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Faith and Family: Images of the Lutheran Church as Family in Erich Loest's *Nikolaikirche*

BethAnne Roberts
Illinois Wesleyan University

Sonja Fritzche, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Poster Presentation P42

**FAITH AND FAMILY: IMAGES OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AS FAMILY IN
ERICH LOEST'S *NIKOLAIKIRCHE***

BethAnne Roberts and Sonja Fritzsche*
German Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

Throughout the end of the 1980s the Lutheran Church in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) experienced a surge of attendance and social activism in an otherwise secularized society. Research shows that the church was the sole island of government accepted dissent within the communist GDR. St. Nicolas Church in the city of Leipzig became the prototype of social involvement; visionary pastors opened their doors to every citizen and provided a space for congregations to voice concerns, organize interest groups, and plan peace protests. The construction of an open environment in which citizens could speak and interact gave rise to a greater sense of acceptance and understanding within its community. This presentation will examine the extent to which Erich Loest in his novel *Nikolaikirche* explores the role of the church as surrogate family through the protagonist Astrid Protter. Loest constructs a severe contrast of familial rejection and personal hindrance in Protter's life with the acceptance and self-actualization she finds at the St. Nicolas Church Monday night prayer meetings. The poster will investigate how involvement from citizens like Protter seeking acquiescence led to the largest peaceful demonstration in the GDR before the fall of the Berlin Wall.