

The Goshen Community Relations Commission hired Philip Thomas of D3 Consultants to study how Goshen has changed over the last twenty-five years and how we as a community have adjusted to these changes. Phil gathered statistical data provided by the Goshen Community Schools, the Police Department, and the National Census Bureau, and interviewed 32 people from different areas of community life – education, health, business, faith, social services, city government, and local residents.

It is no surprise to report that Goshen has changed significantly and rapidly in these 25 years. While immigration is not new to Goshen, the rapid influx of predominately Latino population has made assimilation difficult. This report is based on the assumption that issues within the Goshen community contain both an objective-external dimension and a subjective-internal dimension.

The objective-external dimension consists of that which is observable and can be objectively stated as fact using statistics and data. The subjective-internal dimension addresses the different ways individuals experience and interpret these realities. What stories are being told in Goshen about who we are and how we envision the future? What values are foregrounded in the stories we tell? Which stories go untold? What kinds of patterns have emerged?

This report does not attempt to suggest a consensus on these questions. Our aim is rather to provide a framework in which multiple stories being told can be heard, and greater understanding achieved.

The population of Goshen has nearly doubled since 1980. County Commissioner Mike Yoder states that there has been a significant increase in the geriatric population. Everett Thomas, City Council president, notes growth in a “group of younger entrepreneurs, thinkers and artists...transforming old dives and investing in a new kind of Goshen,” such as the Electric Brew, the Farmers Market, Artists’ guilds, New World Theatre, and a host of newly renovated apartments in the downtown area.

According to the US Census Bureau, between 1980 and 2000 the percentage of Goshen that is black is three times higher, five times higher for the Asian population, and about seven times higher for the Hispanic population. Goshen residents currently represent at least 41 different countries of origin and speak over 25 languages other than English at home. Goshen Community Schools reports that the number of Language Minority Students has grown from 4.7% in 1992 to 36.3% in 2006. The number of non-white students in 2006-07 school year is about 44% with 6% Multiracial, 1% Asian, 35% Hispanic, and 2% Black. The English as a New Language program offers assistance with students who speak Spanish, Japanese, Khmer, Marshallese, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, French, German, and Cantonese.

It is also important to note that the so-called “Hispanic/Latino community” varies in background, political persuasion, and particular experiences. Many Hispanic/Latinos have lived in Goshen for two and three generations. These as well as new immigrants represent over 18 different countries and at least as many distinct cultures. Tom Good, director of ENL program at GCS states,

“Seeing the immigrant or minority students as a monolithic ‘them’ is at the root of a lot of our problems.”

There is a rising sense of anxiety and fear.

“Goshen is a very welcoming community...but the pace of this change is really pushing people. Most folks feel like they woke up one day and their whole community changed.” Larry Gautsche, president of LaCasa.

“Where is the tipping point? We have been able to handle this situation so far because our value base has been strong enough to support a culture of tolerance, but how is it shifting? We are at a crux: which way are we going to go?” Don Jantzi, principal of Chamberlain Elementary School.

The key challenges and concerns of the substantive issues are:

\* Impact on school performance and budget

1. ISTEP scores fall from 66% to 54.7%
2. Resources required for attending to ENL needs

\* Impact on tax-base / school demographics

1. Parent flight and fewer families with non-labeled children moving into Goshen
2. Decrease in high-end homes being built/sold
3. Shadow side of success: recognition for excellence in serving those with needs attracts more of the same and becomes less attractive to middle/upper class
4. Older neighborhoods, large single-family residences are turned into multi-unit rentals

\* Impact on social services

\* Impact on government services

1. Tax evasion resulting in a loss of up to \$8 million in Elkhart County
2. Impact on general security and perceived safety

Issues involving noisy parties, cars in driveways/lawns, roadside mechanics, and even keeping small livestock in the city limits have had to be sorted out by the police department. On the side of the new immigrant, issues involving racial profiling, police intimidation, housing discrimination, labor discrimination, and even discrimination within the Latino community have had to be addressed.

These issues are what people are talking about; to resolve anything, we need to look at “how” we talk. The report brings up several points:

\* There is a need for a safe place for open, transparent, honest conversation

\* We have lots of communication, but little understanding

\* Most dialogue currently is polarizing and unhelpful

1. “We need a safe place where all people can be honest and open, and not have to always be worried about being called racist or prejudice. Some people have genuine concerns and unless we create this kind of a place we will never hear them. We must be able to get everyone’s feelings on the table if we are to resolve differences,” David Daugherty, Chamber of Commerce.

2. "The overall climate of polarization, scape-goating and fear are undermining attempts to create a safe place for dialogue and relationships. I hope we can foster relationships and have commitments about how we treat each other. We don't have very many public places in our culture and in our city where that kind of round table dialogue, respect and sensitivity can occur." Dr. James Gingerich, Maple City Health Care.

\* Legal status / documentation issues have stalled dialogues

1. "Illegal is illegal" vs. "It is more complicated than that"

\* Language and conversational patterns tend to block deeper understanding and simplify / distort complexities, however, there is a general agreement on the following points:

1. Law is important
2. Violations of the law should be taken seriously
3. Current challenges and concerns related to immigration include AND transcend questions of legal status
4. While some question the relevance or appropriateness of current immigration law, no one is explicitly condoning the violation of other national and state laws

\* Role of the police

1. Law enforcement vs. Law enforcement AND community building

The world is rapidly changing and our community is no different. This report looks at the costs vs. benefits of immigration.

\* Costs

1. Illegal immigrants don't pay enough taxes
2. Immigrants have an impact on the cost of social services
3. Immigrants often do not speak English and ask "us" to learn Spanish
4. Failure to acculturate divides the community
5. There is a perception that increase in Latinos has caused an increase in crime and violence
6. Immigrants take jobs from "Americans"

\* Benefits

1. Illegal immigrants pay "extra taxes" (social security, which they won't claim)
2. Immigrants make Goshen more cosmopolitan
3. Immigrants are hard working and entrepreneurial
4. New cultures enrich Goshen
5. Immigrants bring strong family values
6. Immigrants provide cheap labor that others won't take

The report found that there are two approaches that people in our community use when discussing these issues.

Some people want to focus on becoming a more homogenous community. On the positive side, this stance means that we focus on our likeness and strengths; on the negative side, this stance requires that minorities give up their culture to embrace the culture of the majority – it leaves the minority with a feeling of suppressed voice and invisibility.

Others want a “mosaic” community with distinct cultures. On the positive side, this stance accepts and celebrates our differences and adds vitality and energy into the community. On the negative side, this stance divides the community – it exaggerates our differences and minimizes the importance of our similarities.

This report discusses the possible approaches Goshen can take for change to occur.

We could take the advocacy / confrontation approach which would attempt to look to the legal system for solutions. On the positive side, this way acknowledges that discrimination / prejudice is real, wrong, and requires action to eliminate it – it is about addressing systems of oppression. On the negative side, this approach polarizes the community and removes the middle ground – it undermines open/honest conversation and trust by dividing points of view into right/wrong, good/bad.

We could take the bridge-building / dialogue approach which tends to see situations as complex, with ambiguous levels of blame/responsibility shared by many/all parties, and pushes instead for understanding. On the positive side, this approach focuses on long-term peace and stability and acknowledges that we are one community. On the negative side, this approach maintains status quo and systems of power – it fails to acknowledge differences and minimizes oppression and marginalization.

This dilemma could be simplistically described as the difference between realists and idealists. Appreciative inquiry identifies and focuses on what is working well, building on strengths to make the best community we can. When implemented prudently, Appreciative Inquiry can result in a motivated community working towards innovative solutions. In its most extreme form, appreciative inquiry glosses over real problems or becomes idealistic to the neglect of sobering realities.

Though it may acknowledge the positive, problem-based analysis targets that which is failing or problematic within a system. Problem-based analysis has a role in identifying areas of weakness and constructing practical, focused solutions. Taken to its extreme, however, problem-based analysis results in shortsighted band-aid work, falling morale, and a loss of vision. Nonetheless, both of these models have something useful when applied appropriately.

Even as interviewees highlighted challenges and concerns, it was just as clear that Goshen has handled the significant changes with remarkable alacrity and success. While Goshen is a diverse community, in the words of Don Jantzi, it has been blessed with a “culture of tolerance” which has allowed many to address these changes directly rather than merely react. After the interviews, many of the CRC members and Phil Thomas left inspired, with pride to be part of a community with this caliber of leadership and excellence.

The report concludes with the following recommendations:

1. Continue and strengthen existing practices
2. Design and implement clear procedures for handling cases of alleged discrimination
3. Promote intentional conversations within and between different groups

4. Pay attention to and care about the way the community comes together to deal with this issue over the next couple of years (elections and increased polarization of issue is key variable)

Goshen, like many communities across the state and country, is a changing community, becoming more diverse and multicultural. Whether or not these changes lead to disintegration or integration remains in the hands of the Goshen people. One of Goshen's strongest assets is its high level of community involvement.