (Gieb 1981) which has subsequently led to the virtual disappearance of the German language in the home (Gieb 1981; Stadler 1983). The desire of many Germans to participate in English speaking society resulted in rapid assimilation to Vancouver life. However, many immigrants developed a divided sense of allegiance both to Germany and to Canada (Stadler 1983) and, while integrating with Canadian ways in most aspects of their lives, maintained some degree of their 'Germanness,' for many through their participation in German churches. As Schmidt (1983) summarizes,

> The first-generation German immigrants have left their first place of settlement in the core of major cities. With progressive integration into Canadian society and their economic well-being they tend to move into suburban areas. While it has been noticed by government and other agencies that the German immigrants are the best integrated, least vocal, and the least politically active ethnic group, many of them are nevertheless still tied to Germany's umbilical cord (73).

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODS, MODELS AND THE STORIES OF VANCOUVER'S GERMAN CHURCHES

With a larger picture of German immigration as a backdrop, this chapter will begin with an explanation of the research methods employed in studying the German churches. Following this, an examination of some of the models or typologies used to classify church congregations will lead to an introduction to each of the ten churches participating in the study, churches which were built to minister to the German community taking shape during the 1950s in South Vancouver.

## 3.1    RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Documents chronicling church histories are scattered and inconsistently preserved and as such, experiences, memories and information were primarily collected from those who lived them. Most churches have recorded their story in anniversary books or bulletins but some have failed even this modest collection of details. Interviews with church members who have been consistently active in church leadership were undertaken to provide a detailed and personal account of the particular aspects of church history that are of thematic interest. For two churches, interviews provided the only source of church memory.

The process of research began with the development of a complete inventory of churches established in Vancouver as German speaking churches by people of German origin. Several studies were helpful in completing this list (Gumpp 1989; Sturhahn 1976; Burkinshaw 1995) as were preliminary interviews with three church leaders of German origin. Informal conversations and correspondence with personal contacts confirmed the inventory. The final list identified seventeen churches in Vancouver ministering primarily to German origin members and using

German language in worship services. The churches represented several denominations: Lutheran, Baptist, Mennonite, Catholic, Pentecostal and Independent. Special census statistics on Vancouver from 1961 and 1971 estimated that 20% of Germans were Catholic, between 25% and 30% were Lutheran, between 10% and 15% were Baptist and the rest were a combination of Mennonite and Independent denominations (Gumpp 1989; Statistics Canada). In 1991, a special tabulation of German born immigrants reported that 23% were Catholic, 53.5% were Protestant and 21.4% had no religious affiliation (Statistics Canada)[1]. It was decided that for the purposes of this study, a broad selection of churches and denominations would provide a more general but comparative picture of the role of the church in the German community. I attempted to contact all seventeen churches by telephone to present a brief questionnaire survey (Appendix); for two churches telephone contact proved impossible. In most cases, the respondent was the current senior pastor of the church though in a few cases, the church secretary was able to supply adequate answers. Ten questions were asked in order to establish a comparative base from which to select the churches to be interviewed in greater detail. From the list of churches, ten churches were chosen based on their age, denominational affiliation, their original and current demographic profile and their willingness to participate in the research project (judged by their interest in the initial questions). Each of the ten selected churches received two letters; the first introduced the research project as part of a larger study of immigration and religion; the second outlined the specific project in greater detail. Letters were addressed to the head pastor and

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[1] Further broken down, 2.3% associated with the United Church, 1.95 were Anglican, 3.1% were Baptist, 34.9% were Lutheran, 1.6% were Mennonites and 6.7% were associated with other Protestant religions. This breakdown is clearly different from the 1961/1971 statistics provided by Gumpp as hers were tabulated by German ethnic origin not by Germany as place of birth. Obviously most German born immigrants are Catholic and Lutheran.

within two weeks of being sent, each pastor was contacted by telephone. Pastors were asked whether the church was willing to participate in the study and if so, for the names and telephone numbers of church leaders who were willing to be interviewed. I asked that the church pastor approach the respective church leaders to determine if they were comfortable being interviewed. As a result, all of those I contacted were willing to participate (though one suggested interviewee proved impossible to contact). Two or three leaders were interviewed from each of the ten churches and a total of twenty-five interview sessions were conducted between February and April, 1998. In five interview sessions both the husband and wife contributed to the interview conversation; these couples have been counted as one person in the total of twenty-five. My reasoning for this is that each person did not respond to every question though the couples equally contributed to the overall interview. Including these five wives, a total of eight women were interviewed. Their input was particularly valuable because comments were made on a wider range of issues and services and community activity. Six of the interviewees were church pastors. They were interviewed because they had an extensive knowledge of their church's history. They also proved helpful in explaining the church's current situation in terms of programs and demographics. All of the interviews were conducted in respondents' homes except for the six interviews with the church pastors all of which took place at the respective church. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. They were audio taped with the interviewees consent and were transcribed in full by the author. The interviews were semi-structured so while I had a list of questions to ask each respondent, each interview took its own conversational course at the end of which I was sure to ask any undiscussed and applicable questions (see Appendix).

Most interviews began with informal conversation about my choice of research topic and

general studies. It was important to establish a level of comfort and ease with the interviewees as some seemed a bit anxious about the kinds of questions I was about to ask. Most interviewees closely read the interview consent form and several asked questions about either the process of the interview, the overall purpose of the study or what was to be done with the interview material. The environment of most interviews felt relaxed and comfortable as we sat in the respondents' living or dining room. Relationships were easily established, in part I believe because my maternal family was, and is, a part of this German church community and some of my interviewees knew (of) my relatives. For several people, the interview was much like a story telling time as the respondent passed on their oral history. This was the case particularly in interviews where I represented the general age of the respondent's grandchildren. I enjoyed the development of the interview relationship as I believe it brought an honesty and sincerity to interviewees' remarks but it also means that many stories took on a nostalgic tone and a yearning for the 'good ol' days' perhaps influencing the choice of more positive memories or experiences. The church leaders (non-pastors) were almost all retired persons and seemed for the most part flattered to be asked about their churches and their immigrant experiences. The interviews with church pastors took a very different tone than those with church members themselves. Pastors spoke at greater length without the prompting of questions; in some cases, the interview was more like a sermon! I enjoyed them just the same and appreciated the frankness and critical viewpoints offered by the pastors on the role of ethnic culture in the church.

An audio recorder was used to tape all of the interviews. Before beginning I explained that this was the simplest way to ensure that an accurate record of statements was taken but that if the interviewee was uncomfortable with the tape recorder I could instead simply take notes. All of the interviewees consented to using the tape recorder and its presence did not appear to

interfere with the flow of the interview. Only one interviewee appeared to be particularly conscious of the tape recorder and he was careful to discuss only the positive aspects of the church. He wanted to confirm when I had turned the recorder off and then proceeded to mention some of the difficulties the church is currently facing.

The process of interviewing went remarkably smoothly and there were few surprises. The one thing that I did not anticipate was the emotional power of evoked memories. While telling particular stories of the grace experienced by a church as it tried to financially establish itself, of the death of a pastor who had given his life to helping immigrants and of the sacrifices made by the entire church community in order to build a spiritual home, several of the interviewees became very emotional. Three actually broke down into tears. I suppose I was most surprised because I have seen few men of this age group with traditional upbringings display such passionate emotions. I was quite comfortable with their overwhelming emotional expressions. I took them as confirmation of the centrality of the church in their lives. It also confirmed my belief in the importance of the spiritual significance of the church community for these German immigrants. I did wonder in reflection if they would have allowed themselves to reveal such feelings had I been male.

## 3.2    CHURCH CONGREGATION MODELS

In attending to particular contexts, whether the local neighbourhood, an ethnic or linguistic group, or an economic class, churches attempt to mould themselves into fitting particular models or typologies. With or without intention, churches evolve through these models as they experience growth and decline and as meeting spaces become crowded or empty. Individual churches must constantly assess their demographic circumstances. It became clear

after my first few interviews that, among other factors, the impact of a changing neighbourhood

has significant bearing on the evolution of the life cycle of the church. Churches must be

dynamic institutions, observing and anticipating changes in their social environments; those

failing to do so risk losing members and, most significantly, losing young people. Those

churches attached to particular neighbourhoods and serving a specific sub-group of residents

must be particularly conscious of their relationship with the community. Norton (1964) explains,

> *When the urban areas began to grow, the church did not understand that the very*
> *concept of community was changing...If there had previously been some real*
> *significance in the coterminous relationship between the community and the*
> *parish, it was immediately cancelled out in the proliferation of parishes as a*
> *result of this tactic. The tactic fixed a special kind of kinship between church and*
> *place of residence...Thus it was that the church, by the very nature of its*
> *organization, fostered the subcommunity insularity (16-17).*

Very few neighbourhood based ethnic churches avoid what Norton describes here. Most,

"function with indifference to the context around them and end up as sub-communities in their

neighbourhoods" (Posterski & Nelson 1997:182). As a result of such criticism, many church

leaders in the past ten years have become interested in a body of literature in theological studies

concerned with church growth that identifies church models or typologies. The models are

organizational formats after which churches may attempt to pattern themselves as appropriate to

their particular context and circumstance. It is well recognized that churches, ethnic churches in

particular, cycle through common sequences of life events such as those described here by

Mullins:

> *Minority churches are initially established to meet the needs of the immigrant*
> *generation. During this first stage, the services and activities are naturally*
> *dominated by the language and clergy from the old country. The emergence of a*
> *native-born generation leads minority churches into the second stage. In order to*
> *effectively recruit the acculturated generation, bilingual clergy must be secured*
> *and English services introduced. Failure to adapt means an end to successful*
> *membership recruitment and certain decline as the first generation disappears*

*from the scene. Structural assimilation generates new problems for minority churches and brings them to a third stage. Membership leakage through mobility and intermarriage makes organizational survival a critical concern. The disappearance of the original immigrant members means that minority churches are again in a monolingual stage, but at this point they are dominated by the language of the host society (Mullins 1989:177).*

All churches cycle through a life cycle that normally lasts approximately forty-five years. After establishing themselves, churches often have a very slow period of growth for the first two to three years before they experience an exponential growth as families who value the church as a source of morality and socialization join with their young children. After the period of rapid growth, churches reach a plateau at which they remain for approximately twenty-five years as children age. When the children leave to start their own families and churches, the church begins its cycle of decline at which time a decision is made by church leaders that will either restart the life cycle or will end in the church's death. For immigrant or ethnic churches, the cycle presented here is exacerbated by cultural and linguistic issues in the church. The ten churches examined here each represent different points of the life cycle (most however, are at the end or beyond the plateau stage) and later each will serve as an example of some of the models below which categorize churches by the residential geography of their membership and their ethnic composition. In chapter six I will consider why and how churches move through these models.

There are essentially only two **geographic models** identified in the literature on church growth and many churches would fit neither of these models. The first is the *parish neighbourhood church* which functions as the local chaplain in the European system. Every neighbourhood is served by a parish church and the priest of that church is responsible for the spiritual well-being of those in his catchment area (Bakke & Roberts 1986). The parish church functions much the same as the *community church,* though the community church is generally

united by a common identity most often based on characteristics of history, geography, ethnicity or social class (Bibby 1993) whereas the parish church is simply united by arbitrary geographic boundaries. These parish and community models operate at the scale of neighbourhood and traditionally it meant that most members lived within walking distance of their place of worship. One interviewed pastor called his a neighbourhood church, describing it as,

> *...identified by fixed boundaries. Its people share the same services, they go to the same schools, they shop in the same stores, they go to the same library, they see each other on the street every day. And the church is just all a part of that neighbourhood...that's how the ethnic churches for the first generation [of German immigrants] identify themselves.*

He further suggested that "there are shared assumptions," which means that less work is necessary to bring about understanding between people. Unfortunately the existence of already shared assumptions can sometimes mean there are limits to growth because, "you are subject to changes [in the neighbourhood]...you can only draw upon certain people so you stick at a plateau."

In contrast, the second geographic model is the larger scale *regional church* serving geographically dispersed members who travel from all parts of the city to their place of worship. The regional church is a product of the automobile and the willingness of members to travel longer distances often for a wider range of church programs for all ages. Kawano (1992) explains that many of these regional churches are attracting members based on worship or organizational preferences:

> *In cities...many of us drive to the church which best serves our needs, even if it is not the closest. Thus, in a sense, many mainline parishes become 'ethnic' in order to survive. They specialize in a particular type of preaching, prayer or organization: they stress certain traditions, from England or Ireland or Newfoundland (14-15).*

Regional churches tend to have much larger memberships (some even approaching or exceeding

1,000) and are most often located on major transportation arteries. It is suggested that their lack of identification with any particular community eliminates their vulnerability to the life-cycle of a neighbourhood (Bibby 1993). These churches have been criticized for being too large and anonymous and for abandoning communities which they would serve. Their size allows them to profit from an economy of scale, running a greater number and variety of programs for more people of a greater range of ages, justifying their employment of a specialized pastoral staff for music, outreach, family ministry, children's ministry, youth and/or the elderly. Canadian regional churches are toned down versions of the American megachurch described here by Conn:

> *In this decentralized world the church loses its grip on local geographical neighbourhood and is transformed into a megachurch, twenty-five minutes away by car. The size of the megachurch becomes limited only by the size of its parking lot. And the lost community created by this change finds its replacement in the small cell groups and house meetings also characteristic of the successful megachurch (Conn 1994:191).*

The interviewee above who identified the neighbourhood church, contrasted the local church model with one similar to the regional church. He called their model the *neighbourhoods'* church which,

> *serves a number of neighbourhoods and has to be very clear about what draws [members] to the centre and very distinct about engaging people where they live on the edge. I think it is a little harder to manage a neighbourhoods church because the assumptions will vary from community to community of the people who are involved...we have become a neighbourhoods church.*

Somewhere within and between these models fits the description of most of the churches interviewed in this study. I will call them *city-wide churches*. As explained by a current church moderator, "what kept our church alive for a long time was people driving in from the suburbs. We called it a metropolitan church, that was the model we were looking at." The German ethnic churches for the most part began as community or neighbourhood churches. Slowly, beginning in the 1960s but accelerating in the 1970s and 1980s, they experienced an out-migration of

members to outlying suburban and exurban areas. Many of these members continued to commute back to the church but others have left to find a place of worship closer to home. The German churches do not have the benefits of size or youthfulness that regional churches generally enjoy. Nor have they been able to maintain their geographical closeness and intimacy as a neighbourhood church. Most are caught in a difficult and hopefully transitionary model still attracting a relatively small city-wide congregation.

Another body of church model literature focuses on the ethnographic characteristics of church members. Most **ethnographic models** focus on homogeneous ethnic or linguistic communities (Bakke & Roberts 1986); multi-ethnic or multi-cultural church congregations receive minimal attention in examples though issues of diversity in the church are becoming more widely recognized (see Cenkner 1996; Foster & Brelsford 1996). There are four church models based on the ethnic profile of the congregation.

The *immigrant church* is a first and sometimes second generation phenomenon wherein religious customs, symbols and ceremonies of the native land are transplanted to a church in the new host country (Bakke 1987). The experiences of immigration and the challenges of settlement and adjustment become a unifying call to immigrants of like origin. Initially at least, the mother tongue is the only language used in worship. Eventually this becomes an issue of conflict as the second generation become less comfortable with their mother tongue and more comfortable with English. When language transition begins to take place immigrant churches may develop into ethnic churches. In cities where there is a high degree of residential segregation or concentration, immigrant churches may also be identified as community or neighbourhood churches.

No longer functioning exclusively in the language of its mother country, the *ethnic*

*church* preserves a formidable degree of the cultural ethos of that country, even when it accepts non-ethnic members. As Kawano (1992) explains, "Ethnic parishes form because a group of people find themselves isolated - geographically, culturally or linguistically - in a larger society. Part of this isolation may be deliberate...or the racial or cultural group may isolate itself to protect its special characteristics in a new land" (11). If the isolation or concentration is geographic then, like the immigrant church, the ethnic church also functions as a community church. For some German churches in Vancouver the ethnic church was deliberately segregated to protect the German culture in Vancouver. For others, it was the case that there was a need to establish a segregated German church as Germans were labelled as undesirables after the war. This parallels the experience of the Black churches in Britain of both Caribbean and African origin; churches that were established because of exclusionary experiences. They, "are explainable by the fact that this Christianity developed in response to the need for black Christians to make sense of the state of 'ethnic minority' imposed on them when they came to Britain" (Kalilombe 1997:307).

In the *international church* model members are drawn together from diverse national backgrounds to break from the nationalistic and linguistic constraints of the ethnic church (Bakke & Roberts 1986). Descriptions of this model are vague and perhaps the label of *multicultural church* may be more appropriate with an emphasis on the desire to attract members who pro-actively choose to worship, interact and socialize with members of multiple ethnic groups. Kawano (1992) is the only author to articulate the multicultural model which he argues can be used to save dying congregations from extinction through deriving strength from a number of integrated groups. For several of the interviewed churches, this model of a multicultural church was what they are trying to become, though not all in the congregation agreed as one interviewee

explained:

> *I think if you speak with the people who vision about where the church should go and should be, multicultural is the dream. Probably if you talk to the rank and file older generation, multicultural is not something you'd want. And if you push hard enough it was probably some stupid idea that Pierre Trudeau dreamed up.*

The multicultural church is biblically justified (Espin 1996) and for some, an attractive and engaging model. One leader from one of the churches closest to representing this model explained:

> *We are really one people. We are different colours and backgrounds but we are one creation. God didn't create any of us better than any other...it is up to us to see how we're different and how we can work together. I think it adds a lot of interest to our church. When we have a potluck dinner and we have Chinese food and Punjabi food and we have German food, it adds a lot of diversity which is interesting and even a bit exciting. I think it would be rather boring to have all German.*

The fourth model is the *multi-language cluster church* most commonly found in transitional urban neighbourhoods. In this model, host churches share building space with separate and autonomous congregations worshipping in different languages, often at different times. Though there is little interaction between the congregations except for administrative or logistical purposes, the multi-language church model is used by many churches to bridge out of a mono-ethnic church tradition to reach new ethnic groups in the neighbourhood. As will be seen, when left to their own devices some administratively separate congregations become more intimately connected as Canadian born children attend the Sunday Schools of the larger English congregation.

A final model not explicitly identified in the literature is, what I term the *successive ethnic congregation* model. In this instance, the movement of ethnic communities into and out of the church mimics the presence or absence of the same ethnic groups in the neighbourhood. Burns (1994) alludes to this model in his discussion of a San Francisco church built by the Irish

community, 'infiltrated' by the new local Hispanic community and finally attended by a wave of Filipino residents from the community. Services were continually provided in all languages though membership numbers of particular ethnic groups waxed and waned as the dominant group shifted. This church example represents a unique model in that the church never became multi-cultural in the integrated sense, nor can it be considered a multi-language church because it administratively remained one church congregation. This model is extensively used in Catholic churches where masses are offered in several languages.

## 3.3 GERMAN CHURCHES IN VANCOUVER

The seventeen German churches in Vancouver were established between 1927 and 1968; the first four were established in the interwar period and the remaining thirteen began after World War Two, as a result of the impact of the post war German immigration (Figure 3.1). The earlier churches began with a small number of committed members and most later churches either developed as daughter congregations or splits from the earlier established congregations. Most of the churches experienced growth in membership to at least 300 members, several churches reached over 400 and at least five churches recorded over 650 members at their highest point (Figure 3.2)[2].

It is necessary to point out that a good number, if not most Germans in Vancouver did not participate in German ethnic religious life[3]. This is easily determined by counting the number of

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[2] As some churches do not keep membership records not all of the trends in membership can be reported. Membership figures for Lutheran churches are not used because they are particularly problematic and bear little reflection on the actual number of church attendees. Mennonite churches chose not to reveal their membership records and therefore the three Baptist church membership records were used. They are well reflective both of the church attendance and of the experience of declines in membership.

[3] In O'Bryan's (1975) study on non-official language groups in Canada, he reported that nationally, the percentage of Germans who were associated with churches where almost all members were also of German ethnicity was

## Figure 3.1: Establishment of Selected German Ethnic Churches - Vancouver
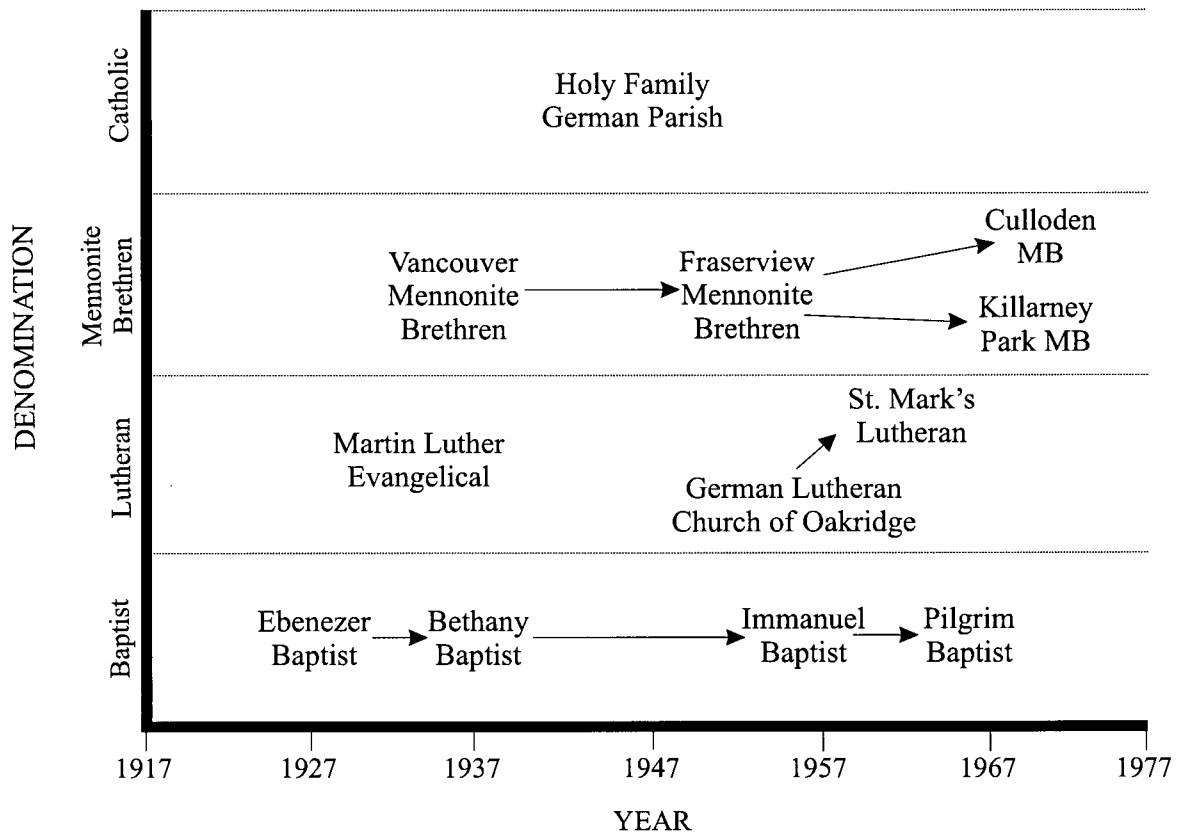


Source: Various Church Documents and Interviews

immigrants and comparing this with the total memberships for all churches. Gumpp (1989)

suggested that this lack of participation may have been the result of "accelerated secularization

from immigration, preoccupation with material and social adjustments or rejection of the

structure of North American churches" (113). She also notes that because Germans were not

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approximately 15%, 6.7% were associated with churches where more than half were also German. Thirty-eight percent were associated with churches were there were less than half or no other Germans; 16% were not associated with any church.

# Figure 3.2: Annual Membership of Three German Churches
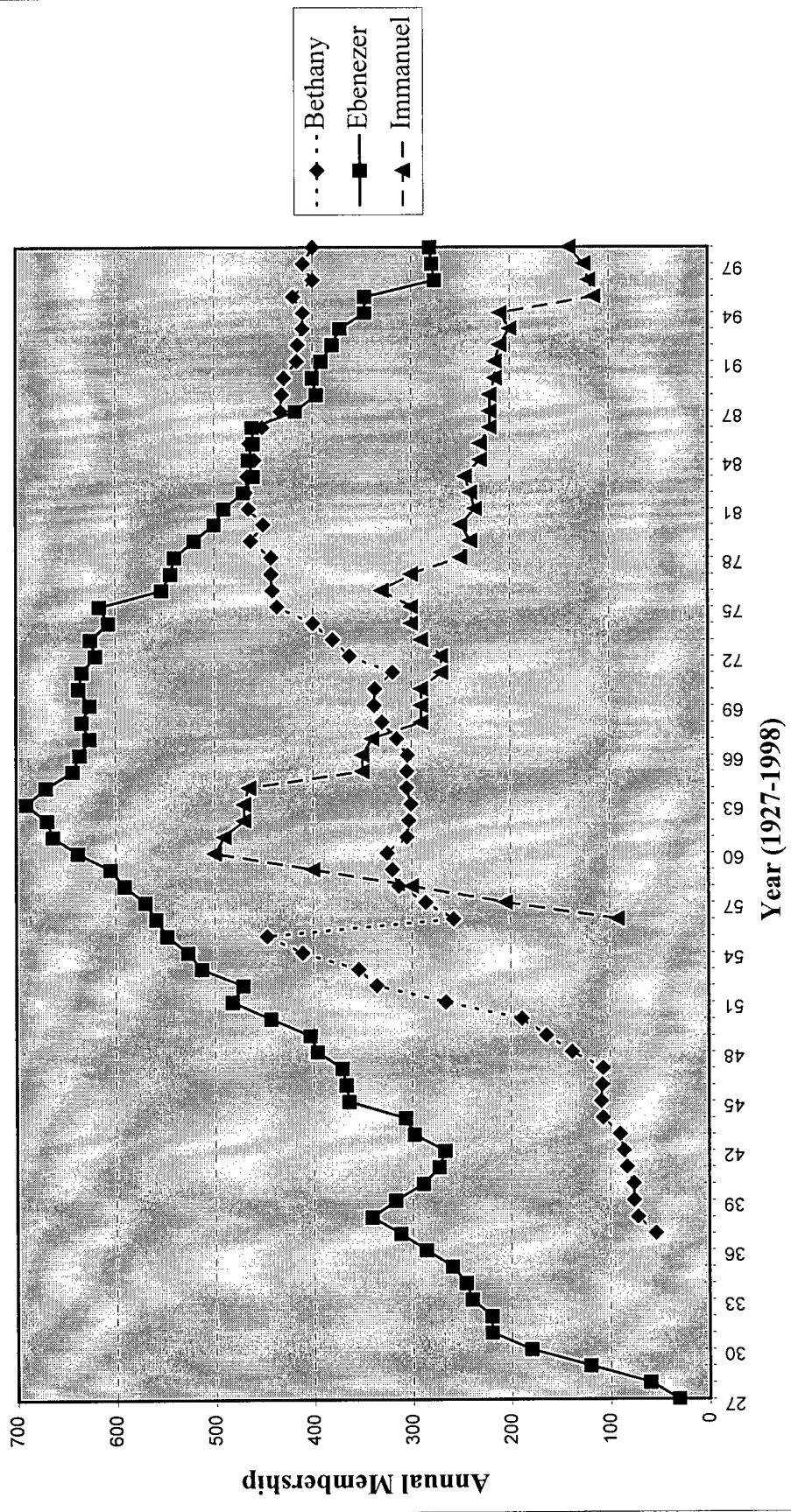


Notes: Ebenezer membership drops off in 1937 when Bethany begins and Bethany's membership drops in 1956 when Immanuel begins as each were daughter congregations of the former. Bethany has recently maintained its membership while Immanuel experienced a recent decline as 90 members left Immanuel to join Bethany at their new church building.

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necessarily tied to particular denominations many assimilated into Canadian churches. She notes that in 1971, 13% of ethnic Germans belonged to the United Church[4].

On a regular basis there is little interaction between the German speaking churches but they do have some connections through the German Alliance. One pastor of a still German speaking congregation explained the activities of the Alliance:

> *the German Alliance meets for the prayer week in January and then we also have like a Crusade in the fall with a speaker from Germany who comes to preach for one or two evenings. They have a pastor exchange in October. That's the only link between the German congregations of various denominations.*

Using the models outlined above, the German churches in Vancouver would best be classified in their early years as neighbourhood, immigrant/ethnic churches. Of the ten churches interviewed there are a few exceptions to the neighbourhood classification, but for the most part the churches began as community based, ethnically and linguistically homogenous institutions. Almost all of the German churches were located in the original German neighbourhood (Figure 3.3) identified in chapter two (see Figure 2.1A) though later established churches are less likely to located within the precise boundaries of the German concentration (though they are still in the general vicinity of South Vancouver). The membership of the Fraserview church, "shows a more evenly dispersed distribution of families. This is a reflection of the fact that these new churches were established to serve families already scattered...from the original core area and families coming into the city and settling in an extensive area, all of whom felt no great need or desire for close settlement" (Siemens 1960:128). The more even distribution still lies within the frame of the German neighbourhood (see Figure 2.3).

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[4] As just another indication of how confusing the issue of 'counting' Germans is, a reminder that in 1991 the percentage of those born in Germany who identified themselves as United Church members was less than 2%.

Figure 3.3: Original Locations of German Ethnic
Churches, Vancouver, B.C.
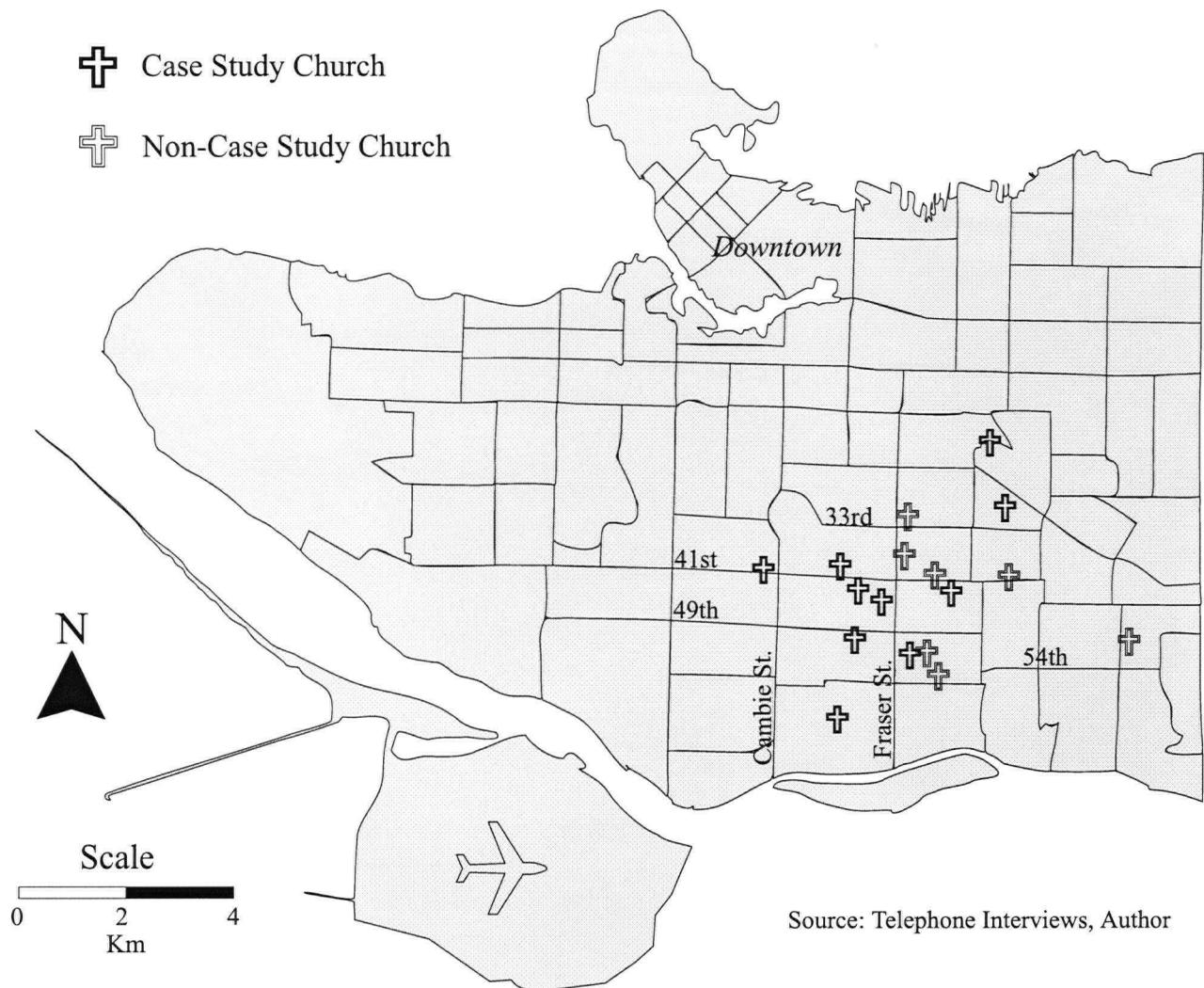
With the exception of the first German church in the city, the churches established

between 1930 and 1960 were, 'tucked away' off of main streets. One respondent suggested that,

*a lot of that boils down to what was happening during World War II. They did
not want to be seen or highlighted. There are people in our congregation who
have very bad memories during World War II of having to report into the
authorities every week because they were German by descent even though they
were Canadian citizens. There are memories people have of worship services
being stopped by the police and people being marched out onto the sidewalk and
the building being searched for radio transmitters. So it was not in their interests*

*at that time to be prominent.*

There is a second factor which likely influenced the location of churches; the Master Plan for the City of Vancouver in the late 1920s intentionally moved all churches off of arterial road ways to side streets. As a result, almost all churches in Vancouver, not just the German churches, are 'tucked away.' The less pronounced locations of the churches has meant that they do not enjoy the prominence of churches whose signage and visible community presence gives them a welcome advantage when seeking to reach the larger neighbourhood. Both the unique and common histories of each of the ten churches warrants that attention be given to their situations (Table 3.1).

## 3.4 ISSUES BETWEEN GERMAN IMMIGRANT COHORT GROUPS

There is one issue that requires consideration before attention is turned to the specifics of the German churches in Vancouver. It is an issue raised by several of my interviewees and one that is common in the literature on ethnic churches. Sturhahn (1976) writes that one of the greatest areas of conflict in the German churches strangely developed "within the circles of immigrants." The seriousness and frequency of these clashes, he wrote, were "far-reaching and [they] often had puzzling consequences" (216). On one hand, continuing immigration maintained ethnic church growth, but on the other hand, alienation and fear often developed between new arrivals and their forerunners (Warner 1998). Friedmann (1952) described the tensions between the German immigrants of the pre and post World War Two cohorts:

> *They are separated by outlook and experience. The older Germans feel that the new German immigrants expect too much spoon-feeding and have little self-reliance. The younger Germans often feel that the older immigrants are smug and not interested in their problems. Germans...[can tend] to disintegrate into bitterly antagonistic factions (44).*

# Table 3.1: Summary Table of Ten Study Churches

| Church | Denomination | Year Established | Approximate Current Membership | Geographic Model when Established | Current Geographic Model | Current Ethnographic Model | Current Worship Service Languages ()=tenant | Current Immigrant Programs/ Services |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ebenezer Baptist | Baptist | 1927 | 350 | neighbourhood | neighbourhood and city wide | multi-language cluster, becoming multicultural | English, (Chinese) & Punjabi | Kids club; ESL; Youth Program |
| Martin Luther Evangelical | Lutheran | 1934 | 320 | neighbourhood | regional | ethnic German | German & English | None |
| Bethany Baptist | Baptist | 1937 | 350 | neighbourhood | special 'neighbourhoods' model | trying to become multicultural | German & English | None - looking into for future |
| Vancouver Mennonite Bretheren | MB | 1939 | 130 (between 130-170 attending) | neighbourhood | neighbourhood and city wide | multilanguage cluster, trying to become multicultural | German, English & (Spanish) | Will begin ESL, refugee sponsor, Boys & Girls clubs |
| Holy Family German Parish | Catholic | 1947 | 400 | city-wide | city-wide (Germans) and neighbourhood | ethnic succession model | German, English & Spanish | Refugee Program |
| Fraserview Mennonite Bretheren | MB | 1954 | 200 | city-wide | city-wide and neighbourhood | multilanguage cluster, trying to become multicultural | English & (Chinese) | Youth drop in, Kids programs |
| Immanuel Baptist | Baptist | 1956 | 110 | neighbourhood | city-wide | ethnic vs. trying to become multicultural | German & English | Chinese ministry, ESL |
| Lutheran Church of Oakridge | Lutheran | 1957 | approximately 150 (40-70 attending) | city-wide | city-wide | ethnic German (expects to fold) | German & English | started moms & tots group (primarily German) |
| St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran | Lutheran | 1961 | 398 (120 attending) | city-wide | regional | ethnic German | German & English | None |
| Culloden Mennonite Bretheren | MB | 1968 | 270 | neighbourhood | neighbourhood | multilanguage cluster, trying to become multicultural | German, English, Greek (Vietnamese) | Youth program; informal programs by church members |

Sources: Interviews, Church Documents

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Cleavages between immigrant cohort groups split churches and led, in a few denominations, to the establishment of daughter congregations. Sturhahn (1976) described the divisions in the German Baptist churches as follows: "When in 1951 great numbers of Baptists from inside the German Reich came, the various 'water currents' found it exceedingly difficult to mix into one large stream. It appeared at times that the only common factor was the German language and the treasure of songs and hymns" (212). Differences existed not only between German Baptist immigrant cohorts but also between German immigrants in the other three denominations; they were particularly emphasized by German Lutheran church members. One Lutheran pastor explained that the divisions between the German Lutheran churches are still visible today:

> *I can still see that now a days when it comes to contacts between for example our congregation and [X Lutheran congregation]. [They have] a number of people from East Prussia, from Polish areas and we have quite a number of people from Baden-Wurtenberg...some how...I mean there are no animosities but...somehow, maybe the wave length is not there. No arguments. No hassles. But there is no frequency on which to communicate.*

Another Lutheran church member similarly explained the significance of the cultural differences between the immigrant cohorts within one particular Lutheran church. He was trying to be diplomatic when he said:

> *Now when I spoke of cultural differences, those cultural differences exist almost as strong today as they did 30 years ago. The clash between the old German-English and the post war people of German origin still exists [in our church today]. As far as integration is concerned, the two groups really have not integrated [together]. They work together somewhat but when it comes down to the family and the heart you are not seeing that integration take place.*

In this case differences were not enough to break the congregation but obviously tension still exists between the cohort groups. In some cases congregations were able to hang together and build a cohesive church community. Where that was the case, one member explained that, it was the faith of church members which overrode cultural differences. One member explained that in

his congregation, where there were quite a number of immigrants both from the pre- and post-World War Two immigrant cohort groups, spiritual convictions maintained congregational unity:

> *there were some immigrants coming from West Germany and they had a whole different outlook than the people coming from Poland or from Russia. They had a different mentality, different values, different traditions, different habits, different taboos. It was really difficult to bring these people together and hold them together as a unit. There I think the spiritual impact was felt. That the Christ that brought us together was stronger than the things that divided us. Though that was not always apparent.*

Not always apparent nor always true; not all the churches were able to claim such victory as will become evident now in examining each of the ten churches being studied.

## 3.5    GERMAN BAPTIST CHURCHES

Prior to 1940 there were two German Baptist churches in Vancouver belonging to the North American Baptist General Conference. Post World War Two immigration from Germany and other parts of Europe as well as from the Prairies, where German Baptists had been strongly established since the first World War, resulted in the addition of two more German Baptist churches in Vancouver in the 1950s and 60s (Burkinshaw 1995). Ebenezer Baptist church (initially named First German Baptist church) was established in 1927 but by the end of the Second World War, "Ebenezer Baptist Church had established itself as an English speaking congregation" (Sturhahn 1976:229). A daughter congregation, Bethany Baptist, broke off in 1939 because of differences in culture and traditions and "because the Ebenezer church had begun to use the English language" (Pousett 1983:65). Bethany became the German speaking congregation and its strength grew after the War when it "experienced a strong influx of immigrants." (Sturhahn 1976:229). The church membership grew so much and so rapidly that another daughter congregation was begun in 1956. The pastor from Bethany started Immanuel Baptist with 200 members from Bethany's congregation. In 1965 history repeated itself again

when the same pastor took 100 of Immanuel's members to begin another new church, Pilgrim Baptist only a few blocks away.

A sudden drop in the number of German immigrants halted church planting in the German neighbourhood. Pilgrim remained small as the "flow of immigrants had by that time ebbed to a mere trickle" (Sturhahn 1976:230). Though all of the immigrants attending the German Baptist churches were German speaking, their actual place of origin differed (see Chapter two) and this was the major factor precipitating the splitting off of daughter congregations. As a church pastor of one of the churches explained,

> *The first wave was actually [from] Germany proper, the second wave was more [from] Prussia, Poland and the Ukraine and the third wave was then from another place and that kind of precipitated a move from Bethany to Immanuel...then among all of them there was still kind of that feeling of distance and that then fawned Pilgrim. So I think it was more that each church had been identified as social territory, familiar territory...[their differences] kind of enforced the breaks and the moves. Even...just their accents...the way they spoke.*

Importantly the cleaving of German Baptist congregations is not an isolated phenomenon as the same cultural differences between cohort groups of immigrants has split Lutheran, and to a lesser extent, Mennonite congregations. This theme will be returned to in greater detail in chapter four.

Several additional daughter congregations of the German churches were planted in the suburban areas of Greater Vancouver[5] in the 1960s and 1970s but in these churches, English was the primary language of worship. These churches were founded and attended by both first and second generation immigrants who had chosen suburban residential locations.

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[5] These churches included Mary Hill Baptist in Coquitlam, Sunshine Ridge in Surrey, Oceanview in White Rock and Rose of Sharon in Richmond.

### 3.5.1 Ebenezer Baptist Church

Ebenezer Baptist began as a "small and humble" church in an empty store at Main Street and Marine Drive in South Vancouver. Its members had migrated to Vancouver from the Prairie provinces and were of German speaking origin, "a lot of those people came from the diaspora of German speaking people from Russia, Poland." The church moved later in its first year to a small church at 63rd and Main Street, then again to Maple Hall near Fraser Street and 49th Avenue. They first purchased property and built a church in 1929 on 52nd Avenue just off of Fraser Street and moved across the street to their present location in 1954. Each move was precipitated by the need for more space as membership grew. As the first German speaking church in Vancouver, Ebenezer initially served those of Mennonite and Lutheran background before such German denominations were established:

> For a while it seemed that our church served in the form of an alliance fellowship.
> Although Baptist in doctrine, ministry and practice, members of Mennonite,
> Evangelical, Brethren and other faiths had found a spiritual home in our midst.
> In a sense we are actually the mother church of five or six churches that now exist
> in our community.

The church membership grew consistently until the departure of the members who started the Bethany church in 1939. Even with the loss, membership continued to grow until the Second World War when the church had approximately 350 members. The influx of German speaking immigrants facilitated further growth through the 1950s (Figure 3.2). The church history book (Ebenezer Church History, undated) notes that in 1956 there was a Sunday School enrollment of 439, a youth group of 80, two Women's Missions societies with 120 members and several choirs with a total of 112 participants. The membership peaked in the early 1960s at 690 members and then slowly began to decline. The residential distribution of Ebenezer's membership is patterned as most of the early churches were; most members initially lived within walking distance of the

church but in the post war years began to suburbanize, some commuting back to the church on Sundays (see Figure 6.1). In a church history report (Konnert, undated) a church leader described the multiple challenges beginning to face the church in the late 1960s:

*We could not foresee the youth rebellion against the status quo...which would ultimately also reach into the churches. By the mid-60s, we had already undergone a difficult pastoral change...and the passing of other pillars of the church pretty well brought to an end the total family involvement in the activities of the church as we had known it. Other contributing factors were the now mobile society that we were living in and the fact that our children were now being educated in various educational institutions and entering vocations and professions, often taking them out of the mainstream of the church activities.*

When the church began, all of the worship services at Ebenezer were in German but English began to creep into use as the children of the German immigrants became more comfortable with English and as the international circumstances of war necessitated actions at the local level:

*By the beginning of the 1940's we were at war and many changes would follow. Since our name was the 'First German Baptist Church' and hostilities were running high, the name was changed to 'Ebenezer Baptist' and the process of changing from an all German speaking service to bilingual was begun, although, a German speaking service would remain for many years.*

The bilingual service ended in the 1970s though by this time German use was minimal.

Ebenezer had decided early on that its priority was the English congregation:

*our church was one of the first to recognize that we wanted to minister to English speaking and other languages and so when our church initially separated from what is now Bethany church, we maintained the English language and the people who went to Bethany, they maintained the German language. That was the incentive for the membership to split apart. Recognizing that one group wanted to switch to English very quickly so they could teach the children English so they could get jobs more quickly and the other group was more nationalistic and wanted to keep their German heritage intact.*

Today German traditions and language have virtually disappeared from Ebenezer. In the past three years the church has made a concerted effort to become a community church again and has

developed programs and outreach to include and involve its new neighbours. The church hosts a Chinese church congregation that is independent as well as a Punjabi congregation with which it has a genuine relationship. The three groups meet separately but are beginning to interact more and more as the children of the Chinese and Punjabi churches begin to participate in the English Sunday School of the main congregation.

### 3.5.2 Bethany Baptist Church

Established in 1937, Bethany's first congregation was German speaking comprised of inter-war immigrants from Poland, Russia and Germany. But as the current German pastor explained, Bethany's congregation really grew as a result of post World War II immigration hence,

> *[now] the majority of our people that identify with the German congregation...are immigrants...from [between] '50 [and] '65...most of our people came over as younger families with children and they are of course getting on in years now...their children have grown up in this country and they identify with the English culture and congregation...the older people still identify with the German because this is their mother tongue. God spoke German as far as they were concerned.*

Bethany was established in an attempt to prolong the use of the German language in worship and conversation. Successful in that mission to this day the church still maintains a German worship service as well as a German speaking seniors group with over 85 members. Bethany's transition to include an English worship service took place in the early 1960s and though it was not an easy transition it did not damage the spirit of the church (as it had in other congregations). The need for an English service was supported by the German congregation who saw the need for English as the way to keep the young people at church. In return, the younger second generation have upheld the German congregation who are respected as the church founders.

Bethany's first church was located at 47th Avenue and Prince Albert Street in South Vancouver. This church was remodelled twice to accommodate a growing congregation but became so crowded during the 1950s that in 1959 it purchased five lots at 50th Avenue and Quebec to build a new larger church (this even after 200 members left the church to form Immanuel). As one member explained the pressures of growth, "there was not a Sunday when there wasn't a dozen or two dozen new people in the congregation."

In the 1980s, two congregations were using Bethany's facilities for their worship meetings: the Indo-Canadian Christian church and the African Evangelical Christian Fellowship. However these two groups were simply renting space from the main congregation and there was no relationship among the members of the various fellowship groups. After Bethany made the decision to sell their church and move to a new location, no other church congregations have used the church's facilities. In February of this year, Bethany relocated to the Hamilton neighbourhood of east Richmond. The move had been in the planning and development stages for over ten years. Services recently began in the new 1200 seat capacity sanctuary in May; the current membership is 350. The decision to move is explained by the pastor of the still active German congregation:

> the church evaluated its ministry and also evaluated the trend and it was soon
> discovered that the younger families were not going to live in south Vancouver...a
> task force...said if we are going to keep our younger families in the church, we
> will have to relocate our facility because of difficulty with people living in
> Surrey...in White Rock and so on...The trend was to lose these families and
> therefore it was decided to find a location that was central...[this location]
> is...centrally located as far as the map is concerned...it is not difficult [to travel]
> from Surrey, from Vancouver, from Richmond, from White Rock and that has kept
> some of our younger families in the church.

The decision to move was actually made after applications to the City of Vancouver to expand the existing building were turned down. The new church in Richmond is described by the

pastors as a 'communities' church meaning members are part of one of,

> *nine different communities [in Greater Vancouver]. These communities have
> their own home Bible studies and things like that but on Sundays we meet here at
> church...distance [to the church] is not a factor as transportation is not a problem
> especially because they have developed this network of good highways, it's really
> accessible.*

Interestingly Bethany is only one of only two churches (Fraserview is the other) that has chosen

to relocate outside of the South Vancouver neighbourhood.


### 3.5.3   Immanuel Baptist Church

Immanuel Baptist church separated from Bethany during the greatest period of German

immigration to Canada.  With a similar reasoning as that expressed by Bethany when they

separated from Ebenezer, Immanuel's motivation, "was to establish an all German church that

would not be English or half English, that would be strictly German and the unity, rallying cry

was German only."  The members who joined Immanuel were all post World War Two

immigrants from Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Poland and Prussia who, "tried to

maintain their German heritage a little more vigorously than Bethany did." This preservationist

attitude toward culture has brought about much tension and alienation within the congregation.

The struggle between English and German has been difficult as the German members see their

language and culture put on the back bench in favour of attending to the English congregation

and possible new ethnic communities.  English was introduced into the worship services in the

1970s and the church had a particularly difficult time adjusting.  The congregation struggled with

language issues even in the late 1980s and 1990s.  Unlike the Mennonite churches, Immanuel has

lost many of its second generation because, as was explained to me, the "church wanted to be

such a German stronghold and the next generation said, 'I don't care about this stuff.'" Its

membership has declined to around 140.

As a result of the understood purpose of the church to serve only the German community, Immanuel has been particularly ill prepared to deal with the out-migration of its members to the suburbs. When German immigration to Canada dropped off, it

> *created a very disorientating experience especially for the church...because they had been accustomed to the fact that all you had to do was hang out your German shingle and then people will come...well things don't operate that way now-a-days.*

Like many of the others, the church is no longer a neighbourhood church though some wish it would become so again. One member explains,

> *We are not necessarily a community church though we are active in it, we have our outreach programs...my wish for our church would be that we are a city church. That it doesn't matter where you live or what you are but that you are invited to Immanuel. And it's difficult let's say when you have many Asians in the community around you.*

The future of the church has been a significant topic of discussion at Immanuel over the past five years as some members saw it best to sell the church and join back with Bethany as they moved to their new church home. The conflict which developed over the issue of selling and joining or continuing the current ministry has made the church, "in a sense even more German now than it was [five years ago]." As a result of the conflict ninety members left Immanuel to return to Bethany. The church is now still struggling to deal with hurt feelings and bitterness over this issue. Out of this turmoil the church has resolved to maintain its German ministry for as long as it is needed but has also made a commitment to, "move in a multicultural direction." The church now has Chinese attenders and is facing issues of how to effectively develop a multicultural congregation without following the multi-language model of renting out facilities to separate congregations worshipping in other languages.

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## 3.6    GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCHES

On the whole, Vancouver's German Lutheran churches have remained much more 'German' than their Baptist and Mennonite church neighbours.  The very first German Lutheran church in Vancouver was started just before the First World War but it became an English congregation very quickly and never went back to being German.  Immediately following the First World War, the same situation repeated itself and it was not until 1934 that a German Lutheran congregation was established with any lasting success.  This church was Martin Luther Evangelical, located in the South Vancouver neighbourhood, established by German origin immigrants who moved to Vancouver after a short stay in rural Prairie settlements.  Two more German Lutheran congregations were established after World War Two by recent immigrants and though there was some membership transfer from Martin Luther to these two new congregations they were formed as a result of missionary work by a Lutheran pastor from the Synod not as daughter congregations of Martin Luther.  The Synod body had not sent the missionary pastor with the intent of having him establish a church but when he chose to do so at the request of his church followers he was essentially fired from the Synod and two churches resulted.  The pastor founded his own congregation and the Synod sent another German pastor to form the other church.  These two churches respectively became St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran (Independent) and what is now the German Lutheran Church of Oakridge, originally the Lutheran Church of the Cross (affiliated with the Western Canada Lutheran Synod).

Much like the Baptist churches, the Lutheran church members see their congregations as distinct and separate based on the origin of their members.  One church leader and post World War Two immigrant explained,

*Martin Luther is a different church...they have people from pre-war and those*

*Martin Luther people are totally different from our congregation. Different
totally...because of regions...because of where they come from. They haven't
experienced real Germany as we knew it...[the congregation of St. Mark's] were
different people from us too. The younger people were [different from the
Oakridge congregation] just in age but the older ones were Reichsdeutsche and
from Northern Germany. So they were supported by the German church...the
German church bought their building and we really suffered very greatly after
[the separation of St. Mark's and Oakridge].*

### 3.6.1 Martin Luther Evangelical Church

Martin Luther Church was established in 1934 by interwar immigrants, mainly displaced

persons from Russia, Poland, and other parts of Eastern Europe. The church grew significantly

following the second World War when it received many more displaced persons who tripled its

membership to over 600. Martin Luther Church began English services in the 1950s but has

managed to maintain its German service despite losing some of the post war immigrants to the

other younger German Lutheran congregations as well as many more to suburban and exurban

out-migration.

Today part of the membership of Martin Luther wishes to carry on maintaining elements

of their German culture through, for example, monthly German sing-a-long meetings. Between

60% and 70% of church attenders are German speaking. But there is some conflict over the

future direction that the church will take. The church has lost many of its younger families, some

who have joined other churches not identified with German culture and others who have chosen

not to attend any church. The church has not made attempts to serve new ethnic communities of

its neighbourhood, in part because it sees other churches successfully including the new

communities.

### 3.6.2 St. Mark's Lutheran Church

When the congregation of St. Mark's Lutheran church split from the Synod affiliated German Church of the Cross (Oakridge), they began renting facilities from a United Church at 18th Avenue and Fleming Street in East Vancouver. When the United church decided to sell its building the Germans purchased it and have remained there since 1961. Most of the congregation at St. Mark's arrived after the Second World War from Germany and the Baltic countries. The church core formed with 50 or 60 members and grew to a congregation of over 500. Its present average Sunday attendance is around 120 though the number of members on the church rolls number close to 500. By current standards, the real membership of this congregation is about 180 (120 members x 150%). In Germany, one must go through a rigorous process to be dropped from the church roll, hence a long membership list. This congregation (as do the other two Lutheran congregations) operates by the same rule.

The church has firmly maintained its German identity and has consistently hired pastors whose mother tongue is German, often directly from Germany. The church today is still "99% German," but a senior church leader explains that now the aging congregation is beginning to question its future as a German church,

> *we conducted a survey a little while ago and...[it] showed that about 70% of the members are 65 years and older. All of a sudden there is a gap and you [only] have a few younger ones. But the older people, 51 years and older, that is the backbone of the congregation right now. They support the church and they support the German services.*

With this demographic profile the church is committed to continuing the German services because these members are the primary church supporters; without them the church would not exist. The church does however see the future danger in sticking only to the German. For this reason, the church is also committed to the English congregation,

*we will not abandon [the English service]. Someday we will need it and it would be dead wrong for us to say well why waste expenses for the service... when there is only 5 or 10 or 12 people in church. Never mind, we want to keep it up and we must keep it up.*

The church realizes the need to take action in future planning and the issue was raised at the last annual meeting where a commitment was made by the church council to formally consider the church's mission directions. One member explains his concerns,

*where we are seeing ourselves in 5 or 10 years? What are we doing now? What should we be doing? My summation of that was, we are doing many things well...we know we are doing them well or we would not be where we are....but let's have a look where we can do things better...There are a lot of Germans who don't go to church and we should make an effort to find them... our congregation is not ready to go to an all-out effort to raise the English service. This is not racism we are saying, this is what I see...They are just simply not ready...where else could we recruit? Only from the Chinese population in our area. There is no other way because this area is about 70% Chinese. So the only ones we could reach is the Chinese. I don't think our congregation is ready for that. To have Chinese council members, a Chinese pastor, they are just not ready for that...I am realistic on this and this has nothing, I hope you do not sense this as racism. I have wonderful Chinese neighbours.*

St. Mark's has been one of the few if not the only church still receiving German immigrants since the post-war boom, many of whom have been directed there by German Consular officials. But the number of recent German immigrants is of course not sufficient to sustain the church nor do these immigrants necessarily become associated or stay associated with the church after they establish themselves in the city. The future direction of St. Mark's ministry is a significant issue of consideration for the church.

### 3.6.3 German Lutheran Church at Oakridge

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Cross was the Synod affiliated German congregation that is now called the German Lutheran Church at Oakridge. The Oakridge congregation is actually a merger of the German Church of the Cross congregation and the

Icelandic Lutheran Church of Christ congregation.

The Church of the Cross congregation (which initially included those now at St. Mark's Lutheran) met at the Danish Lutheran church at 19th Avenue and Prince Edward Streets before buying the old Redeemer Lutheran church in 1958. When the two congregations split in 1960, those choosing the non-Synod affiliated group left to establish St. Mark's Lutheran. The remaining members struggled with a new pastor. When the city expropriated some of the church land to build a school and park, the church decided to sell the building and move into a shared arrangement with the struggling Icelandic Lutheran church located at 41st Avenue and Cambie Street. The German congregation moved into the Icelandic building in 1970 and the two congregations formally joined in 1986; languages of worship include both English and German. Since that time the German speaking congregation has provided most of the church leadership as the Icelandic congregation (comprising most of the English speaking congregation) has continually lost members. The German members are predominantly post World War Two immigrants, "a few from West Germany, a lot from East Germany and then a lot of Baltics, actually, the Baltics were the instrumental people." Unlike most of the German ethnic churches, the Oakridge congregation was never really a neighbourhood church but drew German speakers from the larger Vancouver city region.

Within the German congregation there has been a conscious effort to maintain the German language. The current pastor was hired from Germany; the ability of the pastor to speak and preach in High German is a top priority for German Lutheran congregations. The desire to maintain the German heritage is evident in the singing of German hymns, the traditional German Christmas service, and the German spring sing-a-long. But now that church members are aging they are following the same life cycle as the Icelandic congregation, "the situation is exactly the

same it's just about maybe 30 years later...the same story has repeated itself again and now we [German congregation] are just waiting to be swallowed up by another congregation or a community."

In the last ten years the church has made attempts to invite its neighbours to church, "the council members walked from door to door to door and handed out invitations and pamphlets and the result was nothing...that was very discouraging because we tried to offer projects and programs to the neighbourhood and the response was nil." With only one-third of church members attending English services, the congregation recognized the necessity of increasing membership in its English congregation but thus far it has not been successful. Now the congregation is looking to close its doors as its Sunday attendance has declined to less than forty,

*I always promised when I was chairman that we would have German services for as long as we can afford it. Right now we are in the process where we [are] seek[ing] two or three congregations who will dissolve their congregations and we will dissolve ours and form one church and choose one property to make one large church. People get too old, people who are running the churches. There are too few of them and it is not good stewardship to waste good money just running the church.*

## 3.7   MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCHES

The Mennonite churches discussed here are of the Mennonite Brethren tradition, a partner body in the national Mennonite Central Committee which acts as the social and welfare arm of the Mennonite churches[6]. The mother congregation of the Mennonite Brethren denomination is the Vancouver Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church located in the heart of the South Vancouver neighbourhood around a hub of Mennonite immigrants. It

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[6] The other large Mennonite church that is represented in Vancouver is the Mennonite Conference division and they too have several churches in the South Vancouver area as well as daughter congregations in other parts of Greater Vancouver. I chose the Mennonite Brethren division churches somewhat arbitrarily as I had better contacts.

was established largely by immigrants who had initially settled in rural areas of the Lower Mainland and the Prairies and, "it became a local spiritual home for MBs living in that area." The Mennonite Brethren strongly adhered to their German mother tongue, emphasized their religious and ethnic characteristics and developed a strong group consciousness (Froeschle 1992). In fact, the mother congregation still holds services in German, this almost 65 years after the church was established. In contrast, the Dutch Reformed churches in Vancouver only maintained their language for an average of ten years (Burkinshaw 1995).

The Vancouver Mennonite churches experienced continued and significant growth particularly in the post World War Two period and the constant influx of immigrants necessitated the establishment of several daughter churches. The first daughter church of the Vancouver MB was Fraserview (1955) and from the Fraserview MB Church, Killarney Park MB (1961) was planted. Also in 1961, approximately 120 members of Vancouver MB, mainly middle aged couples and young people, left to begin the Willingdon MB church in Burnaby which is now a flourishing church incorporating seven languages (other than English) in their Sunday services and enjoying a weekly attendance close to 1,000. The last of the Vancouver MB daughter churches was the Culloden MB church in 1968 and it was initially intended to replace the mother church as it was much larger and only a few blocks away. The Vancouver MB church closed its doors for only a few weeks. At the first worship service in the new Culloden building, the church was nearly filled to its capacity and so it was decided that both churches would continue to serve the community.

### 3.7.1 Vancouver Mennonite Brethren

Established in 1937, most members of Vancouver Mennonite Brethren came to Canada from Russia in the 1920s. Many were initially settled in the Lower Mainland and the church grew through serving many of the children of the immigrants who were moving to Vancouver for employment and educational reasons. The church thrived with the influx of the post World War Two settlers; in the early 1950s the church membership more than doubled and the seating capacity of 375 was grossly inadequate for the almost 700 Sunday attenders. Even after several churches were planted and took with them members the mother MB church, the church building remained too small for its congregation. After the new Culloden church was built, Vancouver MB recommenced meeting after being closed for only one or two Sundays and both churches continued to grow into the 1970s when they became home to Russian Mennonites who had immigrated first to South America and were now sponsored to come to Canada. A church pastor explained,

> ...Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, were the chief receptors of many of the Mennonites that were disenfranchised due to the war...as soon as it was possible for these immigrants who were in South America, they came to Canada. Canada at that time offered much better opportunity to get ahead.

Until the mid 1970s the church remained mainly German in large part because of the German speaking South American immigrants. It was not until 1988 that the church separated their services for English and German members, though they had held bilingual services since 1958. The church membership began to decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s as more and more members moved back to the Fraser Valley or to the suburbs. In recent years, the congregation of about 150 has become somewhat multicultural with members of Latino, Lebanese, Peruvian, and

Filipino backgrounds participating. A long time church leader explains his view of the future of the German service, "I think the German language, you give it another ten years and I think the bilingual will be dropped all together. It's more and more switching over to the English and you can't get any more ministers that are still bilingual."

### 3.7.2 Fraserview Mennonite Brethren

Fraserview was the first daughter church of the Vancouver MB church and was established in 1955. The church was located at 59th and Knight Street but it moved to a location in north Richmond in 1979 and sold its former building to a Chinese Baptist church group. When first established, half of the Fraserview congregation were Prairie born Germans of post-World War One immigrants, some even of pre-World War One immigrants. The other half of the congregation were Russian born and arrived in the interwar period (Siemens 1960). The church was started with 230 members and quickly doubled in size by 1958 to almost 500 members. With the addition of adherents the church had over 750 participants. A 1961 newspaper article profiling the church highlights the church's emphasis on young people (Regehr 1961). With a youth group of over 100 the church exerted a great deal of effort to maintain the interest of its youth. The Fraserview church moved in 1979 when it recognized that a large proportion of its membership was moving to Richmond. The factors contributing to the church's decision to move were explained by the church pastor,

> *I think it was urbanization and economic kind of stuff...it was the suburban move of a number of people who were making it economically and moved out of East Vancouver and were...breaking new ground economically and with housing and all of this land was developed here. This land immediately here was developed by the people of this church. All of these houses and the condo units were built by the people who had the vision to build this church and they had a whole...they in essence created a community to service the church so that the church then in turn*

*would have the resources to service the community, you know the symbiotic relationship.*

In the new church building, members tried to maintain the community/neighbourhood church model. In fact the church acted as a developer and bought a large tract of land, built residential units around the church and sold them, in part to help finance the church. In the process of the church's move, it lessened its devotion to its German origins and became essentially an English church. Today the German language is absent from the congregation. The church now hosts a daughter congregation of the Chinese Baptist church that bought its old building in South Vancouver but there is no relationship between the Chinese church and Fraserview's congregation. Their current relationship is essentially as landlord-tenant.

### 3.7.3 Culloden Mennonite Brethren

Since its first Sunday, Culloden has been the largest of the two Mennonite Brethren churches remaining in South Vancouver. Most of Culloden's members are transfers from the Vancouver MB church (which was going to close) but the large initial attendance as well as the anticipation of continued immigration from South America kept both churches alive. In retrospect one leader expressed thought that the decision was not a wise one,

> *Now we sort of feel that we should have sold the other church (Vancouver MB) because our church (Culloden) has dwindled from 550 members down to 270 and we are struggling and the Vancouver MB church is struggling...trying to keep a pastor for the German as well as for the English and having a youth pastor as well. It's quite a struggle financially. But we're not quite ready yet to join...But really that would be the best thing...to sell one of the churches and just concentrate on one church that has German and English.*

Though most of the first church members were neighbourhood residents, most now commute from Richmond (60-65%) and many of the original congregation members have moved to the Fraser Valley. In the last five years, the church has made strong efforts to connect with its local

community through youth and children's programs. The church now hosts two other language groups, a Greek congregation of between 15 to 25 members meet while the English service is held and a Vietnamese congregation of approximately 50 young families uses the sanctuary on Sunday afternoons (this congregation essentially has a landlord-tenant relationship with the church). The church still has a German congregation of 90-100 people to meet the needs of the elderly German speaking church members. The largest church service is the English and attendance runs between 250 and 275 in a church that seats 500.

## 3.8    HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Holy Family Church was built by displaced persons and those from Russia and Slovakia who came to Canada in 1948 and 1949. The first generation of people who came from Germany proper arrived in the 1950s and the differences between these two cohort groups did not lead to outright conflict but as one long time member explained, "we had different outlooks on life, different educations...we just had to adjust to each other." The church was established as a national parish and therefore was the home to any German speaking Catholic in Vancouver. Members were from Russia, Romania, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, South America and Germany.

The church first met at the Ukrainian Catholic parish in the Downtown Eastside. In 1948 the church bought property at its current location and built a school on the west half of the property just ten years later. The location was chosen with the help of , "a large city map showing the concentration of the [German speaking people interested in the parish] which proved that Victoria Drive and 33rd. Avenue was about the centre." The church was a strong religious and social centre for German Catholics but it has experienced significant decline, particularly in

the past ten years as members have passed away or moved up the Valley. A once very involved member now living in Abbotsford explained,

> *they had a very active youth group when we were still there but now they don't have anything...except the Knights of Columbus....nothing else is going on there...[but] because the facilities are there...the bishop said you better take in the Spanish people because they need the space. And as we see when we drove into Vancouver or to Holy Family church, this is a young community and there is life again. But the German parish will just disappear one of these days...We always have a shock when we go into the church and there are only a few [German] people there.*

As a national parish, the purpose of the church was to provide a place of worship for German speakers. Now that most members feel equally at home with English, many have moved to their local parishes. The decline of the church is explained by this long time member,

> *in our case, some die, some retire and move to the Valley for financial reasons. Most of us, our kids move away where the jobs are and then they are so far that they don't go to the German parish anymore. The other half doesn't speak German so they go to an English parish. So this is why it will eventually die. Unless a new wave of German immigrants come.*

Members expect that within ten years the German will be completely gone and the parish will perhaps be taken over by the new Spanish congregation. The same church member explained the arrival of the Spanish congregation just a few years ago:

> *The Latinos, the Spanish speaking Latin Americans, they couldn't get their own parish, they were always somewhere else and we also gave them the school to use for their own parish centre. They come from 16 different countries. The only thing that unites them is the Spanish language and religion.*

## 3.9 CONCLUSIONS

Churches, like neighbourhoods, move through a life cycle. The high watermark of these German congregations was around 1960, benefiting from vigorous immigration and a clearly defined German sense of place in South Vancouver. It was a period of rapid congregational growth, even with the hiving off of daughter churches. However, with the diminution of German

immigration, the anglicization of the second generation, and the suburbanization of members, every church faces significant challenges in the 1990s. In the remaining chapters, I shall consider, first, the churches' roles as service providers to their immigrant members, second how the German church influenced the propensity of the congregation to either maintain and preserve its ethnic heritage or integrate into Canadian society. Finally, I will consider how both the churches and their members have faced the challenges presented in time and in place as they move from an immigrant to a Canadian identity.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SERVICE PROVISION, SETTLEMENT AND ADJUSTMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the social functions and social services provided by the German churches in Vancouver. The discussion begins with a review of the social functions of the church in general and then considers the specific functions of the ethnic church. It is crucial to recognize from the beginning that the social functions of the church play, for the most part, a secondary role to the spiritual purpose of the church. It is also critical to recognize that the church was not only a place that served German immigrants but it was a place where they could serve each other. Members have invested themselves tremendously: spiritually, emotionally and financially in their respective church homes. Enormous sacrifices were made to ensure their establishment:

> *when the church was built, when Immanuel was built, the people, they stayed in basement suites for instance, many of them instead of buying a home so that the church could be up and work ...We had not a fridge not anything for us it was empty...I spent 8 months working on the church from the start...giving my job up for the construction of the church...*

This interviewee was not the only one to sacrifice his energy, time and money; several of the churches were built with volunteer labour including Ebenezer Baptist, Immanuel Baptist, Vancouver MB, and Holy Family parish. As such, churches cannot only be seen as providers of social services. They were and are communities offering their hands and finances to give to others beyond their church doors. I will speak primarily to the social functions and services here in part because this an area that has traditionally been understudied and undervalued. It is also an area of church activity that has changed significantly over the years for a number of reasons to be further explored in this chapter.

## 4.1    SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH

Before reporting on the social service functions of the church, it is necessary to recognize this part of church service within the larger literature on the social functions of ethnic or immigrant churches. Moberg, in his 1962 book The Church as a Social Institution, identifies eight social functions of the church. While we might expect that the social functions he identified would be out of date thirty-five years later, they have maintained an interesting permanence in Christian communities. Moberg first identifies the church as an agent of *socialization* wherein an individual brought up in the church learns to interpret the standards, traditions, folkways and mores of society. In her study of the German Lutheran community in the rural town of Block Corners, Coburn (1992) gives evidence of the significant role played by the church in educating four generations of community members, "This institution provided the most continuous, consistent, and pervasive mechanism for training young and old how to think and how to live" (58-59). Socialization by the church can backfire when children are exposed to other ways of life, ethnic groups or simply, in the case of the ethnic church, when children feel alienated by the cultural overtones of the religious institution (Warner 1998). In ethnic churches, this process of socialization is of particular concern because of the propensity of children to feel alienated from both their immigrant parents and the immigrant church.

The second social function of the church is to *concede status*. By appointing members to positions of status and importance within the church, they receive not only prestige among the church community but often outside of it. The significance of the church as a status giving agency will be further discussed in the context of the immigrant church. The third social function of the church identified by Moberg is to provide *social fellowship*. The importance of social fellowship was mentioned by almost all of my interviewees. It is also one of the most

meaningful social functions of the immigrant church. The church provides a primary opportunity for face-to-face interaction and relationship building. It fulfils the needs for primary group relations, particularly for immigrants who often have few if any family members in close proximity. Fellowship is one function serving all age groups and is particularly significant for youth for whom it may be a determining factor in their willingness and desire for continuing participation in the church community.

A fourth function is the church's role in promoting *social solidarity*. As Moberg (1962) explains, "Religion is a basic source of social solidarity in many family, nationality, and status groups in rural communities, especially at the neighbourhood level" (135). As discussed in the context of church models (see chapter three), many community churches are solidified around a common identity of history, geography, ethnicity or social class (Bibby 1993). The grouping of people around this identity in the church makes it a centre for the promotion of those group characteristics. As a promoter of solidarity, the church also functions as a *social stabilizer* as it, "helps to conserve values and practices that have been found beneficial through trial and error experience." (Moberg 1962:137). Acting as a stabilizer, the church can unfortunately also become an institution preserving the status quo, unwilling to accept or even debate new social values and roles, often resulting in conflict between church generations. Similarly, the sixth function of the church according to Moberg is to act as an agent of *social control* to direct members to behave in particular ways in varying types of situations. While there is much to say about this function it is not the focus of this chapter.

One of the most significant roles of the church (and the focus of this chapter) is the church as a *welfare institution*. Playing a part in both the organization and running of programs as well as working for social reform, the church's role is "evident in pertinent recommendations

made by religious bodies, commissions to study social problems, lobbying for welfare purposes, occasional direct participation in politics, and alms-giving" (Moberg 1962:149). Church organized benevolent work is a smaller proportion of church activity today because of the "secularization of social welfare," (ibid:151). Hexham (1993) argues that church run social welfare programs are better and more efficiently run than government programs and suggests a return to church based welfare programs. Examples of such welfare roles include the provision of meals for the elderly and homeless, personal and family counselling, running of second-hand clothes shops, work training programs, provision of child care, food banks, homeless shelters, seniors' homes, camps etc. (Hexham 1993). As I will discuss later in this chapter, programs for new immigrants have also been a key area of social aid by churches. The last social function of the church identified by Moberg is a *philanthropic* role. Here he points out that the church is both a receiver of donations (for the promotion of spiritual well-being as well as maintaining and developing social welfare programs) and also a giver of funds to other religious and non-religious institutions and agencies. Moberg's social functions are intended to apply to most if not all church bodies. Let us turn now to a more specific category of churches.

In his study of the Korean ethnic church in New York, Min (1992) identifies four fundamental *social roles of the ethnic church*. Interestingly though Min does not appear to have been aware of Moberg's research, he identifies very similar social roles. Each of Min's four roles will be discussed in greater detail, after which I will make reference to the broader social service functions of the church: formal services, informal services and the importance of the church as a place of belonging.

The first role of the ethnic church is to provide a *source of fellowship, comfort and sense of belonging* (Min 1992; Millet 1975). As Millet (1975) explains,

*One of the functions of an identifiably ethnic parish or congregation is precisely to make its members 'feel at ease' in this sense. It provides them with words of understanding and familiar rituals which, at least once a week, free them from the tension of speaking another language or of being continually misunderstood...(106).*

In this manner the ethnic church functions as a centre of community both physically and socially (Mohl & Betten 1981). Interviewees unanimously identified the sense of community as being the second most important function of their church after attending to spiritual needs. One interviewee pointed out that in the immigrant church the social role at times seemed even to usurp the spiritual, "some people in the church have criticized [us] and said we are going too far, this is a church not a social club...at the time [the church] played a very strong [social] role."

Min's second social function of the ethnic church is also found in Moberg's list; that is the *church as a social service provider*. Historically, Canadian churches have played a much greater role in providing assistance like shelter, food, and financial aid but their role has changed with the evolution of the welfare system as well as the proliferation of secular non-profit agencies like the United Way that fund community based social service agencies. Seeing the church as a social service provider is particularly interesting in the case of German churches because of the tight relationship between church and state in Germany. Because churches are supported by state-collected taxes they play a much greater role in service provision. One interviewee who had been hosting a visiting student pastor from Germany held an opinion on the church role in providing social services. He had asked the visiting student:

*How many people are employed by your church? How many people under your jurisdiction, because the pastor is the boss of all activities in a way; in the end he is responsible because [activities are] run by the church. He employed 16 people. I said, 'you've got to be kidding?' Then he started counting, he had municipal nursing, home nursing, day care...they have, I can't remember! I said, 'is that really the church's duty? When do you have the time to look after the spiritual*

*needs of the congregation?' I said, 'can you visit everyone in your congregation in two years?' He said 'oh no'...I said, '[social services are] the state's job really and truly, not the church's.*

There is clearly a necessary balance here illustrated by this extreme example wherein the church is really no longer a church. Let it be understood that social services are a significant part of the church's mission; they exemplify the church's compassion and care for the community. But they are not the essence of the church nor would any of my interviewees argue that they should be.

The third social function of the ethnic church identified by Min is to *maintain ethnic identity and subculture*. He argues that the need for primordial ties and group preservation are fulfilled by an ethnic church which uses the mother tongue and provides cultural education for the second generation. This social function is an issue of debate in the literature and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

Min's fourth social function also appeared on Moberg's list and that is the role of *designating social status* as members aspire to be appointed to positions of leadership. Min argues that the social status function is a latent function, neither intended nor recognized by church members. The status function however has received attention from several other researchers. Nagata (1986) in her studies of South-East Asian religious institutions, argues that the church is the ideal "arena for achievement and leadership," because its size and scale are more compatible and manageable, "than the anonymous urban environment of [immigrants'] professional lives" (27). Status becomes important particularly for those immigrants who have in effect been demoted in their new place of work relative to their status position in their homeland. In this manner the church "offers an arena to reclaim the honour they were deprived of by the immigrant experience" (Warner 1998). In his book on the history of the immigration of

German Baptists to Canada, Sturhahn (1976) illustrates the importance of the church in status

achievement as well as the ensuing conflicts because of the different points of origin and thus

different ways of administering church organizations:

> *It was not uncommon that Mr. X, formerly a well established landowner...came to*
> *Canada with great visions and plans to recapture his past. In Poland or Russia*
> *he was in a commanding position. He now comes to [a large Canadian city].*
> *Theoretically he is prepared to accept any job as was suggested to him but his*
> *knowledge of the English language is very limited. In fact, his employer or*
> *Canadian colleagues let him know that he is a second rate Canadian. His wages*
> *are minimum, his work is menial. He feels frustrated, but cannot very well show*
> *his feelings at work. He is still very much at home in his church. Here his*
> *language is spoken; he has a leading position. If he were the only frustrated*
> *person in the congregation, things might go on peacefully, but Mr. Y and Mr. Z*
> *have similar experiences and disappointments. On top of it all, Mr. X's basic*
> *concept of church administration, originating in Poland, differs radically from*
> *that of Mr. Y and Mr. Z, who are from East Prussia and from West Germany.*
> *Besides, there can only be one Bible teacher, and each of the three claim full*
> *qualification...or there is need only for one additional deacon (Sturhahn*
> *1976:217).*

Sturhahn poignantly illustrates the importance and self-worth bestowed by the appointment to

positions of power within the church. I would agree with Nagata's observation that the function

is latent - not one interviewee mentioned the concession of status by the church as an important

role of the church.

Min's research on the social functions of immigrant churches comes out of studies done

on Korean churches in the United States. In the past ten years, the Korean church has become

the most researched ethnic church group in the United States and Min's observations are

supported by several other Korean church studies. Choy (1979 in Hurh & Kim 1990) lists

several functions of the Korean ethnic church: as a social centre, as a means of cultural

identification, as serving educational needs by teaching language, history and culture and as a

means of keeping Korean nationalism alive. Kim (1981 in Hurh & Kim 1990) identifies non-

spiritual functions including the church role as a pseudo-extended family, and as an emotional support network for individuals experiencing crises. In fact, Hyun (1995) in examining the best means to address the emotional and physical needs of Korean immigrants points to the institution of the church. He argues that,

> *the Korean ethnic church is the best resource available in the Korean ethnic community with which to meet the psycho-social needs of Korean immigrants. It can integrate both the social service functions of church and the classic community based intervention approach...[which] must be culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate (Hyun 1995:30).*

The fact that he argues that the church should be the central venue around which information on "health care, housing, immigration and naturalization services, welfare services, ethnic social service agency services, counselling, education, services for the elderly, legal services and postal services" (Hyun 1995:33) should be distributed speaks to the principal role of the church in this ethnic community.

## 4.2    OVERALL SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GERMAN CHURCH

Each interviewee was asked at some point during the interview if (s)he could try to express in a general sense what overall role the church played for those immigrants who participated in church life. Several quotations begin to paint an image of the church and its meaning in the immigrant experience. The church was the primary place of social and spiritual fellowship for the believing immigrants. It became, as one immigrant explained,

> *the focal point of their spiritual life and also their social life to such an extent that they had no other contacts except with church people. They had their jobs and they did that everyday but weekends and evenings were taken up with fellowship and socializing among their own kind.*

The idea that the church was the centre of social activity was echoed by another second generation immigrant and church leader who explains that the church, "was their social life. That is where their activities were. Other than going to work during the day, the rest of their social life was at the church. A lot of mine was too when I was growing up." In some instances, the primacy of the social role meant that the provision of social services and the import of spiritual guidance fell secondary "to the concern that people had to find an identity...somehow this is a place of familiarity to them, whether it is the language or the customs." This pastor explained that the notion of church as a place of community rather than a spiritual centre can have negative effects on the church's true role if, "much of what [members] bring is not an issue of religious conviction as much as it is a feeling of home." As another pastor and immigrant admitted, there were some attendees who took advantage of the church as a home and as a service provider but he adds, "as a whole the German community looked after each other and I think during the first ten years this I think was the great strength of these churches." The church was a supportive community that, "looked after...emotional needs, spiritual needs and physical needs." It was a centre in a spiritual, physical and emotional sense where immigrants, "found stability and where [they] could always go and ask for help."

As a prelude to a fuller discussion of the social functions and services provided by the church, the following quotation coherently summarizes the formal programs and services, the informal services and the sense of belonging bestowed by the church:

> the founding pastor...went to the train station in Vancouver and picked up those immigrants who were newly arrived and asked them if they were interested in a German community in a church...[he said] we are just in the process of establishing a congregation, please come and join us. We've got German lessons for the kids, we've got English lessons for adults...we have all kinds of activities. So the church in the beginning was somewhere in between a religious group and a community centre so it served both purposes. This was so important for those

*people who left everything behind, got on a ship, got on a train, didn't know anybody and in many cases, hardly spoke any English. It was like finding a second home right away.*

Another immigrant explained that in his upbringing the church was of central significance. As was the case with the German community in Block Corners (Coburn 1992), the first thing that people were concerned with when they arrived in Vancouver was, "where am I going to worship?...When you settle down somewhere, school and the church were the two first priorities for the community." This primary significance was expressed by every immigrant I interviewed. The church was **the** community meeting place, both in the geographic and social sense.

## 4.3    FORMAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

German ethnic churches in Vancouver offered various programs and services to the German immigrant community including language schools, participatory programs, settlement houses, library services and more recently refugee assistance and sponsorship. *Language schools* were significant both in attracting new German church members and in perpetuating the use of the German language in the second generation. Language schools were not limited to teaching the mother tongue language; some churches also provided schooling for adults wishing to learn English (see also Kincheloe 1971). As records of the German schools in the city are only anecdotal it is difficult to determine exactly how many schools were operating and how many students were enrolled. In 1972, the peak year of German school expansion, 12,000 students were taught at 106 German schools in Canada. Thirty percent of the total number of German school students between five and seventeen years of age (about 3,600) were in British Columbia (Schmidt 1983). In Vancouver, the earliest German school was organized at Ebenezer Baptist

church. A former student of the church school explained, "we went to German schools so that we could learn the German language and that was fostered by the church itself and paid for by the church itself." Waldhouse (1961) reported a German Saturday School at the Vancouver Mennonite Brethren church and Gumpp (1989) reported a German Saturday School established in 1956 at Immanuel Baptist church. These two schools had combined enrolments of over 300 students. The Vancouver MB school started in 1957 and was sponsored by the church for students up to a grade six level. Teachers were qualified volunteers who received small honoraria in later years but whose prime motivation was to "keep up the German language because we [the church] were still bilingual." Immanuel's program was financially supported by the German Consulate as well as the church and focused on reading and writing (Sturhahn 1976). Immanuel's German language school continued into the 1980s. A church leader from St. Mark's Lutheran church which did not have its own German language school sent his children to the Baptist school. The churches were quite cooperative in supporting the German church schools because the immigrants, "were concerned about the preservation of the German language among their children...that is why they had German school every Saturday morning. Children were sent to German school and though they may not have always liked it, they always went." Clearly the primary motivation of the German Saturday school program was the preservation of the German language.

The German Catholic parish also held a German school taught by the priest and attended by the children from the immigrant families. This school was also supported in part by the German Consulate. The church's German school existed from the time the church began until 1970 but was closed when there was no one left to teach and when families, like the one I interviewed, had moved to suburban areas too far away to make it practical to travel back. Today

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there is still a Saturday morning German school in Surrey with an enrolment of close to 300 students. The program is no longer sponsored by or connected to any of the German churches but is organized through the German government; it provides an example of the secularization of social welfare activities.

In addition to school programs in German, some churches offered classes in English to newly arrived immigrants. Ebenezer Baptist had such an English program, as did Holy Family Parish. In recent years, Culloden has had an English as a second language program for members of the Vietnamese congregation meeting in its church. Immanuel Baptist, Vancouver Mennonite Brethren and Fraserview Mennonite Brethren are all planning to offer ESL programs to the new immigrants in their communities, primarily of Chinese ethnic origin. The most challenging obstacles to organizing and carrying out these programs are finding committed volunteer teachers and then establishing links to new immigrant communities. Immanuel Baptist is hoping to connect with the Vancouver Chinese immigrant services society, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and Fraserview MB church was going to work with the Richmond School Board before they ran into funding barriers.

The second example of formal programs and services run by the church in support of immigrants is not a particular service but more general church activity. *Participatory programs* serve a key integrative role in the immigrant settlement process. Participatory programs are a part of normal church activities but choirs, men's and women's societies and youth programs serve a wider function for immigrants. The organized groups and programs facilitated interactions from which developed friendships and support communities. Women found advice on finding doctors, dentists, and grocery stores and men learned of business opportunities, and received tax and banking advice. The participatory programs were not only a 'service' for the

immigrants but opened up opportunities to take on leadership roles of status and prestige in the church. In Holy Family parish the range of activities included: Women's Auxiliary Group, German language school, Sunday School, Choir, youth choir, Brass Orchestra group, regular Family night meetings, Youth Group, Folk Music group, the Kolping Society, Knights of Columbus, Seniors' group, assistance at the German Canadian Rest home, and refugee sponsorship (Holy Family Parish 1988). At Oakridge Lutheran, activities were much more limited but included: the Women's Group, the young women's fellowship, youth group, Sunday night school, Sunday School, and several Choirs (Annual Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Cross, 1966).

Most churches had active Women's groups, Men's groups, youth groups, choirs, musical groups, youth groups and of course Sunday Schools, Bible Study groups and weekly worship services. One elderly interviewee recalled dramatic presentations that the women used to perform, "there was so much activity....the women used to have plays and we'd have to memorize pages...there wasn't much [money] for outings as there is today. At that time everyone had to plug along to make a living. But church was utmost in everybody's mind." Without means of transportation nor the financial means to participate in extravagant events, most church groups made their own activities. Youth at Ebenezer would travel by trolley downtown to go ice skating, or over to the North Shore for hiking trips up to the top of Mount Seymour. One church leader talked of activities happening almost every night of the week,

> we had English classes...we had music classes...there were educational activities
> all week and then there was of course the church services and ministry on
> Sundays...they taught piano and violin to the kids so we have always had an
> abundance of musical talent and there are still some at church today who were
> taught by church volunteers to play instruments. There were other things like
> sewing classes and such but it goes through phases. They had a couple of years
> of that and then they'd do something else.

Music has always been an important part of German church culture and the churches in

Vancouver were no exception. Every church had large choirs, often separated into men's and

women's as well as mixed groups and youth choirs (Figure 4.1). Churches had their own bands

and orchestras and regularly put on concerts for members and non-members alike, "I think of all

the concerts we had. The concerts were mostly all in German and there was some really lively

singing. Youth choirs and other choirs and male choirs. They were huge, big choirs."

At the Catholic Parish, one immigrant couple also began a group called the Kolping

Society. The society was initially founded in Germany by a Catholic priest to provide a home

and a fellowship group for men who moved from rural areas to the cities for employment. At

Holy Family the society became both a spiritual and social fellowship group as well as a

philanthropic group serving at missions both in the local community and abroad through lending

financial assistance. The wife of the founder of Vancouver's Kolping society explained,

> *my husband started the Kolping Society here in Holy Family church...because all*
> *the immigrants came at that time and there were quite a few bachelors and young*
> *people who came to the church...we founded a group there that really gave us*
> *stability and we had all kinds of different activities. We met socially, we went out*
> *to the beautiful countryside every Sunday and discovered something new and*
> *being young we were skiing and did all kinds of different things.*

Participation in these groups then meant that ties to both the church and its community were

established. As will be discussed later, these participatory groups served as the structural

foundation to facilitate the development of personal networks.

A third example of formal services was a Girls' Home for single German women who

moved to Vancouver to work as nannies and domestic housekeepers. Organized and run by the

Vancouver Mennonite Brethren church, it served as a critical support network. The home

became the central spiritual and social home for women who had no family in the city. The

# Figure 4.1: Photos of Various Church Choirs, Sunday School and Youth Groups

*Congregation at the dedication of first church building June 2-4, 1929*
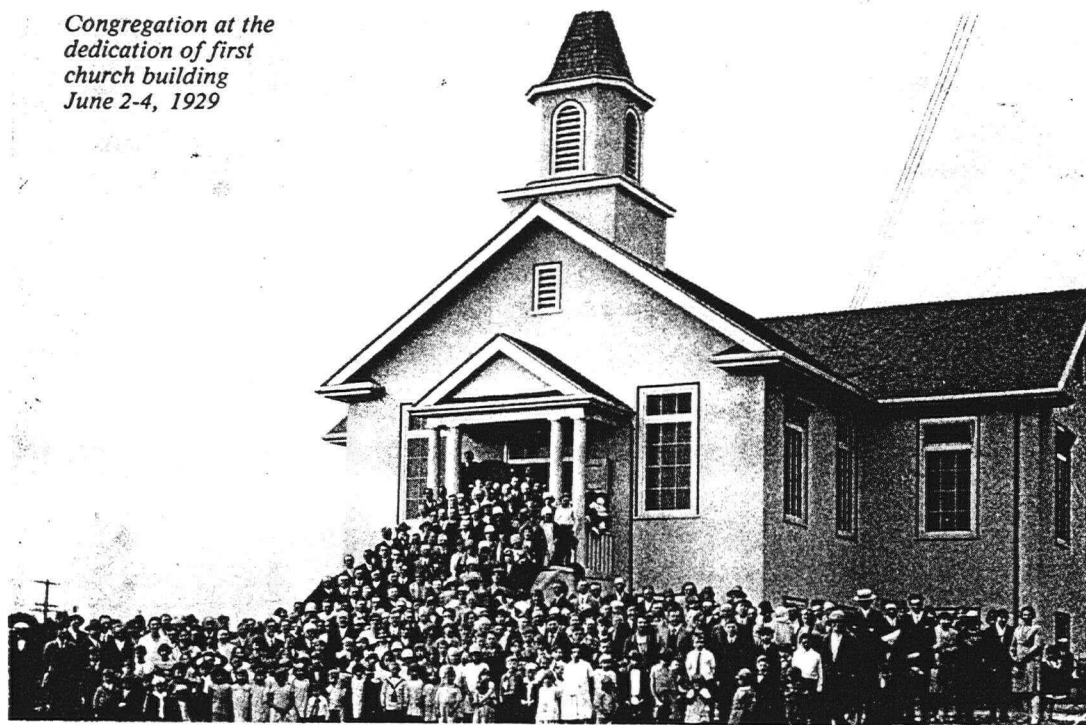


*Sunday School, approximately 1952, Dr. A.S. Felberg, Pastor*



**Source: <u>Ebenezer: Fifty Years of Ministry</u>**
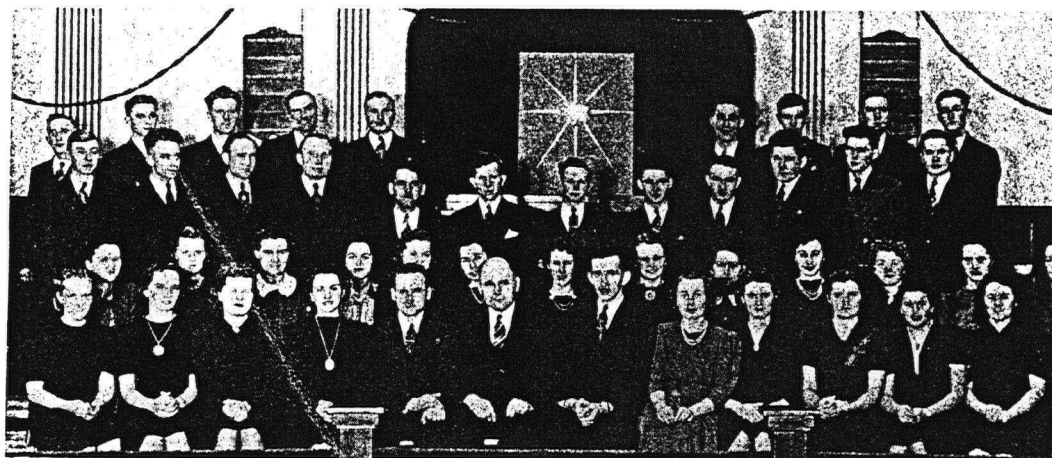
*Above; Mixed Choir: Rev. E.S. Fenske; Albert Sauer, Director; Centre left: Church Band in 1929, Centre Right: Charter members for 50 years Mr. Ludwig and Martha Miller*



**Source: Ebenezer: Fifty Years of Ministry**



**Youth Group, 1959   Source: Immanuel Baptist Church, 25th Anniv.**

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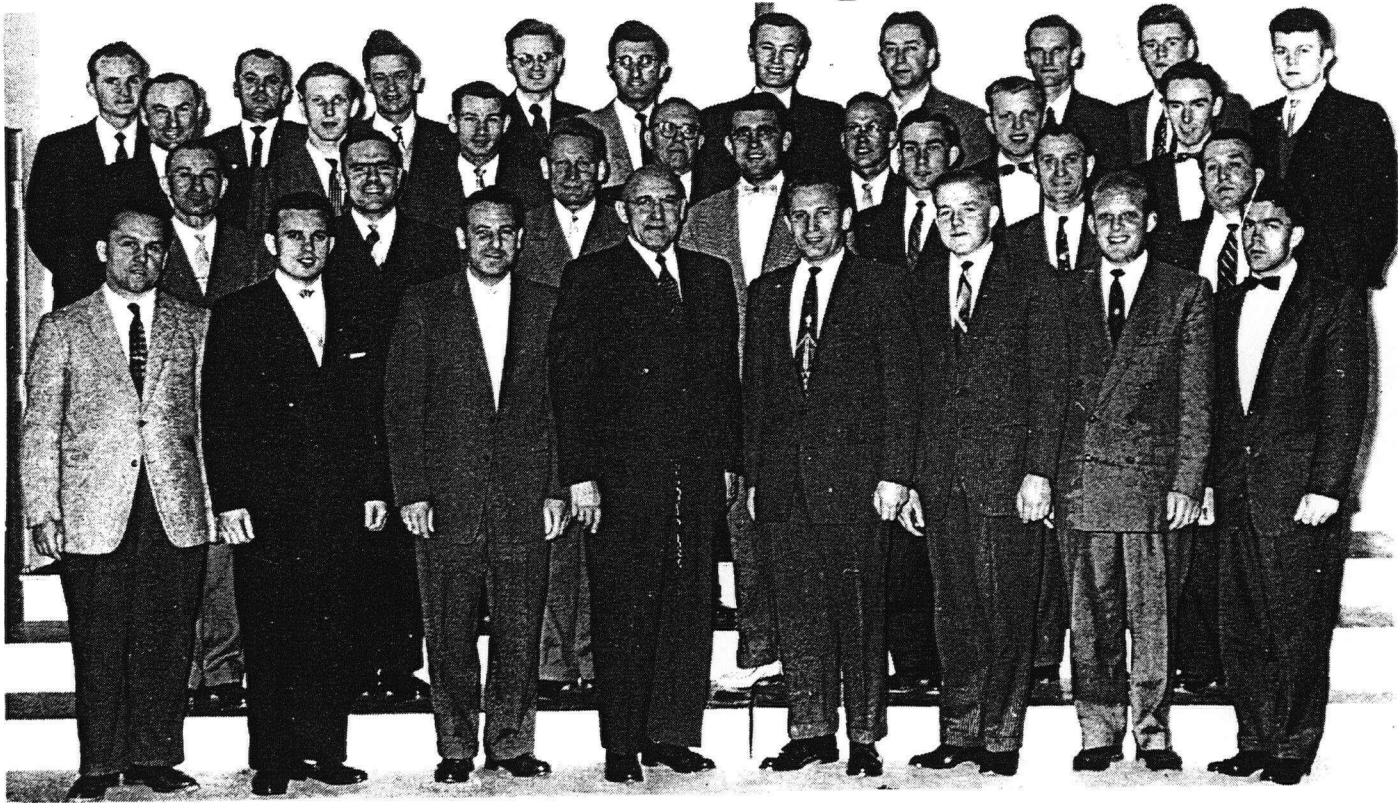
Men's Choir, 1962



Youth Group, 1976   Source: Immanuel Baptist Church, 25th Anniv.

church pastor lived in the home that provided both spiritual food for the young women and friendships with women who became their pseudo-family. The settlement house run by this church was the only one of its kind in the formal sense. Many families also played host to new immigrants.

More recently the same churches that served as support communities for German immigrants have assisted and sponsored refugee families from South-East Asia and Eastern Europe. The Mennonite churches, organized through the Mennonite Central Committee have been particularly active in refugee sponsorship (Lescheid 1989) in addition to services such as running social housing projects, thrift stores (whose revenue supports disaster relief efforts), and drop-in centres for single mothers. Through the efforts of the Mennonite Central Committee 1,243 refugees came to British Columbia between 1979 and 1988, 90% of those from South-East Asia (Lescheid 1989). One of the interviewed churches recently sponsored a refugee family from Armenia and has previously supported at least five other families mainly from South-East Asia (Thailand and Vietnam). Sponsorship entails financially providing for the family for a year but church members also play a role in helping the family with day-to-day settlement needs such as enroling children at school, grocery shopping and learning public transportation.

Refugee sponsorship has become a primary social welfare role of churches (see Harvey 1997). In the 1980s, a Refugee Resettlement Centre set up in a Chinese Mennonite church in Vancouver welcomed up to two hundred refugees each month. Lescheid (1989) explains that, "refugees were met at the Vancouver airport and taken to suitable accommodation. Jobs had to be found for them. Some received material assistance. Introducing refugees to Canada's medical, legal, and school systems required many hours of translating, counselling, and 'walking alongside them'" (133).

Holy Family Catholic Parish has also been involved in the sponsorship of refugees. A church leader explained why the parish became active in sponsorship: "because we knew what we went through and now we had the [financial] means." The church owned a house in its neighbourhood and voluntarily renovated the entire house for a Vietnamese family with eight children that they decided to sponsor; "Of course all of our work was done voluntarily and it didn't cost them a thing. We put the house into shape and bought furniture and finished it all. We always had different projects where we could help." The church has recently sponsored a family from Poland, another church leader explained, "we settle them, we collect furniture, we find them a place to live...this and that. After all we went through it ourselves 40 years ago."

A final service, mentioned only by one interviewee but undoubtably a part of most German churches was the availability and lending of German library books. Much like German language schools, library material provided the opportunity to practice and continue German language use. Books also provided spiritual teaching in the mother tongue which, as will be discussed in chapter five, was of particular importance for the immigrants.

## 4.4 INFORMAL SERVICE FUNCTIONS

Though I have identified them as informal services, the social roles of the church discussed here are really ways by which the church functioned as a hub of relationships and as a community centre. The various 'services' were not necessarily a formal part of the church, they were not discussed at church board meetings, they were not tasks assigned to particular individuals, they were simply done because these are support services that inevitably come out of a caring community.

In the Baptist churches, church women organized *welcoming showers* for newly arrived immigrant families. Members felt a keen interest in helping new families and fellow immigrants establish themselves and become active church members. One post-war immigrant and church pastor explains, "there was a lot of interest in the newcomers, the early immigrants who came in the late 1940s and early 1950s. They were received with a lot of enthusiasm and they were given many many gifts and benefits." Several of the women that I interviewed either participated in hosting showers or were recipients when they arrived. The welcoming showers were much like wedding showers, in that women were given food and household items to stock their shelves. Though never extravagant, their practical and symbolic significance had an enormous impact on those who arrived. One woman who remembered her mother hosting the showers explained they were mainly "food showers...and we gave them household things. I think that really brought a lot of immigrants closer to the church because they felt so welcomed." Another woman explained her family's experience,

> *I'll never forget when our family came to Canada, when a new family was the first time in the church, right away it was a shower that was provided for them, that was a grocery shower or cooking pots, something like that, everything for the kitchen and even the groceries...and that was wonderful. If you came and you had nothing, living in an empty basement suite it was wonderful, even some towels or some sheets or something like that...*

Of the eight women I interviewed, five spoke of the importance of the welcoming showers. A woman interviewed from the Catholic church additionally mentioned wedding and baby showers organized for and by church women. She explained, "wedding showers and baby showers...I think I had at least 40 or 50 in my home. As I mentioned we were the first ones to have a house and we had showers by the dozens. This was all church community."

In Friedmann's 1952 government report on German immigration he pointed to the challenges experienced by women in adjusting to Canadian life. He says:

> *The assimilation of the married woman is usually more difficult. Most of them lack the contacts which employment in a factory or business provides and they feel their loneliness more acutely. Their way into the new community is mainly through their husbands or children (Friedmann 1952:41-42).*

If what Friedmann suggests was indeed true for German immigrant women then the community built around the church holds an even greater significance. For women who had fewer means to develop social contacts, the church became the central node of their social web. It also means that for as much was given in hosting these showers and through church work in general (hosting luncheons, organizing teas, doing Sunday School work), much more was received in building relationships and a sense of belonging. The theme of sense of place and community will be returned to in the final section of this chapter.

For both men and women, the church was key in the development of *social and business networks*. In O'Bryan's comparative study of ten ethno-linguistic groups in Canada he wonderfully summarizes Breton's findings regarding the significance of the church as an ethnic institution:

> *Of all the types of ethnic institutions investigated in the study, Breton found religious institutions and publications to have the greatest effect on the immigrants' personal networks. The former had great effect because it was usually the centre of activities in the community, the experiences in church were similar to those of the country of origin, and the religious leaders were frequently advocates of national ideology (O'Bryan 1975:44).*

During several of the interviews, the church was described as a critical support network, "whether it was helping to build a house...or feed them or educate their kids. The church had that complete role in the social life of the family where today that is a much more separated role."

For most of the people I interviewed the importance of the church in social life was to be taken for granted. Church was a logical place for new immigrants to go, as one interviewee said,

> *there were always new people coming over and looking for a contact and where do you find it? Well at a German church, the German pastor...they always contacted him, sometimes only for help and later when they settled some decided to come back and become a member of the church.*

Even though immigrant children and the Canadian-born children of recent immigrants were able to build their social networks through school, they also placed a high value on the social life of the church. One of my interviewees, who was the only Canadian-born child in his immigrant family, was the youth social convenor at his church at the age of fifteen. He told of the youth activities:

> *we used to arrange ice skating parties with 50 or 60 kids. These were young people aged 17 to 30. Sixty of them and I remember we'd have 20 car loads of people and then we'd go to a restaurant...had banquets at the Georgia Hotel for 125 people...You had to make your own fun you know. On summer evenings, it was the thing to do to go up Fraser Street and get ice cream. The whole street would be filled with kids from church at the ice cream parlours and soda fountains.*

For most of my interviewees church was where friendships developed into marriages. A senior member of one Lutheran church explained, "When I got [to the church] I was in the youth group where I met my wife...we had an extensive youth group going from the ages of 16 to 28; mainly young people coming independently from Germany. We congregated and had a good time together." One interviewee guessed that the majority of church couples met in the congregation. This has had important implications for the German church because it meant youth (at least in theory) were more likely to stay at their home church after marriage because their spouse also spoke German and attended the same church.

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In the realm of business the church played a significant role in helping new immigrants to find job opportunities but it also offered the opportunity for trade and business networking. Coburn (1992) noted that the church in Block Corners, "reinforced trading with other German Lutherans, as first- and second-generation men preferred to trade with someone they knew and trusted" (113). A similar pattern of business networks existed in Vancouver's German churches; in one church a list of the primary occupation of each church member was distributed so members could contact each other for services rather than having to depend on advertisements or other word of mouth referrals. Perhaps not a unique idea today, at the time and within the setting of an ethnic church it encouraged and facilitated trade and business within the German group rather than with the at-large community. At another church, a German-speaking builder from Vienna routinely hired labourers and trades people from within his congregation.

Overall the most common response to my question probing the kinds of things the church did to help immigrants settle in Vancouver was the church's role in helping people to find employment and accommodation. Virtually every interviewee mentioned how the pastor and/or the church had functioned as both an employment agency and a housing board, as well as providing other kinds of general settlement assistance. It is widely recognized in the literature that pastors of immigrant congregations function in multiple roles including that of, "community worker, social organizer, immigration law counsellor and advocate, and often ethnic promoter as well as pastor" (Kawano 1992:116). They regularly provide information and counselling on employment, business, housing, health care, and children's education, sometimes even interpreting and filling out necessary forms (Min 1992). Interviews revealed that more than anything, pastors act as coordinators matching the needs, skills and opportunities of the immigrant congregation. One of the Lutheran church leaders explained,

> *Some of the pastors they were very active for people who needed a job. They could phone him or he would be having his feelers out. Where is a German firm or a German boss somewhere where we could get this guy who has just arrived, get him a job until he was established? So it was quite interwoven this whole thing. Also with advice. Some people, I don't know how many tax forms they made out because some people couldn't read...and things like that. Do you know a good doctor? You know what I'm saying? It was a centre where the lines come together in one spot...that's in the pastor's office or at the church where others came in and exchanged information. Still today [the church] still does this.*

A fellow church member explained the process of coordination by the minister in order to extend support to new immigrants:

> *I think the minister, he would contact some congregation members and ask for help because he himself could only do so much. Then the question was generally asked by the minister, what type of work [new immigrants] could do and so on and then maybe [the pastor would] contact some members in the congregation to see if they could help finding a place to live or a place to work. So the minister would contact members or make an announcement on Sunday and ask if anybody could help out in these areas [like] providing a temporary home for them. Then the question was also asked if they could help out as far as work was concerned. Sometimes help [was] also [given] with the children too, to enroll them in English classes and so on. Some people could speak the [English] language and some could not so they needed help. But as far as the minster was concerned, he couldn't really handle it all.*

One immigrant couple from the Catholic church were in contact with the German parish priest before they arrived. He was their only acquaintance and the church was their only support:

> *[Father Riffel] had written to us in Germany that if my husband would be willing to take any kind of a job then we could come and he would look after us with a place to stay....This letter we took along when we came here to Vancouver and my husband...went to Father Riffel the very first Sunday and introduced himself and this is how we got a place we could always go to and ask questions. If we needed some help he was there.*

Swendsen and Wachtel (1982) label the pastor as gatekeeper in that he often became the sole source of referral and access to information. The extent of the job of the pastor to fulfil all of

these immigrant needs was sometimes beyond the church's control. One interviewee explained how the pastor was forced to deal with helping immigrants not only because they were forever knocking at his door but also because the Canadian Immigration office demanded it,

> *the pastors **had** to deal with the situation, many of them went out of their way to personally help these people to find work and find accommodation because the Immigration Board was quite strict on the pastors on that. The Immigration Board really pressed on [encouraging] pastors to help out...because the Immigration Board was so swamped.*

Besides the work of individual pastors, the church congregation as a whole provided significant support and aid for newly arrived immigrants. Some of the more established church members who had businesses of their own employed those looking for work. One leader explains,

> *Some people had established themselves already, had businesses, other people worked in certain companies and were able to help those people to apply for jobs because language was always a problem when people arrived and they needed help. [The church] was one of the places to make the contact.*

Another Mennonite church leader added,

> *they were very helpful in finding jobs for those newcomers. I guess that's probably true in any community...Whenever somebody new came in here, he didn't have to wonder what he would do. He just came to the church and said what he did and everybody knew this...someone would say we need construction workers...of course many were in construction at that time. I think that was really a plus for the newcomers. They didn't have to worry. Language was a new thing anyway and if they had to find jobs through some other agency that was just English speaking they would have been lost.*

In the oldest Mennonite church, one woman took on the role of employment coordinator for German women arriving in Vancouver looking for work as housekeepers. Through her contacts and efforts many women found jobs cleaning and cooking in homes in Vancouver's wealthier neighbourhoods of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale.

Several of my interviewees had either received or offered assistance in finding and/or providing accommodation. One couple who arrived just prior to the largest immigrant influx and who had purchased their own home opened their doors to house bachelors who arrived with no place to stay. They had up to five men staying with them at a time and were often called upon when the priest was unable to place a newcomer. Another interviewee's family ran a boarding house. He remembered his mother receiving calls from the church pastor,

> *saying that there were fellows who had just arrived in... she'd have up to five or six fellows boarding...then through the network and my dad, they'd either direct them to Burrard Shipyards [to find work] as shipwrights or trained carpenters or the various mills in the Fraser River area for employment.*

Almost all of the immigrants arrived with nothing but their travel debt owed to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for the expense of their journey. For those with virtually nothing the practical assistance of church congregation members made an enormous difference. As one woman who arrived as a child explained, "you came here with nothing...we lived in basement suites and we didn't necessarily have furniture so the people who were here already gave you furniture or whatever you needed for your house...It was a very close knit community." One Baptist church member told me about a shopkeeper on Fraser Street who sold discounted groceries to recently arrived immigrants. As a church member he recognized the needs of newly arrived families. When it could, the church treasury made up the difference in the cost of groceries.

The church pastor and members served each other in extensive ways: helping each other to find apartments, giving legal advice to those buying their first house, accompanying members to the bank to request loans or mortgages; "they provided us warmth and welcome and any [help] needed finding a doctor, finding a dentist all those little things...helped us with the shopping

because we didn't know what to buy or where to buy or anything...it was mainly informal [assistance]." I was told by one church leader that someone I interviewed from his church had hosted countless immigrant families during their first few weeks or months in Vancouver. He and his family volunteered room in their home to new arrivals who were searching for accommodation, trying to find jobs and adjusting to their new environment. Church members gave newcomers advice, as one said, "real hands on stuff...other than the spiritual because they assisted in that regard too you know." The significance of the spiritual can not be left in the backdrop because, as was shared by each of my interviewees, the kindness and generosity shown to new immigrants was motivated by their spiritual beliefs and nothing less. There has been no reward for the compassion and love demonstrated by church member but for many of those families who received such attention, the impact of the church is still dearly remembered:

> the church became an extended family, a tremendous support community. I remember we arrived in Winnipeg on June 15 of 1953 and my father had some friends who had immigrated the year before and we were picked up at the railway station. Already they had rented an apartment for us and put food in the fridge...that was all done by the church.

## 4.5  SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

The final area of 'service' which is really more a part of the general social functions of the church and less a 'social service' is the creating of a sense of belonging and a sense of community. Howard (1987 in Kalilombe 1997) explains the multidimensional role of the church:

> the church became a place of refuge and of acceptance by God and by people of like background and common experience: it was a place where people could find fulfilment, where their spiritual, social, economic and emotional needs could be met and where they could make a contribution towards meeting the needs of others (321).

It is a difficult task to try to capture the sense of community and belonging created in the church family as expressed by my interviewees. The sense is really best described using their words. Frustratingly, the words seen as text here seem less emphatic and passionate than the conversations I was engaged in. Words removed from the intonations and excitement of their voice seem to lose the intensity of their meaning and sincerity.

More than just a community centre, the church became a place of instant relations for those without relatives in Canada,

> *I think as a whole, it was a hard time for the immigrants at the time and they did go to the church for the church reason but then it became the first place you met all the people with the same problems and kids. It became almost like a community centre. A community in itself. And stayed that way...even more than a community centre it became like an extended family and that is the way that it is still.*

Children came to know their parent's friends as Uncles and Aunts. One interviewee explained[1],

> *We all came, we couldn't speak, we had no money and we had no jobs. We created friendships, instant relatives....Kids would say Uncle Helmut or to me they would say Uncle Alfred. They were relatives you might say because nobody had relatives, only friends so these were created right away.*

Families opened their homes to host large dinners on Sunday evenings and though they were not family dinners in the traditional sense, they resembled the larger family of immigrants.

Interviewees emphasized different facets of the social role of the church as being the most significant. While some saw the hand it extended in finding employment as the most valuable, others emphasized the sense of community. One woman saw her church as less a provider of

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[1] Names have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewee.

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social services and more as a network of support. For her the activities discussed here as formal services were secondary to both the spiritual and social roles,

> *The German congregation was a drawing point for families to come and worship and then they began to get together with friends there. But they didn't come for work or to find work in the church...It's definitely a church family. It's not a community centre, it's a family. I noticed that when we were in Germany for four months, I missed the congregation. I have relatives there but they don't know me or the kids as well as the congregation. When we came back it was like coming home. It is a recognition that there is this small town in the city. They still ask how are your kids doing.*

When asked about the level of importance of the church's role in settlement, another interviewee emphasized the impact of formal activities but only because of their ability to facilitate church community development:

> *At the beginning [the church played] a fairly substantial role. Because remember these people who came were uprooted from somewhere. Like myself, I left all my relatives, my place of work. I came to a completely new country, a new town, didn't speak 10 words of English when I arrived here...it became, in addition to a spiritual centre, it became a social centre. To a smaller degree of course. We had family evenings, very popular, about once or twice a month. All kinds of activities. But the key was to get the people together so they could talk with each other, exchange stories and history and hardships and happy times. It was an exchange in a language they all understood.*

There is little doubt that part of the need for a sense of place and belonging stemmed from the experience of war out of which many of the immigrants had recently come. Some had been stateless and others were disillusioned by what their state had come to represent. One of the current church pastors recalled his family experience after the war and the place of the church in the midst of hopelessness,

> *The church provided in a sense, a security blanket, security home for all of these displaced people. All of them had gone through the trauma of the Second World War and that was a horrible, horrible experience. My parents... you see I lost my mother when I was four and we lived in the ruins of Eastern Europe for two and a*

*half years and so all of the immigrants had gone through this horrible war experience and so this was the immigrant experience that had bonded them all together. They had all been a part of that.*

Out of this trauma, the immigrants arrived with new hope. Many became much stronger Christian believers. Several of the interviewees shared with me their belief that their life had been spared from the war by God. The opportunity to move to Canada was a God given blessing and their thankfulness was expressed through sharing their blessings and love with other German immigrants. Those in the church felt as much a family of German immigrants as they did members of the family of God. One particular comment speaks to the importance placed on finding other Christians, "[The church] was really the only way they had contact with other Christians, not knowing anybody in the city it was a place where they could get together and help each other. So I think it was quite important really."

## 4.6 NEW SOCIAL SERVICE ROLES

One of the most interesting changes between the churches as they were and as they are now is the role that they fulfil in terms of social services, both formally and informally. Several of the church leaders mentioned that many of the traditional functions of the church have been taken away or lost because of a lack of commitment of volunteers. As women have become increasingly active participants in the labour force the volunteer base from which churches have traditionally drawn has been drastically reduced. As two women commented, jobs that used to be done by volunteers, traditionally housewives and mothers, are now done by paid church staff members. One of the church pastors talked about this shifting role of the church with regard to social services and welfare,

*See [today] nobody looks toward the church for help. You have all of these social and community services to do these things for you. Forty years ago the church was the dominant source, don't forget there was no social security in those days...no community groups. All of these things have come in during the last forty years....[There is so much dependence on] the social security net. That is why there is a lot of unease among people today when the government says we need to cut back on social services and hospitalization and all this stuff...the older generation is saying yes [cut] because the church picked up this kind of thing. The church was doing this type of work and had always been doing this type of work.*

A member of this congregation also spoke to the changing welfare role of the church as government and non-profit agencies take responsibility for many of the roles traditionally accepted by the church,

*I think the situation today is also a little bit different because the state does help out much more than when our generation came. We got no support from the government while now we have all these groups like S.U.C.C.E.S.S., the Chinese group that helps each other so it's a little bit different. If of course we have contact with a person who has need our church has such good people that they would help however they could.*

Children's clubs and youth ministries are organized by youth workers or Christian education ministers and often these activities are largely outreach projects to children from non-Christian homes in the community. Today's programs need to have an innovative edge; most children participate in so many activities that church activities must compete for children's attention with sports clubs, dance and music activities, and any number of programs organized by local community centres. Several of the churches now organize weekly 'Kids' Clubs' and youth groups intentionally geared to target children and youth from non-Christian homes (interestingly most are also from lower socio-economic status families). At Culloden MB, the pastor estimates that the youth group is composed of up to two-thirds neighbourhood kids, who come from non-Christian homes, and one-third 'church kids'. At Ebenezer, a church leader explained, "We

started a Kids' Club about 10 years ago and now we have 50 or 60 kids coming in from the community [for] Wednesday night activities that include crafts, woodworking, gym night and then of course we take them to camp a number of times each year."

Ebenezer's new social services also include an ESL class for neighbourhood Punjabi immigrants. The Punjabi pastor's wife also wanted,

> *to put in a sewing class and buy a bunch of sewing machines and teach the ladies some skills in the community but there was so much red tape involved in setting that up that it just never got off the ground. We had the machines and everything lined up but then we had to provide air quality and lunch rooms and all that, then they wanted a day care for the kids...so when the government heard what we wanted to do they just put in all sorts of requirements as if it was a full blown commercial school. Of course, forty or fifty years ago we would have just done it and the government wouldn't have heard about it.*

The provision of social services evidently takes on new meanings in such dramatically different contexts. One church member even mentioned the church's role in serving the large number of German tourists who visit Vancouver each summer. I will return in chapter six to the redefinition of the identity of German churches in the 1990s.

## 4.7  CONCLUSIONS

The church plays a tremendous role in the settlement and adjustment of immigrants. Both in terms of identifiable social services and assistance and as a community centre and place of belonging, the church in the German community formed the hub of neighbourhood connections and social networks. It is difficult to paint a picture of the sheer density of the activities around which the church existed. Photographs provide some evidence of the large communities served by the church but still cannot convey the centrality of the church for the German speaking people in the South Vancouver community. Both formal and informal programs and services offered

by the church made the difference between successful integration and social isolation when immigrants arrived. The churches helped immigrants both by fulfilling basic needs as well as providing opportunity for skill development (in music programs, leadership, organization and various other activities) and friendships. Social services are one of the many social functions of the church. In the ethnic church, many of these social functions are similar to the mainstream church but they become more significant for those who have no other means for establishing themselves. The extent to which these ethnic German churches provided and sustained a cultural home will be examined in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## ETHNIC PRESERVATION OR IMMIGRANT ADJUSTMENT?

In assessing immigrant adjustment in a new society there is considerable debate in the literature as to whether identification with an ethnic/immigrant group is, or is not, advantageous in seeking to adapt and adjust to the dominant host society (Bankston & Zhou 1995). On the one hand it is argued that a sustained focus and involvement in the activities of the ethnic group constrain the ability of immigrants to improve their socio-economic status and impedes assimilation. The opposite argument holds that ethnic group cohesion and participation helps groups to adapt to the host culture with the support of fellow immigrants who can then better achieve upward mobility (ibid). Naturally if immigrants are to maintain and build within-group interaction there must be a venue around which ethnic group participation takes place. There may be any number of formal or informal institutions around which ethnic groups may congregate, for example ethnic clubs, restaurants or businesses but Millet (1975) argues that, "of all the institutions supporting the survival of distinctive cultures, the church is usually the strongest and the most active" (105). To this end, this chapter will examine the role of the ethnic church in influencing the adjustment or assimilation of immigrants to the host society versus encouraging the preservation of heritage and ethnic tradition. In the context of the German churches, consideration must be given to the influences of public sentiment toward Germans after the war. Did public treatment of Germans influence whether they chose to join German churches? Did it affect whether the church became a place of refuge where being German was acceptable? After an elaboration on the debate of preservation of ethnic culture versus adapting to the host society a brief consideration of the specifics of this case study group will situate the position of the German immigrants. The remainder of the chapter will discuss whether or not the

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German churches in Vancouver facilitated adjustment or assimilation of immigrants or whether they played a role in maintaining German culture. Of course the possibility remains that the church fulfilled both roles. Finally, the policies and actions of denominational church bodies will receive attention in attempting to interpret some of the local differences in attitudes toward preserving German culture.

## 5.1 THE DEBATE: ENCOURAGING PRESERVATION OR ADAPTATION

Whereas the debate of Bankston and Zhou (1995) focused generally around issues of identification with an ethnic group, the discussions of Hurh and Kim (1990) and Mullins (1989) speak directly to the role of religion and the ethnic church in the promotion or delaying of upward mobility and assimilation. In their research on Korean immigrants in the United States, Hurh and Kim identify the two sides of the debate on the role of the ethnic church: (a) the ethnic church "enhances the ethnic cohesion and identity of immigrants but may slow down their assimilation process; thus the ethnic church functions as a 'mobility trap.'" (Hurh & Kim 1990:23) versus (b) the ethnic church "functions to promote the education, assimilation and mobility of immigrants" (ibid). In Mullins' Canadian research on Christian and Buddhist Japanese immigrants he too examines the role of the ethnic religious institution in immigrant assimilation. He explains the first perspective which emphasizes the church's influence in maintaining ethnic customs and traditions:

> *One major perspective on this relationship emphasizes the conservative role of religion in maintaining ethnic customs, language, and group solidarity. This approach is clearly reminiscent of Durkheim's functionalist theory of religion. Religious beliefs and rituals, he maintained, bind individuals together and provide the social context necessary for the transmission of traditions and values (Mullins 1989:3).*

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On the other side of the coin the church or religious institution is presented as an adapting organization promoting assimilation:

> *A second major perspective on religion and ethnicity emphasizes that immigrant churches are best viewed as adapting organizations. The basic assumption of this approach is that the assimilation process invariably transforms an ethnic group over the course of several generations. Organizational survival, therefore, will eventually require adapting to the acculturated generations (Mullins 1989:5).*

Mullins found that for the Japanese, affiliation with Christian churches was viewed as movement into Anglo-society and therefore "an indicator of assimilationist orientation" (ibid, 10) whereas Buddhist churches were seen as symbols of Japanese culture and therefore affiliates tended to be more conservative and stronger supporters of Japanese tradition and heritage.

For Mullins, conclusions on the role of the ethnic church in affecting the maintenance of culture and tradition versus adapting and assimilating were drawn along the lines of religious beliefs. For German immigrants, any differences in the role of the church must be attributed to something other than the religious differences as almost all German immigrants were Christian believers of either Catholic or Protestant background. In the case of German immigration, the role of the church in promoting ethnic cohesion or in encouraging assimilation must be couched in an understanding of the social circumstances around which the German churches in Vancouver were trying to establish themselves.

Interviewees provided much food for thought around the public attitudes toward Germans and the influence that had on the process of self-selection dividing those who chose to go to a German church, those who chose to go to a 'Canadian' church, and those who chose not to go to church at all. Several interviewees noted what is a generally well recognized observation, that "probably no other nationality assimilates itself into the community quicker than the Germans." A Lutheran church leader explained the common attitude held by many of the German

immigrants:

>*As you know, the German immigrants tried as quickly as possible to integrate.
>For more than one reason...I was in the war for two years and the memory and
>the media to this day...well at that time, was very strong and I think every German
>immigrant here felt that the best thing was to not make any waves at the time but
>to just mould into the system here as quickly as possible. That's the honest
>truth...What most of them want is to be left in peace. They had enough of war and
>enough commotion. I came here to put that all behind me so just leave me alone.
>That's about the size of it for a lot of people, they just want to live with their
>family the way they deserve.*

Several interviewees recounted stories about the way that German immigrants tried to assimilate

and almost blend into the Vancouver landscape. Here a pastor explains the reasons for

immigration and then the implications of arriving under such circumstances:

>*The incident that triggered the German immigration was losing the war...people
>had a fairly difficult time after that and still in the early 1950s I remember people
>who said that when they walked down the street people pointed fingers at them
>and said those are the Nazis and they started the war. At that time many
>parents...a German husband and a German wife would only speak English at
>home between each other and to the kids. So basically they denied their mother
>tongue because they tried to assimilate as fast as they could and sometimes they
>even denied their heritage because it was bad, Hitler, Nazis, everything. And the
>strange thing is that quite a number of our second generation German immigrants
>barely understand German and they don't speak a word of it because under the
>circumstances of a lost war it wasn't fashionable to speak German.*

My own German ethnic grandparents who immigrated from Russia in the 1920s changed their

surname from 'Nikkel' to 'Nichol.' Their new last name was assumed to be Scottish which

made it easier for them to be accepted into their host society after escaping to Canada after the

first World War. For many during the inter-war period there were repercussions for being

German; attitudes were carried over to similarly impact the German churches. Here one church

leader explains the treatment of Germans and describes one incident he remembers at Bethany

Baptist:

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> *Basically because my sister and brother were born in Germany itself, my parents had to report to the Mounties (police) every month. They had to report and get fingerprinted and even though they were Canadian citizens they were classed as enemy aliens so many people did, they had to report to the Mounties. There were certain repercussions. For example, Bethany was already a separate church in 1939 but they had German services...in 1938 a German battleship came into the harbour like many battleships did at that time and of course being a German battleship [the church] wanted to be of service and so they invited them to church and for dinner...there were dozens of German soldiers who came. Well the Mounties kept track of this and realized this was happening and so then later on when war broke out, members of Bethany Baptist church became high on the list of enemy aliens and that became news to the neighbourhood and they became very hostile to the church. They had to virtually board up the windows because they were broken by stones...*

The impacts of violent incidents against the church forced many German immigrants to learn English and adjust as best and as fast as they could:

> *Even [at] Ebenezer, I remember that they did things to the church, tried to ruin things a bit...they used to call them Nazis. But a lot of our people did try and learn the English and I remember my mother, she tried to learn English as much as she could...she tried to help herself but she too was quite an elderly lady you know. The thing is, at home we always spoke German...*

The impact of the war and the unpopularity of being German really had two consequences for the German churches. For German immigrants the circumstance of war acted as an incentive to assimilate quickly and to lose identifiably German characteristics as explained by one church leader, "it was just after the First World War so that was their incentive to assimilate very quickly because it wasn't popular to be German or have a German background. That's really why there wasn't much protection of the German culture." In the Baptist church denomination, outside presses of war influenced the renaming of the denominational conference:

> *During World War Two the German churches felt the pressure of being associated with a nation with which Canada was at war. German names of churches were dropped in favour of English ones, and the whole denomination adopted the designation North American Baptist General Conference (Renfree 1988:286).*

For some German churches, however, the pressures to assimilate quickly that penetrated every aspect of life from grocery shopping to business to education and neighbourhood relationships, left the church as the only remaining arena in which it *was acceptable* to be German, to speak the German language, to sing German hymns and to speak about the horrors of war and the challenges of resettling. It is fascinating that the approach or reaction to one's own German identity at the time has had such a lasting effect on the church's history, growth and process of self-definition. The churches that became the main arena and venue of German culture have experienced much greater difficulty with issues of adjusting to their new social landscapes and challenges of generational evolution. Those who have always taken a more assimilative approach, allowing German characteristics to die, have had an easier (but not easy) time looking at local missions beyond the German community.

## 5.2    PRESERVING/MAINTAINING ETHNIC IDENTITY

The role of the church in preserving and maintaining ethnic identity has been well documented (Moberg 1962; Millet 1975; Hurh & Kim 1990; Coburn 1992; Kawano 1992). When speaking of upholding ethnic heritage, identity, or culture we are really speaking of the continuation of language, history, music, holiday celebrations, food, values and ties to the motherland. Within the church this means that values are passed on during sermons and lessons, that concerns about the motherland are the subject of prayer and that missionary activity is continued, in the case of the Germans, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Coburn's (1992) study found that the use of the German language and the presence of a German speaking pastor who spoke the high German tongue significantly impacted the preservation of culture and practices thus, "solidifying and maintaining the immigrants' ties to the mother country" (35).

More than simply preserving ethnic identity, Millet (1975) argues that "institutions in their linguistically-defined or origin-defined structure *encourage* and perhaps *permit* the survival of a great many ethnic groups," (106, emphasis mine). This is particularly the case for churches who began and ran German language schools on Saturday mornings whose sole purpose was to perpetuate the German mother tongue in the second and even third generations. Moberg (1962) argues that transplanted ethnic churches become, "a centre of allegiance holding the group together, preserving old-world culture traits, perpetuating the native tongue, and thus helping to retard assimilation" (456). In the Lutheran church that held its own small German school, part of the curriculum was intended to teach children about the 'Heimat', the German homeland such that they would sense and learn an attachment to and appreciation for their heritage. Speaking more in terms of recent immigrant groups, particularly Asian immigrants, Kawano (1992) further asserts that the chief role of religion for new arrivals,

> *is keeping alive the ethnic subculture. Thus the subculture takes pride in its religious activities. This is especially true if large numbers of the new immigrants are of one religion or denomination. In this way both religious and cultural identities are transferred together in immigration (62).*

In many ways the German ethnic church has become a depository of culture and customs such that they are and have been preserved in the church much longer than in any other public sphere. One of my interviewees affirmed that his church preserved German ethnicity and did not function to help to integrate immigrants because integration was not within its purview; integration was to occur elsewhere. He believed,

> *our immigrant church did more to help preserve the history and culture where we come from. Because to integrate in Canadian society, that is sort of beside the church; on the job or playing soccer through schools and so on. We don't look to the church for all that although we do recognize that we do need the young people, we do it for the young, bring the English into the church, not for ourselves.*

He recognized that some integration must occur, integration here equals using English, but his rationale suggests that 'integration' should only be adopted for generational reasons. Another interviewee explained that following the traditions of the churches in Germany and Russia, the churches were very strict about both their beliefs, practices and liturgy. There were formats and ways of doing things that, to the outsider, would have identified the church as uniquely German. He explained that in the church, "we could still keep our own ways of doing things, keep our traditions where out in the workplace you had to adjust to the ways of the world or the way other people did things. We of course then adopted a lot of things that are different from our traditions."

Not only did the church *preserve* German culture and liturgical tradition but for the early immigrants it was seen as a *protector* of German identity. Some immigrants pretentiously viewed their German faith as better than the faith of non-German Christians and to them the German church shielded them from the dangers of the more secular English church:

> *the church was really here to protect us from the big bad world. And I grew up in a very tight Mennonite Brethren German speaking community in Southern Manitoba and we talked about the 'Anglander,' the English. There were them and us and although it was never really articulated and it couldn't be because it's not a very theological concept, really we were here to protect the Christian culture and if it was only German culture well that was part of it too.*

If the church plays such an important part in the preservation of ethnic identities, the question of why the church holds such central importance must be asked. For those I interviewed, the church represented 'home' and this in itself obviously held multiple meanings. It represented the home church in the motherland, the motherland itself and it represented the new home of the immigrants in Vancouver. In keeping the German language and its familiar liturgical traditions,

the church also was a place of comfort and an environment that welcomed and accepted ones'

'Germanness.' Several quotations by my interviewees include mention of the importance of

'home' and describe what characterizes their German church. Most speak for themselves and

they are included to recognize this overarching theme:

> *for an immigrant community, everything else is forcing them to adjust and adapt and this is one place where they don't have to...my experience has been that the church is really controlled or directed for that first generation immigrant community. Its mandate is primarily to preserve the familiarity of home and that's not just within the German church. You also see this in the Sikh culture. I'm beginning to see that with some of the guys I work out with down at the YMCA by Langara [College].*

> *in our church still we have lots of German traditions. You can see at our Christmas time even with our advent thing. We have lots of German traditions, we celebrate certain dates even in the year. Pentecost for instance in Germany, you celebrate that. You know even the way things are decorated, the way certain things are done, it's typical German and it's amazing that, the English speakers, those who are not from Germany, they enjoy that extremely, they really like the traditions, while the Germans who came as teenagers over here, who wanted to assimilate very quickly, they don't cherish that.*

> *But see this is home, church is home and that is why these German churches, as long as they have their founding members, they will still have a German part in their service because this is home. They have established it, they have lived together. They went through very hard times together and there is a bond, not only a Christian one but there is an inter-personal bond.*

Another explanation for why the church, in particular, maintains German culture lies in the

spiritual significance of maintaining the mother tongue. For more than half of my interviewees,

English is now their preferred language of conversation. After forty or more years in Canada,

English comes most naturally to them in daily communication. For many of them, however,

German still holds a particular significance in worship because of its familiar terminology and

the peculiarities of translation. The Biblical Word cannot be adequately expressed for these

immigrants in the English language. Several of the post-World War Two immigrants expressed sentiments similar to this church leader's:

> *when you go to a service in your own mother tongue, it's not just the words that you hear. It is more than that. There is feeling in it that in your own language means a lot more than in English though we can understand [English]. That's why German people hang onto the German service. It's just more meaningful. If that wasn't the case, people from Surrey, White Rock and West Vancouver, wouldn't drive all the way to the German service.*

Another interviewee explained his sense of comfort in teaching and leading church activities in the German language. He explained how his wife, who used to be very involved in church activities, is less active now and he attributed their waning participation to the church's preference for English where they (both husband and wife) felt more comfortable teaching, speaking and praying in German. He says, "my wife, she couldn't offer in English what she can do in German. [In German] she can talk to Sunday School [classes]...even the ladies when they have some program she can prepare a speech. In English she wouldn't."

One of the most amazing results of this study, because it examines an ethnic group and ethnic church that have existed for over sixty years, is that the role of the church in preserving ethnic identities is not necessarily a one generation phenomenon. The ethnic church in fact can have a lifespan much longer than the time period even within which a group is considered to be assimilated. As mentioned, it is quite safe to state that the Germans in Vancouver are a highly assimilated ethnic group. Data from the 1991 census suggests almost a disappearance of a once strong German core. As discussed in Chapter two there is (geographically and socially) virtually no German community left yet there are still almost a dozen German speaking church congregations. Several of these churches are still keen to preserve their German traditions and though members are long-since Canadian citizens they have not chosen to give up their heritage.

At one interview with a Lutheran church leader the following conversation unfolded:

> *Interviewer*: The church has been very successful in maintaining the German culture is that true?
> *Respondent*: Oh yes.
> *Interviewer*: Has that changed at all since the church began? Is it stronger or weaker or...
> *Respondent*: I think over 40% according to our survey of our members have been members since between '61 and '70. There are some German people I think who believe if is time for us to build up the English side more. But some of the German people are so opposed to it. It has to be German.

Speaking of the same church, another leader explained the extent of the church's efforts to ensure that the German language is maintained to the high standards of the congregation:

> *this is why we hire all our pastors from Germany...we could find someone here who speaks wonderful English and broken German but that's not for our congregation. Most people there...want a perfect German not broken, like my way of speaking English with an accent. They want someone who is educated. Someone who doesn't preach too high over their heads. The speaking of German in correct sentences is necessary...So far we have been able to find pastors. There are no shortage of them, you just put an ad in the paper. You have to be careful though. In Germany there are pastors now in the seminary who read the Bible somewhat differently. But we bring them over and we will tell you if you are suitable to us or not.*

As was mentioned earlier, the pastor or priest holds a key role in maintaining language which is probably the most defining and obvious characteristic of culture or identity. But he also plays a key role in encouraging, both verbally and structurally, the preservation of German heritage. One couple I interviewed suggested that one of the reasons that German traditions had been lost in their church was because of a lack of effort and encouragement on the part of the minister to promote identifiable German characteristics in the church program.

Another issue raised in the quotation above spurs another important matter regarding the preservation of the German culture in these churches. True in some cases, the ethnic church plays a large part in keeping the German culture alive, but it is a very *particular* version of both

culture and theology that are maintained. The German churches in Vancouver still holding to their German liturgy are, generationally speaking, churches that began in the 1940s and 1950s (most now include small elements of Canadian church culture). A church leader from one of the Baptist churches explained:

> in German, [worship] is very traditional because it's also the way that it was in the old country in those years. It has changed quite a bit in those years now but if you come from a country you bring your ideas and you cherish those. Now in 40 years Germany has developed itself in quite a different manner but still people here are not as well connected...They like [worship] of course the way that they are used to it in their home country...so we are still very traditional.

Elements of Canadian culture that have crept into these churches that traditionally encouraged the preservation of German tradition have brought about dividing tension that is most visible across generations. In the German Baptist churches, issues of generational conflict began when English use first crept into the church through the youth group:

> In a few instances this tendency was counteracted with the utmost discipline and force; [the church] lost young people. In most cases the younger parents - now in control of church affairs - together with Canadian trained pastors saw the handwriting on the wall and worked toward a language compromise (Sturhahn 1976:215).

But as Gumpp (1989) describes, most churches took a level-headed approach that balanced the need for German tradition (found within the church) with behaviours favouring adjustment to life outside of the church. She explains,

> Their desire for religious services in familiar forms, their need for social contact with fellow ethnics, and their wish to pass on their culture to their children did not preclude their aiming at full admission into Canadian society, at friendship with non-Germans, and at providing their offspring with the best chances for life in the chosen land (Gumpp 1989:107).

In the end, the importance of the preservation of the German culture in the church is

really a non-issue though as Nagata (1987) comments, it is amazing "the degree to which theological refinements...are subordinated to preoccupation with identity by birthplace, language, and 'ethnicity'" (33). The church's primary role remains spiritual. Its mission is to spread the Christian gospel. Anything cultural must come secondary to the spiritual or not at all. When I asked the longest living member of one church how much German culture had been preserved in the church he thoughtfully responded,

> *Well the part that has been lost is substantial but I think that some of the stuff,*
> *well the most important things have, through the grace of God, been kept up.*
> *There are some things that, say have been side stepped or dropped but the basic*
> *principles have been maintained and the most important thing is that we haven't*
> *lost faith.*

## 5.3 ENCOURAGING ADJUSTMENT TO CANADA

The second perspective on the ethnic church is that it acts as an adapting organization by encouraging adjustment to Canada; essentially this position of the church stands in opposition to preserving ethnicity. In Park's (1994) review of the geography of religion and examination of the impact of immigration on the religious landscape he notes that "religion is one of the institutional areas of a society in which indigenous and immigrant populations *can* mix and integrate" (157, italics mine). This mixing is necessary if social integration is to be achieved and when the, "religion of immigrants is similar to the dominant religion of the new territory, assimilation will occur more quickly" (Moberg 1962:456). Aside from the German churches themselves, this holds true in the German community who assimilated rapidly and whose religion was similar to that of the British majority in Vancouver. Bankston and Zhou (1995) studied the religious participation and ethnic identification of Vietnamese adolescents in an immigrant community to determine how they were adapting to their new environment. In support of the argument for the church as an institution promoting adaptation, they found that while religious participation

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contributed to ethnic identification, on the other hand, ethnic religious participation also facilitated positive adaptation to American society.

In the case of the ten German churches studied there is less evidence for the argument that the church acted to facilitate immigrant adaptation. Most of the case study churches followed the model of ethnic preservation. They may not be the majority however (and unfortunately this study is not able to reliably position the ten case study churches within the general scope of churches in the entire Lower Mainland as Burkinshaw has done), as Burkinshaw (1996) argues that for most Vancouver churches, trying to integrate into the mainstream church culture was the norm:

> *Several Mennonite groups, a variety of Reformed churches transplanted by Dutch immigrants and Baptist denominations with Scandinavian and German origins, among others, added tens of thousands of evangelicals to the province after large-scale immigration began in the 1920s. Significantly, most did not remain culturally isolated groups but became integrated into the wider evangelicalism in the province to a large degree and began to incorporate considerable numbers of members from outside their original cultural groups....they increasingly defined themselves in terms of evangelicalism rather than in ethnic and cultural terms (88).*

It is unclear whether Burkinshaw is referring to ethnic churches formed after World War Two (which is the majority in the case of the Germans) or before, but it is clear that one of the major reasons that churches encouraged integration and the reception of members from outside of the original ethnic group is because of the restrictions the preservationist attitude put on membership growth. At Ebenezer Baptist, it was the church leadership who decided that the church was to remain community oriented and would minister to members from any cultural background who desired to worship there. As this church leader explained,

> *the church leadership made the decision for the church to be more community oriented and then the rest of the people went along with that. The church is really a flock to some degree. They'll follow the leaders if the leaders are strong*

*enough. And I think that's what happened there...The leadership said this is what
we want to do and this is why we want to do it and this is why it's good for our
community.*

Probably the strongest evidence for the church taking the position of encouraging adaptation

comes from an interview with a current Lutheran pastor who spoke of the first Lutheran pastor

who collected and led the large number of post-World War Two immigrants. He explains how

the church facilitated adaptation not through direct means but really in the sense that Mullins and

Hurh and Kim were trying to explain:

> *Pastor Marx was apparently really good at that, integrating immigrants into
> Canadian society. He put a lot of effort into that. Since it didn't take long and the
> German community and congregation turned into something like a firm bond of
> immigrants, formed like a little society within society but not in order to cut
> themselves off from Canadian society but to maybe find strength in relationships
> they had between one another to go out into Canadian society and do their jobs
> and be faithful and hard workers and build their homes.*

Thus the churches themselves did not take on the position of encouraging adaptation. They did

want to be German and to preserve German culture. However, they also wanted their church

members to be successful citizens in the community. In such a position, the churches encouraged

adaptation through the provision of social services and a sense of place that allowed them to be

grounded in a church home while exploring and developing outside of that home, in a largely

non-German environment.

### 5.4    DOING BOTH: PRESERVING CULTURE AND FACILITATING ADJUSTMENT

It is tempting to portray churches as conforming to one of these two perspectives as both

Hurh and Kim and Mullins have attempted to do, but many churches act in both roles and it is

important to recognize that while churches can accomplish both, many do so without realizing it.

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Mohl and Betten (1981) in their study on immigrant churches in Indiana acknowledged this dual role of the church explaining that, "Religion provided a form of security through tradition and a continuation of what was known and respectable in an alien, rough and tumble industrial town" (14). They recognize that the church defended culture by trying to preserve and transfer immigrant heritage to the new society but at the same time it was, "aiding the immigrant in understanding and accepting a new society" (15). In their example they noted how ethnic churches attempted to introduce and affirm American values. The following quotation sings of American nationalism and though nothing as elaborate as this existed in any of the German churches there are certainly strong elements of Canadian (church) values which have crept into organizational structures and for some churches into worship services. Mohl and Betten explain this bridging:

> *Although the churches maintained a continuity with the old and familiar, they also interpreted American society to the immigrants and aided integration into the new society. American flags hung in church sanctuaries, Church classrooms provided citizenship classes, and children of many parishes joined church-based Boy Scout troops. Church-sponsored interfaith meetings, political clubs, credit unions, and scholarships more subtly prepared the newcomer and his family for American urban life. The churches themselves often took on American Ways in order to retain the interest and eventual support of parish children growing up in an American environment (1981:13).*

One of my interviewees from the Catholic church also spoke to much the same issue of the church bridging both functions of preserving ethnicity and adapting to a Canadian system. She noted that church members both "clung to...traditions...on the other side we wanted to adjust to the new country too." She elaborated to explain just how that was done, "...we brought speakers in, political speakers, speakers from the immigration, we had public speaking courses, we had cooking courses, and so we tried to educate ourselves too besides just having fun together so it was always interesting." The idea that both preservation and adjustment were supported by the

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church is confirmed in the church's fortieth anniversary book which explains that Holy Family, "served those of German origin as a place of worship, as a focus of Christian community, and as a centre of cultural heritage. In all of these ways it has helped them to make the necessary transitions to a new home and a new culture" (Forty Years, Holy Family Parish). One of the Lutheran church leaders explained how his church acted in both capacities as preserver and adaptor. His is an example of a church that perhaps unconsciously was facilitating adjustment because it was not in any organized or formal sense. He said that, "the churches at first help the immigrants a lot when they first come in to get established and also feel they have a place to go to speak their own language and ask questions. But also when they integrated, they need advice for a job or an interview for a job or..." The fact that advice on integration was found in and through church members points to the hidden but common role of the church in aiding adjustment.

I would like to be able to say more about the role of the German churches in aiding both immigrant adaptation and ethnic preservation but interviews did not produce much discussion on such issues. Perhaps it is difficult to look objectively at one's own church to examine how the church has encouraged or discouraged culture. That was certainly the sense that I got when trying to probe into such questions. Perhaps the view of an outsider is necessary but that outsider would need to know the church well enough over a long period of time to make that kind of assessment. Unfortunately I am not qualified to do so. My historical knowledge of these churches comes only from what I have been able to read and hear from the mouths of those who have been a part of these communities for a very long time. Before leaving the issue of ethnic preservation there is an additional factor which sheds a valuable perspective through the denominational lens.

## 5.5 CHURCH DENOMINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE ETHNIC CHURCH

In the introduction to this chapter, several explanations for why churches have chosen to pursue preservationist versus adaptive goals were sought. Requiring more attention here is the role that denominational bodies play in influencing, and in some instances dictating, the directions that churches will take with respect to preserving their ethnic heritage. The most pronounced and outspoken body has been the Canadian Lutheran Church Synod. A weaker stance has been taken by the Baptist and Mennonite denominations. The role of each body will be discussed.

In Coburn's (1992) book on the rural German Lutheran community in the American mid-west there is significant attention dedicated to the influence of the Missouri Synod on the local affairs of the Block church. Well into the twentieth century, the standard language of the church and school was German; this of course influenced the communities' ties to their mother country and the preservation of their culture and practices. The protectionist hand of the Synod reached into the daily life of the community:

> *Ethnic and religious biases against the 'outside world' established a powerful bulwark between German-Lutheran communities and American society. The Missouri Synod tried desperately to shield its members from 'the world' through conservative doctrine and the use of the German language in church and school; preservation of the 'true faith' demanded constant and unrelenting stewardship (Coburn 1992:112).*

Of course the preservation of German culture was made simpler by the rural character of the community; a transition to the English language and 'Americanization' of life were accelerated in urban churches. The power of the church in perpetuating German culture is intriguing. During the First World War, German churches were threatened and as a result, the Missouri Synod instructed churches to appear, at least to outsiders, as patriotic to their new homeland as

possible. Few churches actually dropped the use of the German language in their schools but teachers were asked to use English more and more; many if not most churches dropped the label 'German' from their church name. In response to the instructions from the Synod, Coburn says that many church members became resentful of the dictatorial commands and demands made by the Synod. Their response was a refusal to deny their German roots.

What is interesting about the story Coburn relates is that almost the exact same situation occurred in the Canadian Lutheran Synod in the 1960s when the Canadian German Lutheran Synod joined with the Canadian Norwegian Lutheran Synod. The new head of these amalgamated Synods called for a de-ethnicization of church congregations using languages other than English in worship. Several interviewees reconstructed this situation:

> At that time the word was out in Canada and the U.S. in church circles that only English is the language of the church. So we said fine then, we'll look for our own pastor (normally the Synod found the pastor). The emphasis then was to drop all the ethnic stuff and that of course brought the congregation up in arms.

The Synod decision to discourage ethno-linguistic congregations did not sit well with many of the Lutheran congregations; they were unclear about the rationale for eliminating non-English speaking congregations. In the case of the German Lutheran congregations in Vancouver, they rejected the decision:

> We [now] have very good cooperation with [the Synod] but in the beginning, they made a blunder...[it was] the leader of the Synod. I met him once, the leader of [Synod] and he was strictly against Germans. Why? Who knows, it's personal. He said [Germans] all speak English and there won't be any German spoken anyway so forget it as far as creating a church.

This interviewee was speaking specifically of the desire for St. Mark's to establish itself as a German congregation. The Synod's rejection of that request has meant that St. Mark's has never joined the Synod, choosing instead to remain an independent German Lutheran congregation.

Two other leaders from each of the other two churches mentioned the same conflict with the Synod. Another member recounts his participation and reaction to the decision:

> *the Lutheran church [Synod] in 1960 was uniting...with the Norwegian body. In 1959 I personally had a discussion with the President of the Lutheran church...and he said, we're closing down the German services because we're uniting with the Norwegians and we're all going to be only English. And that was from the top down and what happened...I was in Winnipeg at the time...the German part of the congregation met and they told the pastor that any attempt to [become all English] would mean that they would walk out en masse and if they did that there wouldn't be enough there to carry out a congregation. The same thing happened here [in Vancouver] because I spoke with [a pastor here] on this...he said yes, I got that letter too and I just wrote them back and said no way, they might as well close down the church if they do that. So the feeling from the Synod has not been conducive...*

Eventually there was so much backlash from the congregations that the President of the Synod lost his re-election campaign and the ethnic churches carried on with an even greater determination to succeed as *German* churches.

The influence of the denomination is not the only factor influencing the perpetuation of German culture in Vancouver's German Lutheran churches. A second factor deserving attention is the state connection to the church in Germany. Not directly related to the Lutheran denominational body, state financial control meant that Lutheran churches had a very different understanding of the role of the church:

> *the Lutheran church in Germany was the state church and what happened...my father was Lutheran and I went to a Lutheran church...but because it was a state church you went to church because it was the thing to do and the state church never had the outreach, evangelistic outreach. It was there if you wanted to go to it but there was no concerted effort to reach out into the community because it (the church) was the community. So if you transport those people here they have the same attitude.*

As a result the Lutheran churches here have made less of a conscious effort to reach out and extend an invitation and welcome to the non-churched of their community. The interviewee

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further suggested that as a result of this attitude there has been little "outreach [even] to the young people within the church...the young people didn't find it meaningful." This of course has tremendous implications for the future of the church. Generational issues will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

With respect to the Baptist congregations there has been less denominational controversy over perpetuating German identity within the church. Much of this is due to the fact that Baptist churches are, for the most part, empowered with much greater decision making autonomy. In general, Baptist church denominations have been supportive of ethnic congregations. Nagata (1987) mentions that several Baptist churches in both the U.S. and Canada have developed policies on immigrant memberships and have,

> *for almost a century cultivated a policy of 'Home Missions', which encouraged the formation of separate immigrant congregations, and perpetuated ethnic and cultural differences. This policy caused conflicting responses within the 'Anglo' Baptist community, some of whom advocated swift assimilation, while others refused to associate with immigrants. The Baptists' mode of 'conference' organization permits considerable power devolution, and local congregations, ethnic or not, can manage most of their day-to-day affairs independently...(35).*

The devolution of power and decision making has had an interesting effect on the church histories of the three Baptist churches in this study. As was made evident in the brief church histories already presented (chapter three), each church has taken a somewhat different perspective on ethnic preservation. Ebenezer has moved away from the ethnic church model whereas Immanuel, until very recently, conformed quite closely to it. The observation that some German Baptist churches in the Lower Mainland "dropped elements of their ethnic identity" (Burkinshaw 1995:247) was also documented by Burkinshaw who explained the change as, "an attempt to appeal to the wider community" (ibid:248). Two other authors have noted the declining identification of German churches with their exclusive German identity (Pousett 1983;

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Renfree 1988). In his 1984 book, Pousett noted that most Baptist churches were, "no longer bilingual - their activities are carried on entirely in English. On the whole, they no longer consider their mission in terms of reaching German immigrants and their children, but are attempting to reach a wider community" (66). Though it is impossible to attribute causality or know of the rationale behind these changes, the impact of the denomination must be recognized. Sturhahn (1976) listed three concerns of the denomination which were presented to the German ethnic churches which, in effect, make quite strong statements on the role of the church in issues of cultural concern. The concerns were as follows:

> i) the church role was not to foster the development of one particular language or to preserve cultural values;
> ii) language in the church should never become an end in itself, it is a means to convey the message; and
> iii) the spiritual growth of children is more important than the acquisition of a second language (Sturhahn 1976:215).

These issues, discussed by District Secretaries of the Baptist denomination with individual congregations, were adhered to with varying degrees by each of the individual churches. Simply the fact that the denomination made such a policy statement against the preservation of the ethnic church for cultural reasons above spiritual is of itself significant. The actual impact on Baptist churches in Western Canada is almost impossible to evaluate.

The Mennonite church body has taken an altogether different approach from the Lutheran Synod by discouraging the preservation of ethnic identity, specifically ethnic Mennonite identity. The history of the Mennonite denomination has its geographical roots in Eastern Europe as a peaceful but persecuted church. The experience of persecution has made the Mennonite church and its members a solidly cohesive group. Mennonites have been identified both as an ethnic and religious group holding strictly to values and traditions. In 1977, two articles appeared in the

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*Vancouver Province* on the local Mennonite population and the move to separate ethnic

Mennonitism from religious Mennonitism (Virtue 1977a & b). Virtue explained that church

leaders sought to publicize their position that one must not be of ethnic Mennonite origin to be a

member of a Mennonite church. The distinction between these categories of 'Mennonitism' are

best described by Redekop:

> 1. **Ethnic Mennonites** have no religious commitment but are still classified as
> Mennonite because of names, food, lifestyle and/or language.
> 2. **Ethnic-Religious Mennonites** share the traits of the first category but are also
> religious. They may be dominantly ethnic or religious depending on personal
> emphasis.
> 3. **Religious Mennonites** was the original category that now includes new
> converts and new members with no Mennonite ethnic identity (Redekop
> 1984:112-114).

Discussions on the necessary separation of ethnic and religious Mennonitism have been taken up

by Redekop (1984; 1987) since the late 1960s. In 1964, Redekop identified 'six winds of

change' that he believed the church needed to attend and respond to: de-ethnicization, language

and culture change, urbanization, dispersion, professionalization and class change (Redekop

1984:96). The 'winds of change' he identified were issues he saw that resulted from a number of

social changes and events including: the social impact of World War Two; a new concern for

authentic community evangelism; transition from the German to the English language; increased

urbanization and social absorption; increased intermarriage of Mennonites with non-Mennonites;

and of course questions on relationship between the church and ethnicity. As one of these

'winds', Redekop argued that ethnic identity should be repressed in the church as it is secondary

to primacy of Christian faith and inhibits the invitation to and acceptance of other ethnic groups.

A prominent leader in the Mennonite community, Redekop specifically addressed the

denomination with his concerns:

*There is a place for ethnic congregations, especially if a language barrier exists. But such congregations must then reach out to the non-Christians who speak that language...The ethnic churches which are growing rapidly are those ministering to immigrant people who still have their own closed communities. Most Mennonites in Canada, and certainly the Mennonite Brethren, can no longer claim to be such a church or conference. Our mandate must at least match our secular penetration of society (Redekop 1987:177).*

The shifting source of immigrants to British Columbia as well as the, "secular, transient character of [the province]'s population and the high growth rate of an ethnically mixed population in areas of Mennonite settlement militated against the maintenance of a closed, ethnically based group" (Burkinshaw 1995:246). The MB church's response was to de-emphasize ethnic and denominational distinctiveness and instead to focus on evangelizing to outsiders (Burkinshaw 1996). The translation of Redekop's ideas into the reality of church life took place over a period of ten to twelve years such that in the late 1980s and 1990s, Mennonite churches really began to embrace the idea of a non-ethnic Mennonite church. Again this is a change away from the traditional Mennonite church. One church leader explains,

*[Mennonites] were very narrow in their [outreach]...so if you weren't Mennonite you weren't accepted. Now many of the growing churches in the city have shed their Mennonite name so they can reach the community. But that wasn't always the way, they had the same narrow perspective in terms of being evangelical as your Roman Catholic or Lutheran church have in terms of being liturgical.*

In effect the diminishment of culture has had quite an effect on the three case study MB churches who have all adopted this separation of ethnic and religious Mennonitism and who have now increasingly multicultural congregations. In the past ten years in particular the churches have clearly adopted the approaches advocated by the MB denomination and its leaders and they are now struggling with issues of how to adapt and invite members of other ethnic groups into their worshipping communities.

Finally, the Catholic church system has encouraged the preservation of ethnic congregations. Under the national parish system, Catholics whose first language is not English are invited to attend national parishes of their native language thus facilitating the separation of linguistic groups. In the case of the Germans, Holy Family Parish was established to meet just this linguistic need. As German Catholics have become more comfortable with English and have moved much greater distances from the parish, many have chosen to attend their local English parish rather than travel back to the national parish. As discussed above this system has demonstrated the Catholic church's ability to function both as a preserver of ethnic culture and as an adapting institution.

## 5.6  ISSUES OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND ADAPTATION IN OTHER ETHNIC CHURCHES

Perhaps before leaving this discussion it is useful to reflect on these same issues as they have been played out for other ethnic and religious groups immigrating to Canada. Research focusing on the relationship between religion and ethnicity has been taken up by several researchers of Asian ethnic groups (Ward 1974; Nagata 1987; Mullins 1989; Knowles 1995). Nagata (1987) argued that many recent Asian immigrants have joined Christian churches to become more 'Canadian.' Knowles (1995) has argued the same assimilating motive in discussing the historical situation of Japanese immigrants to British Columbia but offers an interesting twist on the acceptance of the assimilationist aims of the church:

> *For many [Japanese], the [church] missions became an important part of a well-articulated strategy aimed at achieving economic and social security...despite the assimilationist aims of the church, the missions often became cultural anchors which supported ethnic identity and community (Knowles 1995:65&71).*

Ward (1974) also reflects on the assimilationist aims of the Anglo-Canadian church among

Asian immigrants in British Columbia. Church activities were used by missionaries to try to assimilate Asian immigrants but they also provided key social services and activities: missionaries held Sunday School and church services, sponsored social activities, English evening classes, educational and recreation programs for children, teas and social gatherings for women and hostels for those needing shelter (Ward 1974). In the contemporary situation of Japanese immigration, Mullins (1989) demonstrates that for immigrants of non-European backgrounds, joining churches in Canada often meant assimilating[1]. Thus for the Japanese, churches have not been strong centres of ethnic preservation particularly because of ethnic intermarriage, mobility, and the loss of language ability in successive generations. He argues that generational change is, "at the root of organizational problems confronting minority churches" (Mullins 1989:157).

## 5.7 CONCLUSIONS

Compared to both historical and contemporary Asian immigration it appears that the examples provided by German churches are likely representative of the experience of ethnic churches of European background. Most of the German churches preserved their German heritage much more than they encouraged adaptation to Canada though they facilitated that adaptation through the provision of social services and a sense of belonging. Only one case study church really encouraged adaptation and even that did not occur until after a period of ethnic preservation. Some churches did their best to both preserve the ethnic culture and adapt, the Catholic church best exemplifies this model. Today few of the churches are still holding

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[1] See Mullins (1989) on how the Japanese who joined the United Church did so to become more 'Canadian.' The church thus acted as a strong assimilating force.

onto their German heritage; most have embraced new models of ministry (see chapter six) and

it is to these issues of change and adaptation in terms of church mission that discussion will

now turn.

# CHAPTER SIX

## <u>Changes in the Ethnic Church: From Mono- to Multi-ethnic?</u>

This final chapter is an attempt to bring the histories of the German churches to the

present and to examine the changes that have taken place as a response to outside influences.

The central theme of the chapter is institutional change; how have the churches evolved through

their life cycles? Why have changes occurred in these churches? What has influenced the

churches to alter their ministry or what has kept the churches the same? The two most

significant issues impacting the churches are generational shifts - the aging of the immigrants and

the likelihood of the second generation staying at or leaving the church - - and neighbourhood

transition, the impacts of the new social landscape of the church neighbourhoods. Respectively,

these issues reflect changes in time and space. Finally the responses of the churches to such

changes will be examined both in theory and in practice.

One would assume, at least in theory, that churches, like most institutions, are not static.

Park (1994) argues that size, activities and the wider societal context of churches have adjusted

through time as needs and opportunities have shifted. How church congregations alter over time

is particularly interesting as congregations grow and shrink for various reasons including both

"local factors (such as the immigration or emigration of local people) and some related to wider

change (such as broad demographic trends or religious revival)" (Park 1994:210). But some

churches change very little as they become comfortable and perhaps complacent with their

identity, community and mission. One of my interviewees from a church that, at the institutional

level, is much closer to the cultural preservation end of the spectrum explains:

> *we have made very few changes...The only change that has taken place is that we*
> *have lost some members and we've gained some members. And also, different*
> *ministers we've had over the years [because] every minister brings something*

*new. As far as changes, those were the changes...the people haven't changed*
*much. They're older!*

Many churches find comfort and ease in "doing things the old way" as one interviewee put it.

But other churches recognize that complacency and a lack of future visioning will eventually

bring crisis or even death to the church congregation. One church leader from one of the most

active and innovative congregations explained what the church saw:

> *Basically the choice is change or die, take your pick. If you don't change, well the*
> *last one can turn out the lights. If you do change and become more relevant to*
> *people around you, you can survive. It's traumatic for a lot of people and a lot of*
> *them never do make the transition. They'll go from church to church trying to*
> *find where that tradition still exists...That's okay too. [Change is] not for*
> *everybody.*

As was discussed in the previous chapter, much of the literature suggests that a key role

of the immigrant church is to preserve ethnic culture. Consciously or unconsciously, there is the

potential for ethnic churches to become centred on or even preoccupied with their ethnic identity

rather than basing themselves on religious doctrine (Meyer 1975; Millet 1975). Millet (1975)

recognizes that the focus on ethnicity,

> *happens to different degrees and with varying effectiveness depending on the size*
> *of the ethnic population, the number of generations that have been in Canada, the*
> *regularity of the flow of immigrants, and whether a whole church is involved or*
> *only an ethnic parish of an English or French-language sponsoring church (107).*

As time progresses, most ethno-centred churches tend to lessen their cultural focus, instead

accentuating theological or liturgical beliefs with the goal to, "gain the loyalty of the second

generation, which was not as likely to be attracted by cultural individuality" (Meyer 1975:181).

This shift from a partly cultural institution to a purely religious institution is difficult for some

churches whose history is grounded by people of a particular origin. Almost all of the churches

that were interviewed were experiencing or have experienced the challenge of this shift. As one

pastor explained, the churches have *had* to endure this attitude shift so that now, "the fabric of

the church really focuses on the ministry of the church rather than as a depot for culture." In the

American context, Warner (1993) explains that,

> *for the first generation, religion is in part a refuge from America. But the arrival*
> *of a second generation...suggests to many participants that some old country*
> *ways, in particular, languages, must be sacrificed in order to maintain the*
> *attention of the children. Conducting worship in the English language is one of*
> *the classic paths by which ethnicity [is transmuted] into religion, where what*
> *gives the group its identity is no longer Urdu, for example but Islam, not Japanese*
> *but Buddhism, not Yiddish but Judaism (1063).*

Have the German churches dealt with this necessary shift away from culture? If they have, how

have they adjusted? These questions will be dealt with in the last section of this chapter.

Ethnic churches share a dual purpose of sustaining culture and providing a spiritual

centre, though most church members would likely argue that the church's purpose is solely

theological. The German churches were however, very much cultural institutions (some more

than others) and for many churches this preoccupation with cultural 'ways of doing' has

interfered with their ability to deal with changes in their social environment which ultimately are

having significant effects on the ability of the churches to sustain themselves in the 1990s. This

is not to say that it is wrong for the church to act as a sustainer of culture but there comes a time

when the church must recognize that the culture is not what makes the church and its

perpetuation may be a limitation to growth and the goal of Christian mission. This realization is

particularly necessary when younger generations grow up without the understanding and

attachment to their cultural heritage. As one pastor explained, it was not wrong for the churches

to begin as institutions of cultural support but it is wrong for them to remain as such without

constantly assessing their reasons for remaining as a mono-ethnic institutions:

> *what God called us to in the 1950s and 1960s as an immigrant people...it wasn't*
> *wrong to circle the wagons for self-protection. You were tired. You were hurt.*
> *You were lost. You were without...[but now] we're part of the mainstream of*
> *society. We can stop hiding so let's get going. We have to change the page and*
> *yet psychologically I know what that does when somebody strips away our*
> *experience.*

What he is speaking to is the challenge of dealing with the sense of loss experienced by the immigrant generation, some of whom have a very difficult time accepting the challenge to shift away from what they may not even recognize as the cultural ethos of the church. Gladys Tsang (1990), in her thesis on ethnic churches asserts the necessity of this difficult shift:

> *Mono-ethnic churches are justifiable when language and culture become a*
> *barrier for a person to become a Christian. In other words, when an ethnic group*
> *is unmeltable or non-assimilatable, then ethnic churches are necessary...Ethnic*
> *churches should never exist just for the sake of racial ties - for then, the church*
> *becomes a social community and loses sight of the dynamic power of the Gospel*
> *and the Christian bond of love (Tsang 1990:68).*

For the Germans, assimilation in arenas outside of the church occurred quite rapidly. Following Tsang's logic, the necessity of the German ethnic church must be evaluated if its purpose is simply to exist for the sake of perpetuating German ties. To the outsider, some of the interviewed churches may appear as primarily social communities and though they may not have lost sight of the power of the Christian gospel, several have been blind to opportunities to share their faith outside of the German community.

The challenges in shifting away from a cultural or ethnic church identity are easily confused and compounded by shifts to more contemporary styles of worship and organization. Often these two simultaneous adjustments make dealing with change significantly more complicated and often more sensitive. Sturhahn (1976) identified one of the major conflicts in

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German Baptist churches existing between what he termed 'Canadian Christianity,' associated with the English language, and North American songs and 'European Christianity,' associated with the German language and its songs, poetry and literature. Simultaneously there are pressures to become more contemporary and to become less liturgically German (and perhaps more multi-ethnic). One pastor explains the confusion of these two challenges:

> *It is true of a church like ours...we are faced with a big challenge of becoming more contemporary as well as becoming more neighbourhood oriented...and the two are becoming confused, people are reacting to one. The two get woven together...there is language...we've stuck with the mother tongue...and there is also the other shift and that is to a new upbeat contemporary way of worship.*

For some churches, this shift to the contemporary style of worship is a more significant issue than the loss of German culture. But yet, these changes are intimately woven together. In many churches the style of worship is as connected to the German culture as other elements such as the celebration of particular holidays and/or the use of the mother tongue. Despite the difficulty in sifting through these changes, it is the change presented in both of these challenges that is influencing discussions about what it means to be a German church and what the future of such an identity brings.

In the end what often forces the shift out of a mono-ethnic church model is a multitude of influences which bring the church to the point where their existence is threatened. As Mullins (1989) argues, though churches may be intent on maintaining characteristics which are ethnically distinctive, the history of immigrant churches suggests that they must ultimately face the forces influencing them. He argues that, "the process of assimilation forces the churches to choose between accommodation and extinction" (Mullins 1989:5). Successive generations experience a different life history; they are raised in a new environment where "the language and culture of

the old world becomes increasingly unfamiliar and foreign. This inevitably leads to generational conflict over which language should be used in religious and social activities" (Mullins 1989:5).

## 6.1 FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION?

One of the two most significant factors influencing changes in the German churches is that of generational change. The majority of literature on ethnic churches presents generational issues and the way that generational conflicts are dealt with as **the** most central element in determining the life cycle of immigrant churches. Traditionally, the second generation of immigrants have been less attracted to and interested in the ethnic religious institution. McKay's (1985) research on second generation Syrian-Lebanese Christians in Australia summarizes four reasons for the distancing of the second generation from the religious community of their parents:

> *When asked why they did not attend the ethnic churches regularly, respondents usually gave one or more of the following reasons: 1) they couldn't speak Arabic and thus couldn't understand the service; 2) they had drifted away from the traditional beliefs of their parents and grandparents; 3) the ethnic church was inconvenient because it was either too small, too far away or only held services once a week; or 4) they never attended the ethnic church when they were young (McKay 1985:325-26).*

Referring to various immigrant churches in Indiana, Mohl and Betten (1981) concluded that the second generation consciously rejected the cultural and linguistic baggage of the old world and that in doing so, they rejected the language and religion of their parents. Kawano (1992:88-89) speaks of generational changes within the framework of a gradual shift in loyalties. He explains that the first generation of immigrants are a closely knit group still intimately connected with their homeland. For the second generation, loyalties remain to the ethnic culture but not to the

homeland of their parents, a homeland they may never have seen. For the third generation there is almost no connection to the homeland and little loyalty to the ethnic culture; primary loyalty is given to the larger host culture. The lack of parallel loyalties among the successive generations became a significant theme in interview conversations. Among the German immigrants there was a common experience that was not and could not be shared with subsequent generations. One Baptist church pastor explained:

> *We have to recognize that the first generation of immigrants shared something that was unique to themselves and themselves alone...that only lasts for a generation and there needs to be an adaptation that takes place from that point and an adaptation that really does something to tie the lines between the generations. In our case it is faith that ties the lines and it transcends culture. If we can actively disciple the second and third generation then they will be able to share something that the first generation had. The second and third generation will not be able to share the sights and the sounds and the smells of the old land but they will be able to share in Jesus Christ.*

This pastor clearly sees the challenges of generational divisions but in this case, the willingness to change from church as cultural institution to theological home successfully bridged the conflict in immigrant experience and understanding to subsequent generations. Interestingly this quotation comes from a leader whose church was able to make a relatively smooth transformation out of its ethnic skin. A leader from a church that has had a great deal of internal conflict over its identity as a German church and consequently between generations shares a much less utopian picture of the impact of generational issues on the ethnic church,

> *the next generation that was born here could no longer identify with the immigrant experience...with the war experience...the economy was picking up here and they were always at the cutting edge of technology and education and all of these things were available to them...they could not relate to not having food...that was a totally alien experience to them. So that [lack of common experience] led to a tremendous amount of tension...the younger generation came into times of intense conflict with the older generation. The older generation said 'you don't value your heritage'...the language issue became a very critical*

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*one...they tried to have German school here, a lot of the immigrant communities attempt to teach their children the mother tongue so that they could understand the worship in the mother tongue. You see the younger generation did not understand the older generation and the older generation that came here did not understand the new dynamics of the generation that had grown up here...it all led to very strong church conflicts in many of these ethnic groups. A lot of internal conflicts.*

For the ten churches interviewed, there was a range of experiences of conflicts in generational shifts. Some churches have been quite successful in keeping their second and third generations active in their churches while others have dismally failed. Naturally those churches that have been less successful are the same churches who have had or are going to have much more difficulty in planning their futures.

Another example of the impacts of generational change on the ethnic church comes from a Lutheran church that has firmly remained German and has lost many of its young people. The church has kept its mother tongue for the older church members who feel more at ease and a greater sense of comfort in hearing their native tongue. But this member realizes that in keeping the mother tongue there is a sense of alienation by the next generation.[1] It is a problem he says, and the church is just now beginning to think about how it will handle the issue:

*Naturally I see with our church that the big problem is, you go to church on Sunday and you look around and 80 percent of the people are 60 plus...the young generation, like our daughter, she never goes to church...very few of the young ones come back...but it has to do with the older people, some of them, very few, are sticklers against the English language and they want to keep the German tradition which I personally think is wrong...why would you, a young person, come to a German congregation where the minister speaks English but with a big accent?...I think this is another problem in the long run.*

A German Catholic interviewee echoed these sentiments explaining that comments made by her

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[1] O'Bryan (1975) reports that nationally, the percentage of second generation Germans who are fluent in German is only 4.6%. For third generation Germans, the percentage fluent in German is 0%.

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son influenced the family's move to a non-German parish:

> *my second son, he came thirteen years later than his brother, of course he went to*
> *church with us every Sunday and then he wanted to become an altar boy but he*
> *said to me, 'mom, I don't want to be an altar boy in Holy Family church, I really*
> *don't understand what Father is saying'. So then we switched to an English*
> *speaking parish in Coquitlam...because we wanted to give him an upbringing in*
> *the church too and he should at least understand what he is talking about. This is*
> *when we went to Holy Family church for the special events but we went to the*
> *English speaking parish [on a regular basis]...it's wonderful to keep the ethnic*
> *group together but you have to reach out too, otherwise you are too narrow*
> *minded, you concentrate just on yourself and you don't want to reach out.*

For the most part the Mennonite churches have been more successful than any other denomination in keeping subsequent generations but even they have not been totally immune to the trend of a decline in the youthful church population. Part of the reason for the decline is the geographical movement of the second generation to other parts of the city but part of the reason also lies in the difficulty of keeping children who feel distanced from their ethnic roots at a church that has little meaning for them. As explained in chapter three, Fraserview MB church moved in 1978 from the original German neighbourhood to a suburban location in Richmond. This move allowed me to ask a question that could not be answered (except in theory), by any of the other churches. I asked if the church had been more successful in keeping the second generation because it had moved to a location closer to where the second generation had also migrated. Most church leaders had previously attributed the loss of the second generation to their migration out of the city due to the cost of housing. My respondent told me that the second generation had not stayed at his church in great numbers. He rejected the excuse that real estate was the only cause for departure. "Children left," he answered, "because we were so rigid." One of the Lutheran church leaders shared a story about a family from one of the other German Lutheran churches. In this friend's family, while the second generation had remained at the

family's home church, the third generation chose to attend a 'Canadian' church that was actually

a longer drive for them because they simply could not identify with their parents' German

church:

> *the third generation is there already, their son is in his 30s and he has a wife and*
> *kids. They've left the [German Lutheran] church and drive from Vancouver to*
> *Richmond to another church because they didn't like the minister [at the German*
> *Lutheran church]. He didn't offer too much in the English [language] and the*
> *kids didn't want to go because [the church] didn't speak proper English. They left*
> *that church about 2 years ago to go to church in Richmond and drive farther!*
> *[Keeping the German and losing the next generation] is a problem.*

As second and third generations of families leave the ethnic churches, the core group of young

people is naturally a diminishing one. Adding to their reasons for leaving, younger families find

other churches that offer greater fellowship with people of their own age. A strong church with a

struggling youth group explained that families are no longer attracted to them because they

cannot offer the kinds of programs that other larger and younger churches can. He explained:

> *Why do our young people [leave]? One single reason is there is not enough*
> *activity. We have a youth group but youth like to be with a lot of other youth not*
> *just 8 or 10 or 12 kids. You go to Willingdon [church] where there are 100 or*
> *150 youth...that is what [families with kids] are looking for.*

Church decline becomes a downward spiral. Families may leave because they cannot culturally

identify with the church of their parents. They move away and there is little incentive to travel

back to a church that worships in a language they may understand but cannot communicate in.

Without young families at the church it is tremendously difficult to attract other families and the

congregation ages and approaches its uncertain future. A final description of the loss of

successive generations is explained by a Baptist church leader and brings the discussion to the

next major factor influencing the ethnic church life cycle - neighbourhood change and the out-

migration of members from the geographic-ethnic community, "We lost a lot of the young adults. There were a couple of things that happened, we started four other churches in the greater Vancouver area...so as a result when young couples got married and moved out to the suburbs, they went out to those churches."

## 6.2    MOVING OUT AND MOVING IN: NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE

The term 'ethnikitis' was coined by Wagner (1976) to describe the disease suffered by a neighbourhood church that is unsuccessfully dealing with ethnic immigration/emigration. A church with 'ethnikitis' is unable to adapt to its new neighbourhood reality to see the connection between the community of the church and its geographic community. It is almost a certainty that what some of the German churches are suffering from is a case of 'ethnikitis.' Here I want to talk about the impacts of geographical change on the ethnic church. This is a tremendous issue for these churches and volumes of quotations speak to this problem. There are two major factors that are changing both the local neighbourhood and in turn, the church community. The first is the out-migration of the original immigrants and the second generation from the traditional German neighbourhood (as was made evident in chapter two). The result of this out-migration is that the church undoubtably loses members though it may keep some thus becoming a dispersed congregation that travels back to the church from all over the Greater Vancouver area. The second factor is the in-migration of new ethnic groups to the local community. These ethnic groups do not, unfortunately, easily fit into the existing German church communities. Burkinshaw (1995) mentions the influence of these two factors on the decline of the Baptist churches in East Vancouver:

*Only part of the relative decline...stemmed from the upward mobility on the part*

*of the second and third generations and their movement to the suburbs. Much of
it came from a major demographic shift in the overall population in major parts
of the city as a result of immigration, especially from Asia... (Burkinshaw
1995:243).*

These two factors have proven to be most serious because the churches have had difficulty

determining how they are to deal with these changes in the social landscape.[2] One pastor

explains:

> *The German churches in this area, the ethnic churches have gone through major
> struggles because they have never fully identified who they are and the
> demographics changed so rapidly and they have failed to identify their new
> mission field. Who are we? Where are we going? What is our mission field?
> These things were never articulated...I see that churches were always reactionary
> rather than [being proactive and] saying what is happening here or even what is
> God doing here?*

The two factors will be discussed and elaborated upon as they have impacted the ten churches;

indeed *every* church and every interviewee mentioned some aspect of neighbourhood change as

being a critical factor in shaping the future plans of the church.

### 6.2.1  Out-Migration

The fact that the majority of the German churches began as neighbourhood churches has

meant that the out-migration of Germans from the original neighbourhood has had more serious

ramifications than would otherwise be experienced by a church that began with a city-wide

membership base. One church member from the oldest Mennonite church explains:

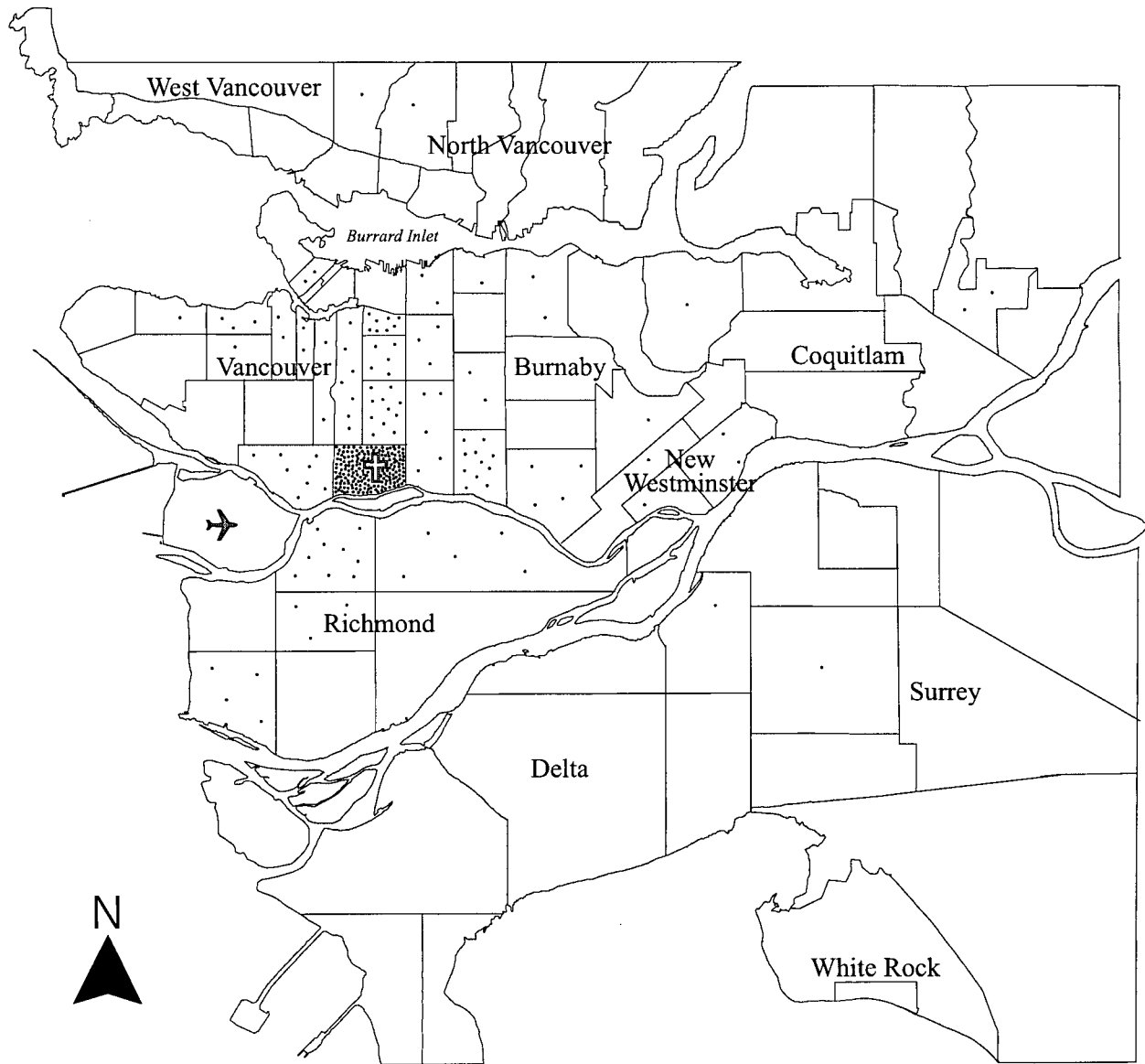> *At the beginning, most people would move close to where the church was located*

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[2] Generational changes are most commonly discussed in the literature and in many ways are a within group
issue. As a result the church sees generational conflict as something they have the power to control or manipulate.
Neighbourhood changes, on the other hand, are outside of the control of the church making them more difficult to
deal with.

*because...a lot of them didn't have automobiles and [therefore] no [means of]
transportation. But later on as they became more well-to-do they bought cars and
so on and then they moved farther out away from the church. Now of course
people are living all over the place. Driving sometimes quite a distance to church.
That has really changed.*

Maps of the membership of Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1963 (its peak year of membership),

1987 and 1997 demonstrate both the very significant decline in overall membership but also the

suburbanization of members (Figure 6.1 A, B & C). The most obvious change displayed in the

maps is an enormous loss of members in the postal district immediately surrounding the church.

The total number of members in this district declined from 197 in 1963 to just 54 in 1987 and

only 27 in 1997. While there is not an enormous increase in the number of members travelling

greater distances, there are members commuting in from White Rock, Surrey and Delta in 1987

and 1997; in 1963 no members travelled from these southern Vancouver regions.

Even in the younger churches the same phenomenon of out-migration was experienced.

At St. Mark's, most members settled "more or less in Vancouver or Burnaby" but between 1965

and 1970 many church members moved to the outskirts of the city. In the late 1960s and early

1970s, the churches experienced the first wave of out-migration as the children of the earlier

immigrants and some of the more recent immigrants moved to Richmond, Surrey, Coquitlam or

the North Shore. One previously very active church couple explained their first move out of the

city of Vancouver to the suburbs: "as soon as you got established you wanted to get out of the

old house that you bought and you wanted a new one. This is why we moved to Coquitlam.

And this happened to most of our families." With the greater distance between their new home

and the church, compounded by the fact that their children were less comfortable with German

than English, this couple lessened their ties to their parish, attending only for special occasions.

# Figure 6.1A: Residential Location of Members of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1963, by Postal Code District, Vancouver

West Vancouver

North Vancouver

Burrard Inlet

Vancouver

Burnaby

Coquitlam

New Westminster

Richmond

Surrey

Delta

White Rock

N

Scale

0     5     10
Km

✠   Ebenezer Baptist Church

•    One Household

Total Church Membership = 690

Source: Ebenezer Church Directory, 1963

Figure 6.1B: Residential Location of Members
of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1987,
by Postal Code District, Vancouver

# Figure 6.1C: Residential Location of Members
## of Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1997,
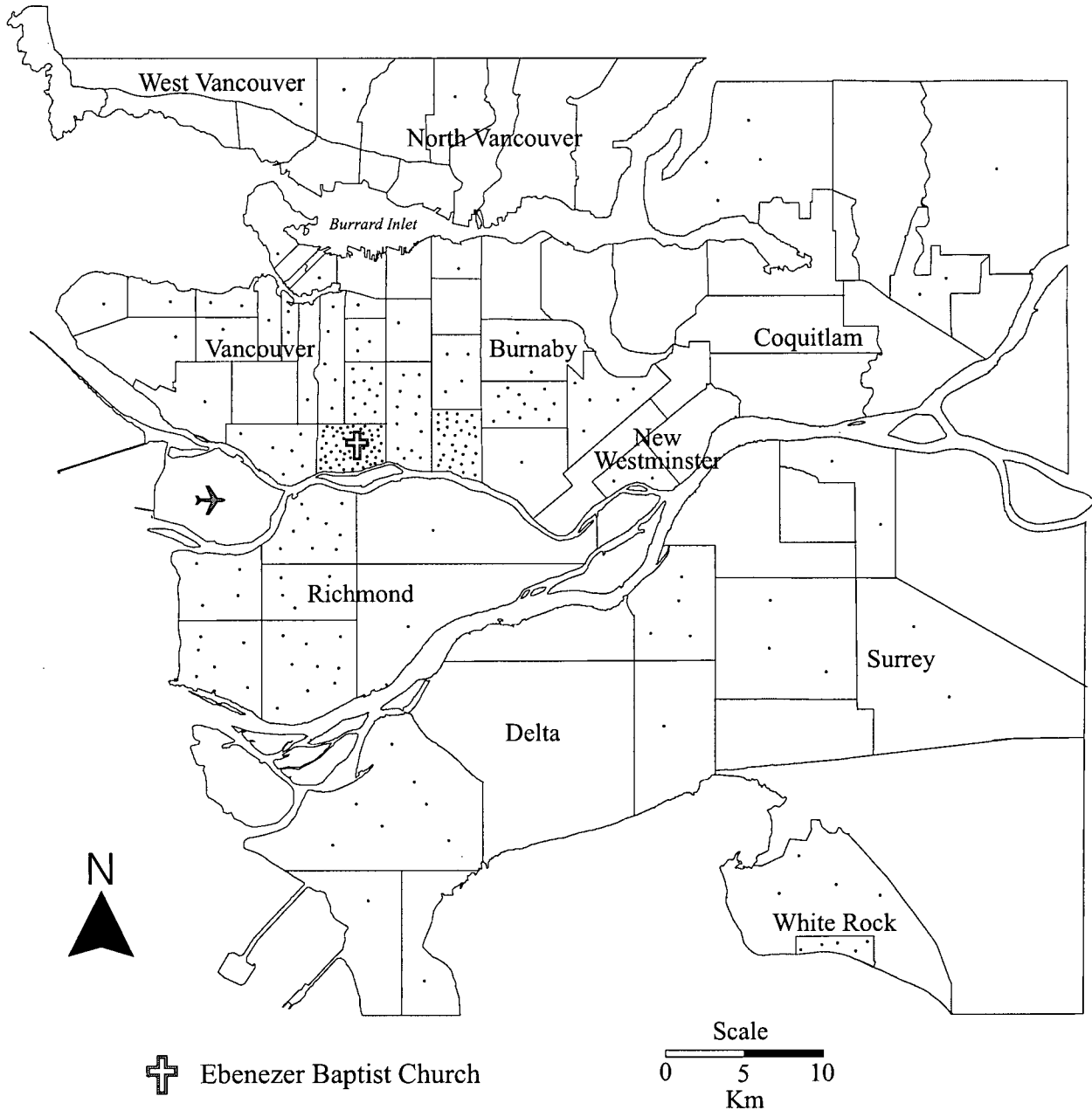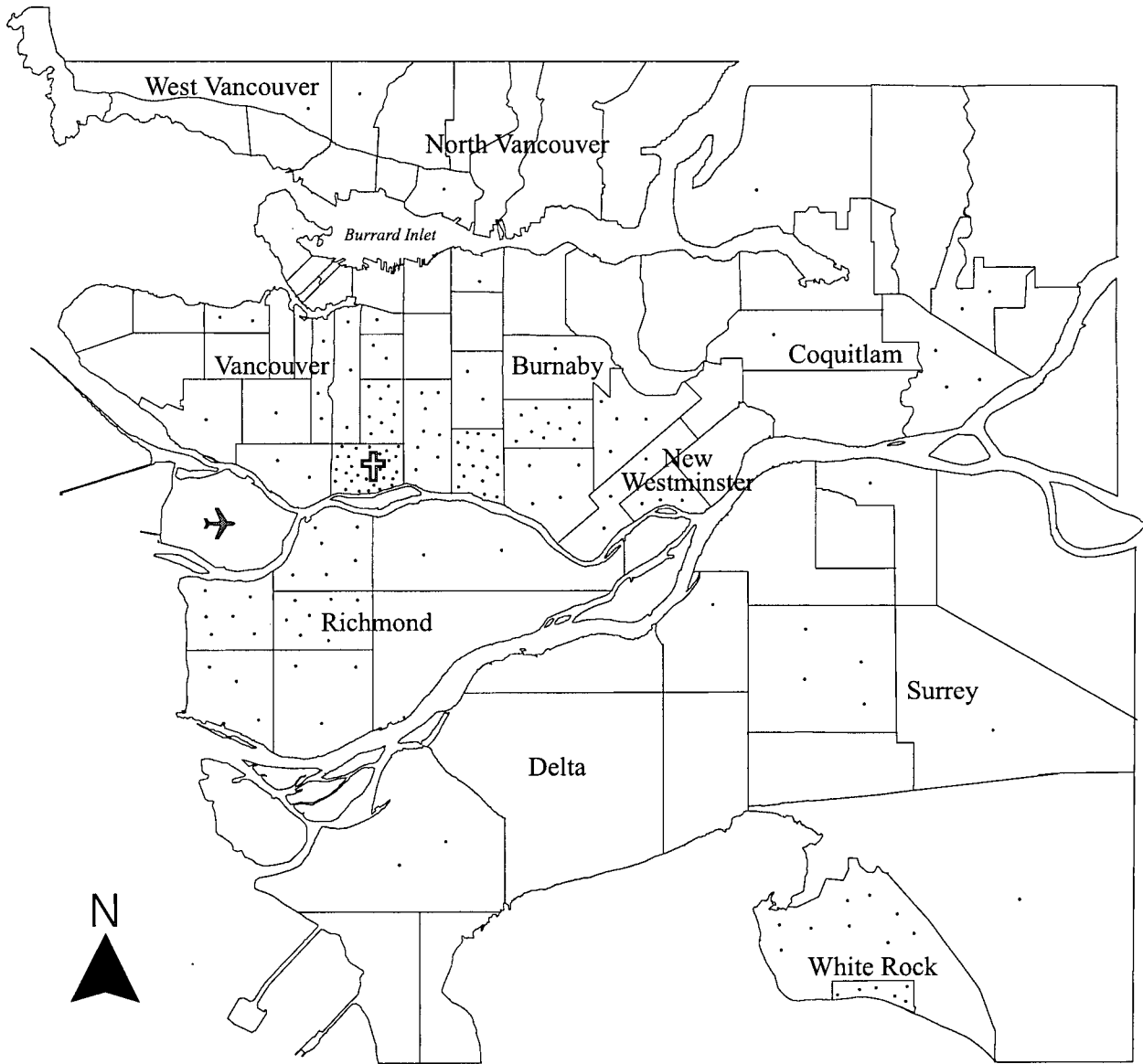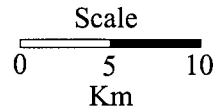## by Postal Code District, Vancouver



✝ Ebenezer Baptist Church

• One Household

Total Church Membership = 297

Source: Ebenezer Church Directory, 1997

Another interviewee mentioned the same issue explaining that, "if you[r family] moved...and if you didn't teach your kids [German] then it was a hassle...why should I drive 40 miles [to a German church] when I have an English speaking church around the corner. There was not the connection to the church as much." The result for some churches has been a total loss of members but for others it has meant a shift from a neighbourhood church to one that attracts members from the city-wide region of Greater Vancouver. One such city-wide church member explains that, "The people from our church do not necessarily live around our church. We have people coming from Richmond, Surrey, Burnaby...we have someone living way out at Horseshoe Bay. So it is not necessarily that the members live around the church."

In the mid-1980s a second out-migration continued to drain what was remaining of the German church memberships as many of the German immigrants and their children who had prolonged their stay in the traditional German neighbourhood now moved even further afield to the Fraser Valley, particularly Abbotsford and Chilliwack. One Mennonite member explained, "now the majority, once they reach 65 they move to the Lower Mainland, to Abbotsford. There are two churches there that are bilingual (English and German)." It was surprising that close to half of the interviewees mentioned this more recent out-migration to Abbotsford, which was referred to as 'German heaven' by one interviewee. A Lutheran church leader who is one of the remaining members still living close to his church discussed this second out-migration:

> *we have a second problem, not only do people get old and depart from this world but a lot of them who have lived in the city of Vancouver and Burnaby, who have lived in comfortable houses, have come to retirement age. The kids are gone. The house is too big and they move to the Valley...A lot of the older people do that, they move to Abbotsford, Langley, but most of them still come to our church. Some of them as they get older cannot travel that far and there we are losing some of the people.*

The two waves of out-migration I have described are not quite as clearly broken by the dates indicated. The suburban (but not ex-urban) migration has continuously impacted the church while the Abbotsford migration is a more recent phenomenon of the last twenty years. A final quotation from a leader at Bethany (the church that has recently moved from Vancouver to east Richmond) explained his observation of the moves made by Bethany's members:

> *In 1985 I mapped out where our people lived. [They were] right around the church and it was such a concentration that I couldn't even find enough pin holes. Now that picture has changed very dramatically because the younger families have moved away from the city...to Surrey and the outlying areas...the older people have stayed [in the church neighbourhood] until it was no longer possible for them to stay...the south Vancouver scene has changed dramatically...The other churches have the same problem, the younger families move out of the city because it is not possible for them to afford to buy property in that area...have relocated and many churches have lost many members on account of that. [Younger families] now live in their own communities and they have found a community church.*

Herein lies the explanation of the out-migration that was so pervasively given without any prompting on my part; real estate was the unanimous factor explaining out-migration. For the first wave of out-migrants, the search for new and bigger homes attracted Germans to the suburbs; for young families it was the lower cost of housing that permitted them to purchase a home they could not have otherwise afforded in Vancouver proper. A Lutheran pastor explained that his church had only a few second generation members,

> *this has its reason in the property prices and real estate in Vancouver...a young family trying to build a house and buy a property have to move to Surrey or Port Coquitlam...very few of them have remained in Vancouver and even fewer still attend church services. There must have been a youth group of at least 20 to 30 members and most of them moved to the suburbs or disappeared never to be seen again which is sad really.*

Another church leader explained the experience of members of his church:

> *The older people were able to buy a house and pay it off [in Abbotsford] and were*

*able to capitalize on a very good price. [Abbotsford] became a very good place
to retire, put a little bit of money in the bank, cheaper housing...[out-migration] is
still happening. Not in the droves that it did. The younger generation get
married and the price of housing is just formidable in Vancouver when a lot is
$275,000 and that's not even a house! So Delta, Surrey, Langley, Abbotsford,
Chilliwack, not as much Chilliwack, those areas have benefited by many of the
younger generation, [aged] 40 and under.*

For the later out-migrants to the Abbotsford and Chilliwack areas, it was the opportunity to cash

in on their property values in Vancouver that acted as incentive to initiate their moves to the

Fraser Valley areas. The Mennonite churches in particular spoke to this issue:

*[Our church membership] peaked at close to 600 members probably 10 or 12
years ago. Ever since the Hong Kong money started to make its presence known
in Vancouver it became very advantageous for people who had moved
to...Vancouver 25 or 35 years ago who purchased a house here for $6000, maybe
later at $25,000, or $30,000?...all of a sudden they could sell it for $350,000
because of the Asian money. It became very attractive...It became their retirement
package because RRSPs just weren't something that they had...many of them have
relocated to Abbotsford which has become a hub for the Mennonite community to
a great extent.*

Despite the strong out-migration of many German church members, many of the interviewed

churches are carrying on business as usual and for some, though out-migration has been

significant, the willingness of members to travel back to their home church has permitted their

survival.

## 6.2.2   In-Migration

The second factor of neighbourhood change has had less of a direct impact on the

churches than the out-migration of members. Chapter two briefly mentioned the in-migration of

new immigrant/ethnic groups to the South Vancouver neighbourhood that is still home to most of

the German ethnic churches. Since the late 1970s the presence of East Indian and Asian families

has presented challenges to the German churches who are of different minds on how to deal with such neighbourhood change. The actual responses to such changes will be discussed later in this chapter; here I simply want to elaborate on the neighbourhood changes as presented by the interviewees.

In the 1950s and 1960s, explained one couple, the population in the South Slope area of Vancouver was mainly of European origin. The Germans were concentrated around the Fraser Street area until the in-migration of other ethnic groups among other factors influenced their out-migration:

> *Robson Strasse (Street) was almost entirely owned by German business people. They sold [their businesses] maybe in the early 1970s and they closed their shops...Now Robson is [owned by] other [business people] and Fraser Street has changed also. There are a few people who still live in the neighbourhood maybe but not too many...I've heard many people say [that] all of a sudden they were surrounded by Hindu people and Chinese. They say this is not my neighbourhood, my environment. I prefer to move away from here. I mean there are lovely Hindu or Chinese people but [the Germans] didn't want to be taken over by other groups. They always figured, Fraser Street, this is our territory. Since it started to disintegrate now they've all gone to small towns...*

The sense of being taken over as expressed here was not a unanimous experience but it was common. Most interviewees saw the disappearance of the local German community as part of a process of natural neighbourhood succession. A Baptist church leader gave a more elaborate explanation of this:

> *when we (the Germans) arrived here the people on the south slope of Vancouver wondered what hit them because we invaded their community...drove a lot of them all away. All the British people who were there left it to the Germans and now all the Punjabis and Chinese and Koreans come along and of course we feel a little threatened. Like we are being forced out but I think we have to keep it in context. We ourselves were there at one time and there were people here who made us feel comfortable and now we need to do the same for the people who are coming now.*

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The way that the changes in the neighbourhood are perceived of course is reflected in how the churches reacted to the in-migration of these other ethnic groups. The church leader quoted above is a member of a church that is trying to make new community members feel welcome in the church. Tsang (1990) speaks of the influence of local changes in the social and economic culture on the church. She argues that, "the church in a changing neighbourhood is faced with new challenges and new mission" but that, "many churches in urban communities have failed to plan for a positive and orderly transition because they don't want to face the fact that things are no longer the same" (32). As a result, she sees churches becoming, "stagnant, passive and insensitive to the changes in the community" (32). Some churches resist while others resent changes in their community. They try to defend themselves from behind fortress walls but are eventually forced to die or sell their church building. One church leader used this same fortress metaphor to explain his congregation's reaction to neighbourhood change. He said that,

> *What happened [is that] the immigrant churches went through an intense emotional fear [about] what was happening in our community...'we don't understand it.' Our children are now gone and our community is changing so much and even if we tried to cluster around our fortress we won't succeed. This is where there was a sense of panic and loss of identity and mission mentality.*

This church is now trying to move out of the arena of fear and into the more positive mind set presented by Tsang. She explained that while some churches have had difficulty dealing with neighbourhood transition, others who have "recognized the spiritual significance of immigration" have been able to discern other options to define a "clear and renewed vision" (Tsang 1990:33).

It is clear that both the out-migration of members and the in-migration of new ethnic groups have been major factors of change and it is also evident that to a greater or lesser degree,

each of the ten German churches are trying to assess their own standing in the new neighbourhood. One Mennonite church leader maintained that the out-migration of church members had still affected the church more than the in-migration of new groups. His church now has a Filipino family attending but has no Chinese members; "we have had Chinese visitors but no Chinese [members] and they are the most numerous [in the neighbourhood]. No East Indians [members] either. But we have Spanish and Peruvian but they don't live in the neighbourhood." As a final example, after explaining the move of many of the church's 'kids' to the outlying areas because of real estate prices, a church leader whose church has not walled itself in explained that, "the mission of your city church has to change...you adapt to that change and you reach out to the community and in our case the area is Chinese and East Indian." Unfortunately adapting to change is easier said than done and it is a real challenge for churches to attempt to reach new cultures so foreign to their own. One Baptist pastor said that there were many attempts by the church to reach the new community but language became a significant barrier as the church's surrounding community was Chinese and East Indian. At Bethany, the church that moved just this year, the decision was that "the best gift that we could give the community was to get out of the way and let those who could most naturally reach this community do it." Before going much further into discussing how the churches have dealt with their changing environments there are a few other factors which have contributed to both the maintenance and loss of German culture in the church and the process, for most churches, of gradually lessening German identity.

## 6.3  SECONDARY FACTORS AFFECTING GERMAN CULTURE IN THE CHURCH

In addition to generational issues and neighbourhood change, several secondary factors

have influenced the diminishment of culture in the German churches. Chapters two and five

discussed the influence of the First and Second World Wars on the church and its members;

Coburn (1992) concedes that the wars were the most significant events influencing the

assimilation of Germans into American culture and hence discouraging the persistence of the

ethnic church. There is little doubt that the process of self-selection also hindered the persistence

of the German ethnic church in connection with these events as many German immigrants chose

not to be affiliated with either the ethnic church or any religious group at all. Immigrants who

chose to attend the ethnic church separated themselves from the mainstream in their religious

life. A Lutheran church leader explains, "if I as an immigrant were to go to...a Canadian

Lutheran church, I would have to apply myself in Canadian culture. That's different. We are

strictly an immigrant congregation and we choose to be a German group." Special census

statistics from 1991 lend evidence to the important issue of self-selection suggesting a large

number of German born immigrants now attend non-ethnic churches (see Chapter three). In

Gumpp's (1989) discussion of the German community in Vancouver she too discussed the

choice of many German immigrants to attend non-ethnic or 'Canadian' churches, or not to attend

at all:

> *Large sections of nominal believers among the German immigrant cohort did not*
> *seek religious guidance after their arrival in Canada...dwindling fluency in the*
> *ethnic tongue, exogamy, and other aspects of assimilation led many Germans to*
> *join mainstream religious institutions such as the United Church of Canada. This*
> *religious acculturation and integration again reduced the distinctiveness of*
> *German immigrants and encouraged their interaction with non-Germans (Gumpp*
> *1989:161-2).*

A third factor influencing German culture in the churches has been the flow and supply of

new German immigrants to refresh and revive old German customs and heritage in the church.

As Mullins discussed in the context of Japanese immigration, "without new immigrants to replenish the ethnic membership base, the probable end of the minority church life-cycle appears to be either organizational dissolution or transformation into a multi-ethnic church" (Mullins 1989:179). From the late 1920s to the early 1970s the large numbers of German immigrants brought with them a pure German language that was of enormous benefit to the German churches as recent immigrants infused new life and perpetuated German traditions. In particular, the Mennonite churches who received South American German immigrants seem to have kept their German language and traditions much longer despite one being the oldest MB church. One church leader explained,

> *as the oldest church you would imagine that it would have changed first...for some reason during the 1970s or so there was such an influx from South America and they were all German speaking and they joined our church. You know if you have a young [German] couple then the German language is being maintained and kept for a longer period of time. But now of course the [German] group is not getting any larger and some of those young couples have gone back [to South America] and others have more readily switched over to the English.*

Churches that did not experience the continuous inflow of immigrants slowly moved to become less and less German. In the case of the Baptist churches, immigrants who came and found the 'German' churches to be 'not pure enough' started their own churches until they too became less 'German.' A member of the oldest Baptist church explained,

> *you had one church leaving another church because this church was now English...then after two generations they went through the same procedure and they became English and those who wanted German started another church...the only thing that kept it going was consistent flow of immigrants that kept people coming. Now that the immigration has stopped and you don't see that anymore [and] in 15 years there will be no German church.*

The fourth factor influencing the continuation of German in the churches has been the

attitude of church leaders and members to language transition from German to English. The stages of language transition are common to almost every non-English speaking church. The gradual inclusion of English into church activities follows a quite natural pattern:

> *First...the pastor found it necessary to perform occasional weddings or christenings in English; next he added an extra, English-language Sunday School class. Since the children learned English quickly in public schools and on the streets, the parish soon found itself with an all-English Sunday School and occasional English worship services. Eventually the English-language services became a regular Sunday feature, scheduled at a more convenient time than the German services, which were attended largely by older people. At long last, the parish would be entirely English (Kantowicz 1995:600).*

The precise process of moving toward a main worship service in English and a secondary service in German may be slightly different but in most churches it is relatively similar to Kantowicz's description above. What does separate the churches, however, is their reaction and attitude toward this process. Where some churches quite congenially accept the process and inclusion of English as a natural phenomenon necessary if young people are to be included in church life, other churches oftentimes violently oppose any decisions to slip away from the German language. In most cases it is those churches who oppose the use of English who temporarily remain strong but whose futures remain misguided. After all, church members and German speakers only get older. A church leader from one such church explained,

> *we made one mistake. We did not start speaking English in our meetings early enough. It was mostly German and our kids hesitated to speak because they couldn't speak perfectly. We switched over [to English] in the 1970s but then our children were already 14, 15.*

Churches who began their transition to English too late have suffered by putting themselves in situations of playing catch-up rather than being proactive in keeping their future generations:

> *We have tried English services...we had three or four or five people and then it*

*was given up on...the next year we tried again but it never worked for any length of time. So we started Sunday School in English...we were always conscious that the young people needed English but the main service just never got started...[but] a lot of people thought Sunday School was a German school rather than English.*

As a result of their lack of success this church has really suffered huge membership losses. On the other hand, those churches who dealt with language transition in a more open-spirited manner have been able to successfully evolve into primarily English congregations with associated German worship services. When I asked a leader of such a church if language had been a problematic issue, he responded:

*We never really, as far as I remember, had that problem when we switched over to [English]...there were some people who were disgruntled about it but it kind of settled you know and they learned to accept it. I don't think we had people leaving [the church] because of it. Not that I'm aware of. Some were not too happy about it but they learned to accept it and then eventually they could see that this is how it had to be.*

A leader from the same church compared his congregation's attitude to another church that still struggles with conflicts over language-use:

*[we] had accepted, I believe right from the outset, that we are going to minister in two languages and language is not going to be a problem. Where [the other church] started out to be German only, and 'German' was spelled with a capital "G". It was very very important to them and the early beginnings were very difficult.*

The loss of one's mother tongue as the primary language of worship is understandably a difficult pill to swallow. Discussions of language transition were never easy and though it was not always acrimonious, the process was lengthy and tensions inevitably and ultimately had to be dealt with and moved beyond.

The final factor influencing the persistence of German culture within the church has been

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that of marriage either within the German community or outside of the ethnic group. Several interviewees mentioned that they had met their husband or wife in the church and/or through youth group activities. Some even suggested that **most** of their friends met their husbands and wives at the church and this in turn impacted the church's ability to reproduce its culture in the next generation. No interviewees spoke to this issue but several mentioned the impact of increasing intermarriage outside of the ethnic group. A Mennonite church leader explained,

> *people intermarrying with others...that has changed. That was something that was very rare when we first came to Vancouver. Or even back in our [Mennonite] communities, well anywhere in the Prairies or Vancouver. It is very seldom that a Mennonite would marry somebody from another church. That has really really changed. Now I'd say almost half our young people, maybe more, intermarry with others because they get together more. They go to the same schools, they have events where they get together with other young people from other churches.*

Intermarriage with other ethnic groups has been another reason for the loss of younger families. When one partner has no connection to or understanding of the German language there is little reason for them to stay at a German church if they choose to attend church at all. Intermarriage was one of the main reasons that one Baptist church made the transition to English when it did. The pastor explained,

> *there were some young people who were born in this country and they married English speaking partners and then the church had to make a decision. Are we going to just let them go or are we going to provide for them and their spiritual needs? It was very wisely decided that we were going to be open to English speaking people and that was never a real conflict in the church, that's why they felt at home even though they were a small minority.*

With all of these factors influencing the loss of German culture, what are the churches doing to survive and adapt to their new landscapes, environments and communities? What does the literature suggest are the options for the church to move out of the ethnic model? What have the

ten churches in fact done to sustain themselves and plan for their futures?

## 6.4     NEW FACES ?: RESPONSES TO CHANGE

After reflecting on all of these factors impacting the German churches the bottom line is that if churches want to survive, thrive and fulfil their Christian mission they must respond to these changes.  Responding need not mean a total loss of culture.  In some cases, self-evaluation may miss some of the cultural traits that remain even when congregations believe they have left them behind.  As Warner explains, even the most acculturated of religious communities still bear some signs of their heritage, "in the hymns they sing, the languages they pray in, the special garments their members wear [or] the architecture of the buildings they worship in" (Warner 1998).  At some point there must come a time when the past is left as history and the church embraces a new future.  One of the pastors I interviewed called the point at which this decision is made the event of the 'cultural funeral.'  He explained that this was a time,

> *when you bury the past.  You honour it, you eulogize it, you help it find its place*
> *in history and in memory.  But when the funeral is done you go on.  There is some*
> *who have done a very gracious funeral but have moved on.  There are some*
> *whose whole ministry is a lingering funeral.*

Churches located in the heart of new ethnic subcultures need to be able to re-define themselves and as was discussed in the context of the attitudes toward language transition, the approach to change is critical.  Kawano argues that if congregations cannot see, "the growing diversity of [their] community and neighbourhood, and if [their] systems and structures cannot respond appropriately, then the society will find other systems and structures to respond to its growing diversity" (Kawano 1992:137).  A lack of response by the church puts it in a gradually weakening position to gain acceptance into the new communities.

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In Burkinshaw's review of the evangelical church movement in the Lower Mainland he observed that for churches that did change, there were "significant dividends, in the form of extremely rapid growth, to formerly ethnically based denominations" (Burkinshaw 1995:265). But the means by which most of these churches achieved their growth was through emphasizing assimilation of new members from outside of the original ethnic group. These churches did not embrace the ideal of a multi-cultural congregation that would accept members because of their faith without forcing changes in their cultural practices. Some of the churches who are just now beginning to make changes to become multi-cultural congregations are consciously trying to avoid becoming assimilating institutions. Others are less decided, instead choosing to become 'Canadian' churches, however those may be defined.

Tsang (1990:92) has identified four options[3] for churches whose congregations are largely commuter based and whose outreach into the neighbourhood is either small or non-existent; a perfect description of most of the German churches in the 1990s. The choices the churches have are as follows:

> 1) **remain status-quo** - "It may decide to remain and minister to its constituency without community outreach. It may draw a few new members that are of similar racial and economic backgrounds."
> 2) **remain status-quo doing some outreach** - "[The church may] try various outreach programs while retaining a basic commuter orientation. However it is difficult to hold commuters and when they start dropping out, the church will decline in membership."
> 3) **move to members** - "the church may simply choose to move out to where the members live and abandon the original location. The church may sell the property, hopefully to a church that can minister to the community."
> 4) **rebuild as a neighbourhood church** - "perhaps the most radical [option is to build] a congregation which decides to identify with, communicate with, and relate Christ neighbour to neighbour."

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[3] I have given each option a name but the quotation/description comes from Tsang.

Examples of each of these four options can be found in the ten case study churches. In general, the three Lutheran churches have chosen the first option and remain German churches with no outreach to any other ethnic groups. Several of the Baptist and Mennonite churches have chosen the second and fourth options; it is difficult to judge precisely as options two and four lie along a continuum. The third option has been adopted by Bethany Baptist and in the late 1970s was selected by Fraserview MB but it has also been considered by several other congregations. When Ebenezer found itself in a struggle for re-definition itself it considered the option of moving to a new location. One member explained the situation:

> *there was a time, I forget what year it was, that they wanted to move. To sell our church and move elsewhere where there was less Chinese and other ethnic groups you know. But then the majority lived around here and they were getting up in years, well how are we going to get there?...when they move elsewhere how are the older folks going to go? They don't drive anymore.*

Obviously the issue of distance became a problem but the church had pastors who were not committed to the community and who did not see the option of staying and ministering to the local community as a viable one. A senior leader explained,

> *We had three pastors who decided that we shouldn't be there anymore and they said we can't minister to this community so we need to move...We (the congregation) said no, we can do better than that. We can have Chinese pastors and Punjabi pastors who will share the gospel to them right here. We send all kinds of missionaries overseas to do the same thing so why can't we have those same people here ministering to the people who are right around our doors? That has been our philosophy at Ebenezer to provide services and ministries to the people that they can use.*

Ebenezer is still dedicated to the attitude that it adopted at that time in the 1980s. The philosophy of the pastors who left is common in ethnic churches fleeing a changing neighbourhood. Traditionally church mission has been viewed only in the international arena so

the idea that the church is to reach unchurched members in its immediate neighbourhood is an unfamiliar concept (Bakke 1987). Kawano (1992) concedes that when people from other countries come to Canada, host churches becomes confused about how to react. They are unable or unwilling, he says, to cross ethno-cultural barriers. So too for those German churches who chose the fourth option, the challenge has been and remains immense.

According to Tsang and Kawano, however, the fourth option is the best. Kawano uses the example of a new immigrant group moving into an Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood to present the options open to local churches. His example may also be easily extended to describe the situation of the German churches:

> *When an Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood changes through the influx of immigrating peoples, the Anglo parish perceives that evangelism in the immediate area is no longer possible. The people who were historically drawn to the local parish no longer live nearby. This is an old phenomenon in North America. The church becomes a little English-speaking ghetto in an immigrant community. Eventually, that congregation faces tough choices. It can withdraw to the suburbs. It can continue its struggle. It may amalgamate with another parish in a similar situation. Or it may simply die. There is one other alternative. It can make strenuous and super human efforts to reach out to the new peoples about itself (Kawano 1992:92).*

The options presented by Kawano are similar to Tsang's. He adds the option to amalgamate with another congregation in a similar situation which is what the Oakridge Lutheran church is looking to do. Clearly, however, Kawano presents the alternative of reaching out to the new community as the preferred option.

Unfortunately the next step to "make super human efforts to reach out to the new peoples" is where most churches have difficulty. In the case of the German churches, the new neighbours are not English speakers and are not from culturally Christian states; attracting interest is almost a monumental task. One church leader explained some of his church's attempts

at reaching the new community:

> *We've tried just about everything. We've sent out flyers through the mail. We've had BBQs on our front parking lot for the community...you get a few families to that...because our customs are quite different they come once or twice to see what's happening and then they usually don't come back. The biggest success has been with the younger generation, the second and third generation [of new immigrants]. But we've called door-to-door. We've canvassed our neighbourhood within about a two kilometre radius but without much success. People are all very polite, they'll listen to what you say but most of them never come [to our church].*

The problem is that new people are invited into a church that is designed to meet the needs of its members. In this case, to come to a 'German' church, even if the language of worship is English. To address this problem a church must become culturally sensitive to the new ethnic communities it is attempting to reach. It must intentionally strip away everything that may be a barrier to interested seekers.

## 6.5    OPTIONAL MODELS TO RE-BUILD THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHURCH

If churches do seek to follow this option there are models which can be assessed and followed to help the churches emerge from their ethnic base. Tsang (1990:92-97) has identified three such models and while some of the German churches fit into her characterizations there are problems with each suggested solution.

The *assimilationist model* involves hiring an ethnic minister onto the church staff to focus outreach to one or more of the ethnic groups in the church neighbourhood. The goal is to integrate[4] members of the new ethnic groups who are likely (but not necessarily) of similar socio-economic status as the majority of the congregation. The church, while eventually desiring one

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[4] 'Integrate' is Tsang's word choice. In the definitions I have presented I would use 'assimilate' here. The difference in meaning is important enough to require differentiation.

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community, would allow for or encourage smaller groups to meet the specific needs of the

particular ethnic group. The obvious danger of this model is its tendency to become paternalistic

and homogenizing. The second model involves *temporary sponsorship* wherein a congregation

uses its own resources to minister to neighbourhood ethnic groups. In turn it helps them to

establish their own congregation by supporting the new church. The host church allows the new

church to use its facilities and hosts provide some organizational structure while allowing the

church to retain its autonomy. The final model is called the *multi-congregational model* and is

similar to the multi-language cluster church model presented in chapter three. Within this

framework, independent congregations share the same church building and contribute equally in

terms of finances, ministry and governance. It has the advantage of allowing congregational

freedom while witnessing to a number of ethnic/linguistic groups in the community. In the

model suggested by Tsang, each of the multiple congregations holds equal power. I would

suggest however, that there are in fact two types of multi-congregational churches: balanced and

unbalanced. An example of a balanced model is the German Lutheran Church at Oakridge prior

to 1989 (when the Icelandic and Lutheran congregations merged). Initially the two

congregations shared equal power with balanced memberships on boards and committees. Using

the same term - the multi-congregational church - Conn (1994) further explains what I would

term a 'balanced' multi-congregational church:

> *In this model, two or more ethnic churches, not simply individuals, are joined
> together under the umbrella of a single church...the model centres around ethnic
> churches often using separate languages but within a single church. Much more
> than just sharing a common building, this model requires a common church
> membership roll, joint planning and programming, a common budget and, on
> regular occasions, common worship. But they also retain their own distinctness
> as an ethnic fellowship within the one fellowship. A joint pastoral ministry team
> includes pastors from each of the ethnic churches that make up the one church
> (149).*

The unbalanced multi-congregational model is much more common and is characterized by churches with one large congregation (usually English speaking) and one or more smaller congregations of other linguistic groups. These congregations have a relationship that mutually extends the work of both of their groups. Separate from the multi-congregational model is the landlord-tenant model whereby ethnic congregations simply rent space from a landlord congregation. The landlord keeps the church operating at a financial level, partially by means of rent charged to the tenant congregation. There is little communication between the congregations. Posterski and Barker (1993) speak of the prevalence of multi-congregational arrangements but the examples they give are more likely to be of landlord-tenant relationships than actual multi-congregational arrangements:

> *From coast to coast, but particularly in our major cities, local churches from*
> *every denomination share their buildings with ethnic-based congregations.*
> *Church signs in multiple languages are a common sight across the country. In*
> *fact, if it were not for the growth and multiplication of Chinese, Korean,*
> *Vietnamese, Portuguese and other ethnic churches, denominational increases*
> *would be fewer and declines would be much more severe than the present pattern*
> *(Posterski & Barker 1993:95).*

Several of the ten case study churches demonstrate the model of an unbalanced multi-congregational church as a means of involving new ethnic groups in church activities. Generally speaking if the ethnic church shares the same denominational affiliation, the relationship is likely more than landlord-tenant; if now, the relationship is primarily financial. Culloden MB shares its building with a Greek congregation while it has a landlord-tenant relationship with its Vietnamese group; Fraserview MB is the landlord of a Chinese Baptist church; the Vancouver MB church used to rent space to a Vietnamese congregation and now has a Spanish congregation

holding services in its building; Holy Family church is now home to a Spanish national parish that contributes financially to the operation of the church; for a few years the German Lutheran Church at Oakridge rented its facilities to a Chinese church but after conflicts over church use it no longer does so; for short periods of time Bethany Baptist was rented to an African Fellowship group and East Indian Christian group; Ebenezer rents space to a Chinese congregation and, in the previous model of temporary sponsorship (and perhaps in the future as a multi-congregational example) has begun a ministry with a Punjabi pastor among the East Indian immigrants in its neighbourhood.

A final model which must be added is the *multicultural church* which is advocated by Tsang but not articulated as a model. The multicultural church model was presented in chapter three as an ethnographic model but is appropriate for mention here as an option for churches looking to change their ethnic balance. The multicultural church requires that more than one ethnic group be represented in one congregation. The basic principle is that there are no structural or organizational divisions or barriers which separate groups into individual congregations. One Vancouver church which began as a British ethnic church in Kerrisdale/Oakridge on the city's west side is an example of such a model. In this congregation one-third of the attendees are of Chinese origin, one-third are 'Canadian' (mainly of British origin), and one-third are Filipino; many other members represent other ethnic groups and in total, over twenty-seven nationalities are represented. This church has successfully adapted to neighbourhood changes but is constantly challenged by its new demographic circumstances which require constant re-evaluation.

To elaborate on some of the successful stories of adaptation to the new neighbourhood by the German churches I will review some of the new activities and programs at the churches that

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have chosen to follow options other than the status quo (as presented by Tsang). Before getting

to the current situations it is important to note that, though the models outlined above can be

successful (particularly the last three) they do not *always* work; multiple congregation

arrangements can lead to tensions over the use of the building and conflicts in management. On

the other hand, following the suggested models can also result in positive and unexpected

opportunities arising. In Ebenezer's case, the relationship with the Chinese congregation using

the facilities downstairs has become more than landlord-tenant now that some of the English-

speaking Chinese children attend the English Sunday School program taught by teachers of the

church's main congregation. A church leader explains,

> *we've had a number of people from the Faith [Chinese] church downstairs, they*
> *still speak in Mandarin there, they've joined our Sunday School classes because*
> *they say, 'we want our kids to learn English' so they're coming to our Sunday*
> *School classes so they can learn English. Once those kids spend 4 or 5 years with*
> *us in the English class they won't go back to the Mandarin because 90% of their*
> *involvement during the week will be in English.*

This is just one example of the opportunities presented by the multi-congregational model when

there is a willingness and desire to reach beyond the German ethnic group.

## 6.6    SUCCESSFUL 'ADAPTING' STRATEGIES OF CASE STUDY CHURCHES

Six of the ten case study churches have made earnest attempts to adapt to their changing

neighbourhoods in some shape or form. Most have done so through childrens' or youth

ministries, reaching the Canadian-born children of immigrant parents from a wide range of ethnic

backgrounds. Ebenezer, Immanuel, Fraserview, Culloden, and Vancouver MB all have some

kind of children and/or youth ministry that now includes a high proportion of children of East

Indian or Chinese background. Immanuel and Ebenezer have also been able to attract immigrant

parents themselves, the former through an English as a Second Language program and the later through the church's ministry to the Punjabi people. It is important to stress how difficult it has been for these churches to reach out to their 'unchurched' neighbours. Initially it was a challenge for church leaders or pastors to convince the church community that there were areas of need in the community that the church could play a role in fulfilling. The reality of trying to communicate and attract participants has presented a second challenge. Most of the German churches do not operate programs that specifically target new immigrants though such programs might enhance their neighbourhood connections and presence. Churches who want to reach out to new immigrants must find some means by which to connect with them, either through a church member who may have befriended a new immigrant neighbour or though some kind of institutional connection like the Immigrant Services Society. Simply organizing a program without having the connections to the targeted community will likely result in few interested participants. The churches who have for several years now been presenting programs and opportunities to their neighbourhood community (generally the children in the neighbourhood) are now beginning to see the fruit of their labour and God's love.

About ten years ago, **Ebenezer Baptist** made the decision not to relocate to a new area of Greater Vancouver. At that time it was faced with the option of either relocating or changing its ministry focus. The decision to stay in their current home resulted in the departure of the three church pastors who said that if the church did not want to move, they would. As new pastors were hired they were brought on with the understanding that the church wanted to focus on its local community. The current pastor in particular has embraced the vision of the church. One leader explained his position and the result of the efforts of the church to reach the community:

> *[our current pastor], that is exactly where his heart is at, to minister to the*

*people. It doesn't matter what nationality, what colour, anybody with a need. His philosophy is that if the church is meeting the needs of the people physically, emotionally, spiritually, then the people will come. And they are starting to come.*

As discussed earlier, Ebenezer houses two other congregations. Faith Chinese Baptist church is an independent Baptist congregation affiliated with the same denominational body as Ebenezer's main congregation but is separate from them in their administrative and leadership structures. It has been at Ebenezer for over twelve years. The second congregation is a Punjabi fellowship group that is more intimately connected with the main congregation. The Punjabi group has been meeting for two years; their small group participates more regularly in church congregational dinners and events. Though these congregations are divided by barriers of language they do plan events together:

> *We have functions together where we are together, our church, the Chinese church and the Punjabi church. We respect each others' cultures and traditions but being a church there is one thing that binds you together and that is our beliefs...of course our common beliefs really enhance us and makes something that could be very negative, very positive.*

One elderly interviewee told me about some of the pot-luck dinners she has attended: "...the Punjabs bring some of their food and it's put all on the table. We have [these] suppers occasionally and we invite the Punjabs and also the Chinese downstairs...that's one thing we do enjoy, the dinners together. It's okay!" In addition to dinners together, the congregations are now becoming increasingly more connected through the children of the East Indian and Chinese congregations who participate in the Sunday School of the main congregation. One member explained,

> *The original immigrants from China and Hong Kong and from India, the first generation [keep] pretty much to themselves. But their kids and their grandkids now want to be part of the English community...[they] usually start in Kids'*

*Club...we have some teeners who are ethnic, and in our young adults club, some of those are ethnic...Just last Sunday we had a new families luncheon and there were 44 people...and probably two-thirds of them were ethnic just from our own community.*

In the last five or six years, one member explained, the church has become much more community oriented. Their Kids' club now has between 50 and 60 children attending each week for crafts, woodworking, sports activities and, once a year, a trip to camp. Recently the church hired a Christian Education minister to focus on the non-Caucasian families in the community. His work will involve contacting the families of the children who attend the Kids' Club program.

Ebenezer has made some exciting contacts with its new community but it must be careful to avoid an attitude of paternalism and assimilation. The development of close relationships with new members as well as the involvement of new members in positions of leadership will help to mitigate against the church's development into the Assimilation model described above.

**Bethany Baptist** has recently relocated and because of that they are really in a transition phase of trying to re-establish themselves. In terms of programs they are probably one of the least active but only because they are just finishing building facilities at their new home; within a few months they will likely have a great deal more going on. Bethany of course still has a German service but it is certainly not the centre of the long term vision of the church. It has made a commitment to continue the German worship service for as long as it is needed but it will not be 'artificially prolonged' as one member articulated. The church sees its mission field both in the Greater Vancouver area, in the 'neighbourhoods' it holds a presence in, but also in the immediate neighbourhood around the church which is newly developed and not served by any other church congregation. Like its old home, the community it has moved to is also heavily populated with Chinese and East Indian people. Unlike Ebenezer, however, Bethany has made a

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"dedicated commitment...not to be a mosaic of ethnic ministries but to be a composite...to be a Canadian ministry." This has been a conscious decision of the church and as was explained,

> *there are churches that approach the ethnic issue in a completely different way. They see themselves as a composite of different congregations so they have a Spanish congregation or a Hong Kong congregation and somehow they share space...[those churches] work in some cases. But for us we say we are a Canadian congregation and that is our primary ground on which we all meet.*

Within this new context it will be interesting to see how the church proceeds with fulfilling its mission with a 'Canadian' identity.

**Immanuel Baptist** has only recently emerged from some very strong and intense within-congregation conflicts over language issues and the future of the congregation. A number of factors played into the conflicts: Immanuel's congregation was shrinking; Bethany had made the decision to sell their building and relocate; Immanuel is a daughter congregation of Bethany and some members felt it was appropriate for Immanuel to also sell its building and join Bethany in their new project. Half of the congregation was in favour of selling and joining Bethany but half were adamantly opposed to it, seeing themselves as a completely separate church unwilling to simply close down and join Bethany. Bethany was not open to the idea of merging congregations but they were happy to accept Immanuel's members into their family. The result was that 90 members did leave Immanuel and join Bethany[5]. Now out of this conflict, Immanuel is just beginning to organize new programs like family nights, after-school clubs and summer kids programs. Several years ago the church actually closed its Sunday School program because there were virtually no children attending. Now the kids programs are attended by

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[5] For several years the German congregations at Bethany and Immanuel have worshipped together, alternating buildings every two months. The German pastor who ministered to the joint congregation is associated with Bethany. Most of the 90 members who left Immanuel to join Bethany went because they felt at home with Bethany's German congregation after worshipping with them for several years.

Chinese children from the neighbourhood; its summer Daily Vacation Bible school program has attracted over 40 children, 90% of whom are Chinese. The church also started an English as a Second Language program about four years ago through contacts with the Chinese Immigrant Services Society (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.). That program initiated the church's contact with Chinese people in the neighbourhood. Immanuel is making a slow transition to become a multicultural church. It is still looking and experimenting with ways to do cross-cultural ministry to successfully make its transition.

**Vancouver MB Church** is currently dealing with finding a new pastor to serve both its original German congregation as well as its main English congregation. Like several of the other churches, it too has made the recent decision to focus its ministry and outreach on its local neighbourhood. One member described this decision and the challenges involved in reaching it:

> *Well for a long time I don't think we had a clear vision of reaching into the neighbourhood...somehow maybe it was a feeling that each one should stick with his own. But if you obey the Lord's command you are supposed to go and make disciples of all nations. So these last years it has been emphasized more and more that we have to reach into the neighbourhood because mission starts at home...We are already multicultural in our church. I mean we are still classified as Mennonites but there are different cultures [represented].*

What this member describes is the beginnings of a multicultural congregation that does not necessarily represent the church's immediate Chinese and East Indian neighbourhood but it is more than just a mono-ethnic German church. Activities with local high school students have been initiated by the church's youth pastor as well as summer programs for children, a large number of whom come from the neighbourhood. Vancouver MB is beginning to move in the multicultural church direction.

**Fraserview MB Church** has also opened its doors to neighbourhood youth with a drop-

in centre on Friday nights as well as a 'Kid's Club' program and sports activities two or three afternoons a week. For the most part Fraserview, like most others, is still very much a 'white' congregation. As one interviewee explained, the youth and children's activities do not reflect the Sunday morning crowd: "In no way ethnically do any of [these kids/youth] programs reflect our Sunday morning crowd...these are Canadian-born Chinese and East Indian kids who live in the neighbourhood." Fraserview has adapted an attitude of servanthood, seeking to serve the community, "whether or not they buy our faith." The church leadership believes that it is important to communicate to its community that it wants to be a "citizen on the street." It will be through the neighbourhood youth and children that they will hopefully gain a greater presence in their community.

**Culloden MB Church** has traditionally concentrated their efforts on reaching the non-Christian family members of church goers; this was the range of the church's mission field. As the local neighbourhood has changed and members have moved to the Fraser Valley, the church has made new attempts to reach its community through new ministries:

> In the last...10 years or so there have been concerted efforts to reach out through club ministry...Girls and Boys club, midweek ministries and some of our college and career people have really embraced ministry into Culloden Court[6]...the people there are low income, multiracial, and multiethnic by and large...[there are] just a whole host of different family needs...people with AIDS, people who are single moms with small children...all kinds of difficult arrangements...Our boys club program at the church runs [with] about half of the kids from the neighbourhood. When I say in the neighbourhood it also means non-white as a rule. The girls club has up to 70% from the neighbourhood.

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[6] Culloden Court is a social housing project located adjacent to the church. While it is not connected to the church it has become a focus of ministry by several of the young adult church members who have made particular efforts to invite residents to church activities. As an interesting note, one church leader told me that since church members have developed relationships with Culloden Court residents, vandalism which used to be quite frequently experienced by the church, has ceased.

The mid-week youth group now has an attendance averaging around 38 to 45 teenagers. About one-third are the children/teens of church members and the remaining two-thirds are from the neighbourhood. These neighbourhood youth are not traditional church members and it is understandable that the senior church elders have expressed hesitation with respect to the direction that some of the younger church members and staff have taken. One interviewee explained that the youth group now includes,

> *Kids that are involved in street gangs in some cases. Kids who are struggling in school or have dropped out...there is a whole host of different kids. You have Portuguese background, you have Spanish background you have East Indian, you have [kids] from Africa, Chinese [background]...just a hodgepodge...We've had kids come here with smoke bombs, with drugs, and part of gangs, checking it out and saying 'this is cool, I think I'll come back' and then two hours later involved in a shooting incident where they've been shot...just two blocks away. That's the kind of neighbourhood [we are in and] that has changed dramatically from when the church was first built.*

Culloden's situation is a particular one, in part because its very immediate neighbourhood has changed so drastically.

The other four churches, the three Lutheran churches and the Catholic parish have made few or no attempts to minister to new ethnic neighbours. The Catholic parish is somewhat of an exception as it appears to be winding down its German ministry. The bishop instead is encouraging the efforts to build up the growing Spanish congregation which will likely take over the church. The Spanish congregation has its own priests and is not really connected to the German congregation at all. None of the German Lutheran churches have any programs for new immigrants or even second generation immigrants of the new ethnic groups. One interviewee suggested that part of the reason was that his church saw the needs of new immigrants being met by, for example ethnic Chinese congregations. While this may be the case, the future of the

Lutheran churches is a much more uncertain one without a large cohort of young members to take on the necessary leadership roles and financial responsibilities.

## 6.7 CONCLUSIONS

All churches are subjected to changes that affect their growth and decline. Ethnic churches that begin with a neighbourhood-based congregation are particularly vulnerable to ethnic transition in the immediate district and generational aging. The ten case study churches are excellent examples of institutions that have been seriously impacted by a second generation that has often chosen not to be affiliated with the immigrant church their parents attended as well as institutions located in neighbourhoods that are no longer German. Earlier a pastor referred to the idea of a cultural funeral; it is clear from the discussion of the new adaptive strategies of the churches that some have held their cultural funerals. They have celebrated their past but are now looking forward to new missions in their new communities. Other churches are struggling with the thought of surrendering their cultural identity. Their ministry is, as the pastor said, a lingering funeral. Churches must themselves assess the long term health of such a ministry and the impact it will have on the future opportunities of the church. This chapter has presented a number of options that are available to churches whose circumstances have forced or are forcing the articulation of a new vision and mission. Though not all of the German churches have yet dealt with planning for their long term futures, seven have made decisions and have begun to take actions to become reacquainted with their neighbourhoods through the introduction of programs, often aimed at children and youth. It is easy to be quick to judge churches that have not dealt with issues of change or made efforts to open their doors to their new neighbourhoods as fast or as wide as one would hope. But the challenge of change is a tremendous issue and

churches that have chosen to deal with their new circumstances must be commended and encouraged to learn from one another.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## <u>CONCLUSIONS</u>

This thesis has explored the interesting histories and activities of ten German churches in Vancouver that were established under varying historical circumstances by groups of German speaking people from both Eastern and Western Europe. It has examined the histories of the German immigrants themselves, their patterns of settlement in Vancouver and the neighbourhood changes experienced in the original German neighbourhood. It has reviewed geographical and ethnic church models and has described each of the ten churches within the framework of these models as well as their local circumstances. The role of the church in social service provision has been examined both historically, with respect to formal and informal services, as well as in the contemporary circumstances of church mission. The church as an influence on the assimilation of German immigrants versus the church as an arena of cultural preservation has been debated. In their present situations, demographic changes of generational succession and neighbourhood transition have been discussed as they have influenced the future plans of the ten churches.

The reasons for pursuing these questions and themes in research are many; I have been interested in the role of the church in an immigrant community and the level of importance held by the church in the lives of the German immigrants. The activities and social services organized by the church and the social functions that the church serves have rarely been documented or traced over time. I have sought to investigate how culture has been preserved in the church as well as how the church was, and is, dealing with changes in its neighbourhood, its decline in membership and, for some, the challenge of shedding ethnic skin. There have been benefits to examining churches that have been long established though it has been challenging to reflect on

church histories that are so long and varied.

This thesis has concluded that indeed the church did play a very significant role in the settlement of thousands of German immigrants to Vancouver. The church was an institution of great importance to the immigrants who served and were served in its community. Along with schools, church was considered to be the most important institution in the German community. First and foremost the church was a home that resembled the 'home'land. It was a place where the mother tongue was spoken, where liturgy was familiar, where stories of war experiences could be silently exchanged and where community was defined. The church's role was at its centre, a spiritual one, but its social functions were of equal importance. The church ran numerous programs for immigrants to help them settle both in the physical and social sense. The church also became a centre of culture where those who wished to preserve their heritage were permitted to do so. The fact that the preserved culture was not familiar to the children of immigrants meant that its significance had to either succumb to anglicization or suffer the loss of the next generation of church members. Over time, several of the churches have lost a large proportion of their membership to the suburban and exurban areas of Greater Vancouver. This outflow of members has meant that churches have faced difficult decisions about their future directions. Their neighbourhoods are no longer German and the churches cannot survive with a membership of aging commuters.

This is the place at which most of the German churches sit in their life cycles; it is the time of decision making that will determine how their future church will look. Some of the churches have made conscious decisions to change their focus to again become neighbourhood churches as they once were. These churches have a geographical focus, drawing from a new ethnic neighbourhood base that is South and East Asian. Other churches are postponing

decisions about their future directions while others have chosen completely different paths to reach their future goals of mission. What may be concluded is that while churches may have quite similar histories and circumstances of establishment, they often choose very different avenues of outreach and direction, particular to neighbourhood differences, church attitudes and contact opportunities with new immigrants.

What this means is that the church must be recognized as an institution that can play a significant role in the settlement and adjustment of immigrants to Canada. The social services and the sense of community that the church provides are crucial components in the process of establishing oneself in Canada. It means that churches must be aware of the changing needs of Canada's immigrant populations and must be self-aware of the longer term effects of building churches that serve particular language or national groups.

The issues that have faced the German churches and have been the foci of chapters in this thesis are not unique to the experience of Germans. One interviewee who has regular contact with a Chinese congregation made the following comments:

> *Interestingly the Chinese have some of the same dynamics at work that the Mennonites did years ago. Years ago when Mennonites moved from the German [language] to [using] English, the language issue was a big one; similar to the music issue today. The Chinese have the same issue now, the older generation wants to keep the mother tongue and the younger generation says, 'we want to see our friends come to Christ and we need to have English'. They are going through some of the exact and identical dynamics [as we went through] and the same will be true for other language groups as well. It's very, very noticeable in the Chinese.*

While the experiences of ethnic church congregations may be similar in terms of issues of language transition and generational succession may be similar there are important differences that must be considered. Min (1992) points out that caution must be exercised in comparing the ethnic churches of European origin immigrants and more recent Asian immigrants:

> *The earlier European immigrants, who were predominantly of low economic class origin, usually came without personal resources, and thus meeting basic economic needs was very important for their adjustment. By contrast, family and other non-economic adjustment problems are more serious than economic problems for middle-class Korean immigrants, the vast majority of whom have brought a moderate or significant amount of money and belongings from Korea (Min 1992:1391).*

The social services needed by Korean immigrants and offered by ethnic churches as well as multicultural or 'Canadian' churches are very different than those of the German immigrants. Recent immigrants are more likely to require counselling and educational services whereas social services in the German churches were organized in part to meet the economic needs of immigrants, helping them to obtain housing and jobs (Min 1992). Tsang (1990) spoke of the new church social services in demand by Chinese immigrants:

> *Some of the most popular services that can be provided to the ethnic new immigrants are ESL classes and Chinese language schools. Establishment of an ESL class often attracts non-Christians. The purpose of this school is to serve as an arm to reach out to the new immigrants and befriend them. An ESL school can be structured as an ongoing project which is attractive because it is free of charge or at most costs a minimal fee...Other projects which can attract non-Christian youths are the starting of a big brother or big sister program or sponsorship of a new immigrant orientation program (80-81).*

As several of the German churches move toward multicultural ministry, particularly to Chinese immigrants the outreach suggestions by Tsang are valuable options for both attracting and serving new immigrants in the congregation. Indeed one area worthy of further research is an investigation of the programs and services offered by all churches and the methods of outreach used to incorporate a diverse population. Do 'ethnic' and 'Canadian' churches approach mission differently? Do they target particular social, economic or ethnic populations? Another area requiring further research relates back to issues raised in chapter two regarding the origin of congregational members and the separation of congregations. Though statistics are somewhat

elusive the issue of point of origin is a significant factor determining cleavages in church congregations and denominational affiliations.

Posterski and Barker (1993) summarize the characteristics of effective churches and particularly emphasize the opportunities for church development through social services:

> *As governments face dwindling sources of revenue and as budgets continue to focus on spiralling deficits, allocations to social programs will continue to decline. As the government reduces its role in the provision of social services, there will be an opportunity for churches to increase their role in caring for the needs of Canadians. Effective churches will conduct needs assessments of their surrounding communities and respond in ways that send the message that people who love God also love their neighbours (209).*

The opportunity to care for new neighbours in particular is one that the church (mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic) cannot afford to pass by; church social service programs of course do not relieve government of their responsibility for social programs but churches now have new opportunities to reach new and old Canadians. The German churches profiled here must recognize that they have a responsibility to share the gospel with their neighbours regardless of ethnic background; some are courageously doing so in the face of very real obstacles. The churches that reach back to their neighbourhood, through whatever means they are enabled, will fulfill their Christian mission and hopefully begin a new congregational life cycle that will include people of multiple ethnic backgrounds.

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## I

**Seventeen Churches Originally Contacted by Telephone:**

Martin Luther Evangelical
Ebenezer Baptist
Holy Family German Parish
Bethel Pentecostal (renamed from German Pentecostal)
Immanuel Baptist
Pilgrim Baptist
German Church of God
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran
First United Mennonite
Fraserview Mennonite Brethren
Sherbrooke Mennonite
Mountainview Mennonite Brethren (recently became Mount Pleasant International Church)
German Lutheran Church at Oakridge
Bethany Baptist
Vancouver Mennonite Brethren
Culloden Mennonite Brethren
Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren

## II

**Telephone Interview questions to all 17 churches:**

1) What year was the church established?
2) Did it begin as a German speaking church?
3) Is the congregation still German speaking? and/or of largely German ethnic origin?
4) Are other non-German ethnic groups represented?
5) Is the church presently located in its original building? What was its original address? Were there any subsequent moves prior to its current location?
6) Does the church hold services in languages other than German or English? Which ones? Are they separate or integrated congregations?
7) Is the church membership largely neighbourhood based? If not, how would you describe its geography?
8) What is the approximate membership of the church?
9) Does the church organize any programs or have services available for recently arrived immigrants?
10) Does the church have any daughter congregations or is the church itself a daughter

congregation?

## III

**Schedule of Interview Questions to 25 Interviewees (from 10 Churches:**

A)      Could you describe to me the general background of the German church members attending your congregation when you first began?  (When did they arrive; where did they come from; what was their economic status?)

**How has the church ministered to people as immigrants?**
B)      What kind of things did the church or church members do to help German immigrants settle in Vancouver?
C)      What needs did the German immigrants who came to Vancouver have and how did the church help to fulfill those needs?
D)      In a broad sense, how important was the church to the German immigrants?
E)      Could you tell me about the types of services your church currently offers, particularly to immigrants?
F)      Does the church reach beyond its own membership base in offering services to immigrants?  If so, how are the connections made with the wider community?

**How did/does the church aid integration into Canadian society?**
G)      Has the church fostered the preservation of German culture and identity or has it encouraged its members to integrate with Canadian society or has it done BOTH?
H)      Has the church lead the movement toward integration or has the church followed the integration of its members?
I)      How has the church dealt with the issues of the second generation?  Has it tried to connect with the Canadian born generation?  How and why?

**How has the church as an institution adjusted/integrated into Canadian society?**
J)      As church members have aged, how has the church adjusted its cultural orientation?  Has it redefined itself?  Has it lost its German identity?
K)      How has the changing social compositon of the church's neighbourhood affected the church?
L)      To what extent does your church regard its community as including the district immediately around this building?  Or do you see yourselves primarily serving a more dispersed community that shares a cultural tradition?
M)      Does the concept of multiculturalism have a particular meaning that guides the work of your church?