
A Legacy of Ministry and Global Theological Education

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If the nineteenth century is recognized for the shift from Dutch Lutheranism, marked by an exclusive, self-contained model of church to U.S. Americanization, characterized by the church's missionary dependence, then the twentieth century must be viewed as the era of self-governance following the withdrawal of foreign missionaries. It is into this context that recently retired the Rev. Dr. Winston D. Persaud and Dr. May Burt Persaud entered, carrying forward the missionary legacy by spreading the gospel and working diligently to ensure the formation of a well-educated and trained clergy for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana (ELCG).

In the fall of 1980, the ELCG was filled with joy and anticipation. A son of the soil, who had traveled overseas to study theology, was returning home to serve as pastor of his home congregation. The Rev. Dr. Winston D. Persaud became the first indigenous pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, a congregation historically led by missionaries from the predecessor bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

A new chapter was being written, and the excitement was palpable. For years, the community had hoped that Winston would return to serve among them. Now, that long-held hope had become a reality. But there was more to celebrate. The young pastor did not return alone. By his side stood his American wife, May, bringing with her a deep Christian faith, a passion for education, and a shared commitment to ministry.

Rooted in a deep sense of vocation and an abiding commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Persauds entered ministry not merely as a profession, but as a sacred calling. During their years in Guyana, they combined theological insight with compassionate service, and an unwavering dedication to the people they served.

A bridge between churches and cultures

Rev. Dr. Winston D. Persaud, Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Global Theologies, and holder of the Kent S. Knutson & United Evangelical Lutheran Church Chair in Theology and Mission at Wartburg Theological Seminary (WTS), and his spouse, Dr. May Burt Persaud, a gifted scholar in Biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek, who served for over three decades as biblical languages instructor at WTS, the University of Dubuque and its Theological Seminary, have been a vital bridge

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between the ELCG, ELCA, and WTS, dedicating their lives to pastoral ministry, theological education, scholarly research, and cross-cultural engagement. Their shared commitment has nurtured enduring relationships across cultures grounded in faith, mutual learning, and shared mission.

Winston's theological leadership in Guyana and later within the wider Lutheran communion embodied a rare blend of academic rigor and pastoral sensitivity. Reflecting on his ordination, he recounts a formative moment rooted in his family's interfaith context:

"My mother, a devout Hindu and a widow, had a different understanding of what it meant to invite family and friends in the community [to my ordination], most of whom were Hindu... For her, if there was a major public event in the family, it would be rude, to say the least, and a show of poor hospitality not to tell relatives and friends about it and invite them to come. In a curious way, she was motivated by both her Hindu sense of religious celebration that must be communal and also her understanding that Jesus would want others beyond the Redeemer congregation to be invited as an expression of authentic hospitality in Jesus' name."

This reflection captures the heart of the Persauds' theology that hospitality is evangelism, not in the sense of seeking conversion, but as a practice of caring relationship, wherein the gospel is announced through radical welcome. As Winston writes, "The Christian community, which is called into being by God's word of forgiveness, healing, and hope, and which proclaims that word, is to point always to living the life of faith in Christ for the good of others, including those who are oppressed and their oppressors, those who are 'sinned against,' and those who are outcast, excluded, and exploited."¹ It is a vision of evangelism rooted not in coercion, but in communion; a theology shaped by culture, family, and the expansive love of Christ.

Early ministry in Guyana (1980–1984)

During their early years in Guyana, the Persauds made immediate and lasting contributions to the ELCG and the wider Caribbean region. Winston served as a full-time pastor and held leadership positions within the ELCG and the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC). He represented the ELCG at the CCC Assembly in Curaçao in 1981 and contributed to the CCC's Development Committee, where he reviewed proposals for community development projects.

May played a vital role in Christian education and formation. She advised the ELCG women's ministries, led teacher training sessions, contributed to national youth programs, and taught biblical Greek to seminary candidates, laying a strong foundation for theological education in Guyana.

Ministry and mentorship (1984–present)

Upon joining the faculty at WTS in the 1980s, the Persauds remained deeply connected to the ELCG. Winston spearheaded the development of Summer Pastoral Training programs and introduced Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), along with immersion experiences at WTS and in ELCA congregations for Guyanese seminarians. These initiatives provided formative theological education and contextual ministry training.

In addition to their work in Guyana, the Persauds pioneered immersive Theological Intensives for ELCA seminarians. Beginning in 2009, they developed a model for cultural immersion through J-Term placements in ELCG congregations. This initiative expanded seminarians' understanding of the church, not solely as a national institution, but as a global faith community enriched by diverse cultural and ecclesial experiences.

Winston and May regularly facilitated visits by Wartburg faculty to the ELCG. Notable visitors included Roger Fjeld, Paul Hill, Duane A. Priebe, Daniel L. Olson, Samuel D. Giere, and Craig L. Nesson. In addition, alumni and leaders from the ELCA churchwide organization were invited to participate in theological education and leadership development in Guyana. Through

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their partnerships, the Persauds helped shape Wartburg's global theological vision and created sustainable partnerships between U.S. and Guyanese Lutheran communities.

In the early 1960s, the ELCG faced a significant turning point as it became clear that missionaries would soon be withdrawing. According to Paul B. Beatty Jr., the conclusion of the American Foreign Mission (AFM) era necessitated a shift toward indigenization.² This was a deliberate effort to incorporate elements from various traditions in a balanced and contextually appropriate way. This approach aimed not only to shape the church's liturgical and theological identity but also to affirm its role in the society. Beatty emphasized that this transition must be an attempt to anticipate, and perhaps even help to create, new modes which appealed to all sections of the people.³

This shift also broadened the church's vision of leadership, highlighting the need to educate and train young adults for roles in the church and in the wider society. Central to the Persauds' legacy is their steadfast commitment to mentoring students from Guyana. They facilitated academic placements at ELCA-affiliated colleges, such as Bethany College, Concordia College, and Luther College, providing holistic support that extended beyond the classroom.

In addition to creating academic pathways, Winston and May connected students with congregational communities for spiritual and emotional care during their studies. Beginning in the mid-1990s, they also played a key role in facilitating Wartburg College's 21st Century Studies Program visits to Guyana. These initiatives deepened mutual understanding and global awareness between U.S. and Guyanese communities.

The Guyana Mission Network

In the spring of 1990, Winston co-founded the Guyana Mission Network (GMN), a collaborative effort involving former missionaries from the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Caribbean. The GMN continues to serve as a vital link between the ELCG and global partners. Through the GMN, Guyanese pastors have had opportunities to visit the U.S., explore new

1. Arland Dean Jacobson and James W. Aageson, (eds.) *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 82.

2. Paul B. Beatty Jr. *A History of the Lutheran Church in Guyana* (Guyana: The Daily Chronicle, 1970), 119.

3. Beatty, *A History of the Lutheran Church in Guyana*.

ministry models, and strengthen ties with ELCA congregations. The network also provides ongoing support for pastors, lay leaders, youth, and Christian education programs in Guyana.

Winston was a frequent preacher at annual gatherings for Guyanese ministry within the ELCA's Metro New York Synod, helping connect diaspora communities in shared worship and mission.

Publications and theological contribution

Winston's extensive body of work has appeared in respected journals such as *Currents in Theology and Mission*, *Word and World*, *Dialog*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, *Lutheran World Federation*, and *Living Lutheran*, among others. Over more than four decades of teaching and scholarly engagement, he has also contributed numerous book reviews, essays, and theological reflections that have enriched contemporary Christian thought.

One of his most significant contributions is the book, *The Theology of the Cross and Marx's Anthropology: A View from the Caribbean*, which offers a distinctive Caribbean theological perspective on global socio-political realities. This work exemplifies his commitment to contextual theology and his ability to engage critically with both classical and contemporary thought.

Winston's writings continue to challenge, inspire, and inform theological discourse across cultures and disciplines, establishing him as a vital voice in global theological conversations.

A unifying theological vision

At the heart of the Persauds' ministry is a compelling vision of the church as the full expression of Christ's body; a community not divided by race, class, or culture. As Winston writes, "Neither the individual Christian nor the church as a whole is to be an instrument of anyone or any institution, including political party or in-group determined by the factors mentioned above, that calls for allegiance reserved for Christ alone and/or is dedicated to the elevation of the individual's or the group's good by the suppression of the good of others."⁴ This theological conviction has shaped

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their ministry, bearing witness to the transformative power of education, mentorship, and faithful partnership in building up the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church across borders and generations.

As Winston and May reflect on decades of dedicated service, that moment in 1980, when their journey with the ELCG began, may seem like a distant memory. Yet in hindsight, it stands as a watershed moment in the life of the church. Through preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and community engagement, the Persauds nurtured a new generation of leaders, shaping both the church and the wider society with a legacy rooted in faith, hope, and transformation.

Neither they nor the church could have anticipated the profound and enduring impact of their ministry, one that has extended far beyond Guyana's borders in the Caribbean, North America and farther afield. Their legacy continues to shape and inspire the laity, seminarians, pastors, scholars, and church leaders around the world who seek to serve God's global mission with humility, justice, and love.

4. Jacobson and Ageson (eds.) *The Future of Lutheranism*, 89.