

BISHOP SEDGWICK DANIELS' TESTIMONY TO
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES

March 25, 2003

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to be here today to testify to you with respect to the efforts of Holy Redeemer Church of God in Christ and its affiliated entities in connection with the development of efforts to improve the lives of citizens in our city, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps a little background may be helpful to you. We founded the Holy Redeemer ministry 16 years ago with eight persons and have now grown this ministry to over 5,000 persons representing people of every background and skill. Our organization has 28 affiliated entities which are involved in self-improvement activities such as the creation of a 100,000 square-foot-plus youth center in a neighborhood densely populated by low-income students; development of multiple public/private operating school initiatives which have resulted in improvement of education for some of the most economically distressed youngsters in Milwaukee (we now educate more than 750 students); the development of a health clinic focused on bringing the marvels of medicine directly to the community through a clinic located on our campus, which is affiliated with the faith-based organization of Covenant Health, a large health-care provider in Wisconsin.

Our campus is a redevelopment of a 10-acre site which was previously distressed and, in fact, vacant. We have turned this site into a vibrant campus, serving literally thousands of people each day who receive a variety of services - meals, job training, health education and care, and top-flight elementary and adult education. Our mission, then, is to have a 24/7 outreach to this community. The demographic data for this community reflects that not only are we providing services, but this has resulted in the employment of hundreds of people. The success stories are indeed marvelous. One of the best examples is one of our school administrators who, through many efforts, used welfare outreach services to college-educate herself, ultimately becoming a college graduate, and after several years of working as a teacher, she became one of our school administrators on the campus. In fact, President George W. Bush visited our campus last year to get a first-hand view of the remarkable effects we're having on people. The examples go on and on with respect to how we have changed the lives of people.

We have also been critically involved in the housing initiatives in this community. When we consciously moved our campus to this economically depressed central-city area, many were surprised that we did not move to a more tranquil suburban environment. We intentionally did not do so because we knew where the needs were. One of the things we found was that many people had housing needs -- elderly people, people who were in transition and people who were searching for the American home-ownership dream. We, therefore, with the cooperation of the City of

Milwaukee, and through the use of federal tax credits, developed a premier low-rise elderly housing project which has received many recognitions, including a special award from the Federal Home Loan Bank Board. The facility is oversubscribed and there is a tremendous demand for us to provide additional facilities for seniors. We also obtained and rehabilitated homes in the area to allow for transitional needs of people. Many of these people have used this as a springboard to putting their lives back together, and they have moved on to very productive citizenship. In connection with a local bank, we have also instituted a home-ownership seminar program so that many of the community residents (who are now renters) will be educated as to the value of home ownership. We are in the process of exploring various initiatives to assist with home ownership education and down payment assistance. The net effect is that our housing initiatives have taken a neighborhood which was psychologically and physiologically depressed and helped to convert it to a neighborhood that is now excited and proud of our campus serving as the engine for community and housing development. People who visit the campus are amazed at its impact on the neighborhood. This is a reflection of the true purpose of our ministry. While there are many initiatives which have good purposes, we are happy to report that no initiative in this particular community has had more of an economic effect. We have educated thousands of youngsters in first-rate educational institutions. We have created and improved the housing stock in our neighborhood, and we have created an environment in which literally hundreds of people from this neighborhood are employed in meaningful and life-supporting jobs. This is the commission to which we are called, and we hope that you, through your legislative powers, will recognize that such faith-based initiatives such as ours are vital in many communities in the country.