# FAITH MISSION SOCIETY

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When the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) was in the process of discontinuing fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and dropping out of the Synodical Conference in the late 1950's and early 1960's, it had no foreign mission work that it could call its own. They had a home mission program but from ELS Convention reports from those years, there is no mention of trying to start a foreign mission. Things began to change in the mid 1960's. At the 1965 Convention, the Mission Board of the ELS suggested looking into the possibility of a foreign mission. They suggested either starting a foreign mission of their own or sending a man to a Wisconsin Synod mission field.[1] At the 1967 Convention, the Mission Board reported that it was considering a mission somewhere in South America. The Convention passed the Mission Board's recommendation that an exploratory trip be made to South America within the next year.[2] In January and February 1968, Rev. Adolph Harstad and Rev. Theodore Kuster made a trip to Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, and Costa Rica.[3]

At the 1968 Convention, the Mission Board recommended that the Synod begin mission work in the 'barriadas' of Lima, Peru. The Convention passed that recommendation and later on during the Convention, Rev. Kuster, who had been called as

[1]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 48-No. 14, July 22, 1965, p. 215.

[2]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 50-No. 14, July 27, 1967, p. 245.

[3]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 51-No. 11, June 13, 1968, p. 209.

the missionary to Peru by the Mission Board, was commissioned at a special service. Mr. and Mrs. Orlin Myrlie, laymembers of the Wisconsin Synod, had also volunteered to go to Peru and assist Rev. Kuster. On July 16, 1968, the Kusters and the Myrlies arrived in Lima, Peru and foreign mission work by the ELS had begun.[4] With the beginning of that mission, the seed was planted for the beginning of Faith Mission Society.

Meanwhile in the northern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, Rev. Robert Moldstad was serving as pastor of First congregation in Suttons Bay and Concordia congregation in Traverse City. Moldstad took an interest in the work in Peru and in January 1969, he printed the first issue of 'Mission News.' 'Mission News' contained a number of articles about the work in Peru and about life there. A second issue of 'Mission News' was printed in January 1970. During the same period of time, articles about the life and work in Peru also appeared in 'Lutheran Sentinel.' 'Lutheran Sentinel' is a publication of the ELS which at that time was printed twice a month. 'Lutheran Sentinel' is similar in content to 'The Northwestern Lutheran' of the Wisconsin Synod. These articles were written by the missionaries and their wives, or by relatives of the missionaries who had visited them, or by Mission Board members who made trips to Peru. Often these articles included a picture or two from Peru of the missionary families or of the people of Peru. These articles appeared every issue or every other issue of 'Lutheran Sentinel' from 1968-

[4]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 51-No. 14, July 25, 1968, p. 271.

1971. Then the number of articles fell off to just a few each year.

If a judgment were to be made from the number of articles about the Peru mission in 'Lutheran Sentinel,' it might appear that once the missionaries became established, everyone forgot about them. But once again, things were happening in Michigan. On October 18, 1970, Moldstad was installed as pastor of the dual parish of Faith-East Jordan and Faith-Hillman.[5] Both of these churches are also in the northern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Moldstad continued to occasionally print 'Mission News.' Interest in the mission work in Peru began to increase, especially at the churches which Moldstad served. Some contributions also began to come in for the work there which were outside of the Synod's budget. Eventually it was decided that it would be best to organize so that they might more easily further the cause of mission work not only for their own congregations but for the whole synod as well.

The May 11, 1972 issue of 'Lutheran Sentinel' reported the organization of that group which called itself Faith Mission Society.[6] That name came from the society's interest in missions and from the names of the two congregations Moldstad was serving in East Jordan and Hillman. This wasn't a mission society in the sense of the old European mission

[5]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 53-No. 22, November 26, 1970 p. 349.

[6]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 55-No. 9, May 11, 1972, p. 139.

societies that often operated outside of and even against the organized church. Faith Mission Society works together with the ELS in promoting mission work and mission awareness. Although Faith Mission Society is not a part of the ELS and receives no support from the Synod, it does work together with the Mission Board for the support of mission work in the ELS.

That article of 'Lutheran Sentinel' which reported the organization of Faith Mission Society also reported the five mission goals which state the purpose of the society. These goals are:

"1. To increase mission interest through timely information.

2. To increase mission ambition through a greater concern for lost souls.

3. To increase mission potential through training courses.

4. To increase mission resources by greater financial support.

5. To increase mission accomplishments through more opportunities for service."[7]

Faith Mission Society keeps those goals and purposes in front of themselves and in front of the readers of 'Mission News.' Occasionally 'Mission News' will contain a short article titled 'What is Faith Mission Society?' This article contains a brief history of the society and a summary of its goals and purpose. It reads in part, "The purpose of Faith Mission Society was, and still is, to provide a service to those Christians interested in the promotion of Christian

[7] Ibid.

mission work. It is not in competition with Synod mission outreach, but rather is an organization assisting in mission outreach...Faith Mission Society provides only a channel through which Christians may joyfully find an additional chance to serve the Lord...One of the main activities of Faith Mission Society is the publishing of 'Mission News' which provides timely and informative news of the ELS mission work in order to a) stimulate mission concern and b) encourage support of the mission field financially and, most importantly, to help with our prayers and personal encouragement."[8] The purpose of Faith Mission Society is also printed on the back page of every issue where it says, "'Mission News' is published in cooperation with the Mission Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod by the Faith Mission Society...The purpose is to stimulate greater mission interest and ambition by timely and informative articles."

Faith Mission Society has a Board of Directors which directs the operation of the Society and the publication of 'Mission News.' The Board of Directors has usually consisted of the pastors of the three ELS churches in northern Lower Michigan and three or four laymen from those churches. The original executive secretary of the Society was Rev. Robert Moldstad. But he didn't stay long in that position because at the 1972 Convention of the ELS, he also was commissioned as a missionary to Peru. But just because the driving force behind the founding of the Society left soon after its

[8]"Mission News," Vo. XIII-No. 2, December 1982, p. 16.

organization, that didn't mean that the Society would gradually fade away. In fact, Moldstad's leaving for Peru served as sort of an inspiration for the Society to continue and to grow.

As was said before, the main task of Faith Mission Society is the publishing and distribution of 'Mission News.' The topic that gets the most coverage in 'Mission News' is the ELS mission in Peru. That is more than likely the reason that the number of 'Lutheran Sentinel' articles about Peru dropped off significantly after 1971. Most of these articles are written by the missionaries themselves or by members of their families. Many of these articles describe the work that they are doing and the different ways and opportunities they have to bring the Gospel to the people of Peru. They may talk about special occasions for the church in Peru or different projects they are involved in or are beginning. These articles aren't limited just to the Gospel outreach in Peru. They may also tell about the different customs and lifestyles of the Peruvians or may describe a visit or a mini-vacation one of the missionaries' families made to another part of Peru. Articles like those help to give the readers of 'Mission News' a very good picture of what mission work and life is like in Peru. Occasionally members of Faith Mission Society, or friends and relatives of the missionaries, or members of the Mission Board will make a trip down to Peru and will write an article in 'Mission News' about their trip and about their impressions of the mission work and the land.

All of these articles are accompanied by many pictures which help the readers see the land and identify with the missionaries and the people they are serving. Both Rev. James Olsen, who served as a missionary in Peru in the early years of the mission, and Rev. Martin Teigen, who has served as a missionary there for the past twelve years, say that these articles and pictures of life and work in Peru are very accurate and give the readers of 'Mission News' a realistic picture of what is being done in Peru.

Although the mission work in Peru is what gets the most coverage in 'Mission News,' it is far from being the only thing covered by the paper. From 1972-1978, the ELS also had a mission in Central America and there were several articles about the work in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Eventually problems with the government made it necessary for the ELS to pull its men out of Central America.[9] In the last 5-10 years, 'Mission News' has also started to carry many more articles on the home missions in the ELS. Articles about these congregations remind the readers that mission work doesn't just mean across the ocean or half-way around the world. Mission work also means right here in the United States. Once again, pictures of these congregations and churches make them more than just the name of a city to the readers.

One other topic which appears in just about every issue of 'Mission News' is the LWMS--Lutheran Women's Missionary Society. There are summaries of most of the LWMS meetings in

[9]"Mission News," Vol. X-No. 1, April 1979, p. 1.

the different areas and regions of the ELS. These summaries include the topics which were studied or discussed at the meetings as well as a report of the projects which they are carrying out. Once again, 'Mission News' uses plenty of pictures to show what is going on at those meetings.

Other topics and projects are covered by occasional articles which remind the readers of their existence and inform them of their progress. There have been articles that deal with mission work and youth. These range from reports of youth groups doing door-to-door canvassing for the church to articles about a trip for youth to the mission field where they do some volunteer work. These articles in some cases have been written by the youths themselves. 'Mission News' also reports on 'Thoughts of Faith' which is a radio broadcast sponsered by the ELS which sends its signal into the Ukraine and into Siberia in the Soviet Union. These broadcasts started on Sept. 8, 1979 and 'Mission News' has been reporting about this project occasionally ever since. These articles are often written by Rev. John Shep who is very involved in the program. Especially interesting and encouraging are reports of letters which occasionally come from someone who listens to the broadcasts in the Soviet Union. Another project which sometimes appears in 'Mission News' is Project Christo Rey. This project is carried out by Christ the King Lutheran Church, a small congregation in Bell Gardens, a town in Southern California. The members of that congregation realized that they had a tremendous opportunity

to reach out to the Mexicans and other Spanish speaking people in their community. Robert Moldstad, who had returned from serving in Peru, was the pastor at Christ the King when the project was started. This projects translates and prints materials in Spanish and offers several sessions of Vacation Bible School (VBS) in Spanish for the Mexican children. Christ the King was too small to fund this project on their own so they rely on volunteer work and contributions from the outside. Many of those donations come to them through Faith Mission Society.

Other features which appear in just about every issue of 'Mission News' include the addresses of the foreign missionaries and the contribution form. The printing of the missioaries' addresses is something that goes back to the 'Lutheran Sentinel' articles before Faith Mission Society was formed. These addresses allow the readers to send letters and cards which are appreciated by the missionaries and which give the letter writers more of a feeling that this is their mission work and that these are their missionaries too. Rev. Olsen estimated that he received about 15-25 letters per month because his address was printed in 'Mission News' while he was in Peru. Rev. Teigen also made the observation that the longer a missionary is in Peru, the lower that number of letters becomes but that they are very often remembered , especially at the different holidays.

The contribution form does appear in every issue and it gives the person who wants to contribute money to the work of

the Society a listing of the different funds that are set up. These funds have changed through the years as new projects are started and old ones are completed or dropped. Projects which appeared in the early issues include the missions in Peru and Nicaragua, home missions, the printing and distributing of 'Mission News,' and the LCF--Lutheran Children's Fund in Peru and Nicaragua. LCF gifts were used for physical needs such as food and medical help and for spiritual needs such as VBS projects and other materials. Other projects that have appeared on the contribution form through the years are Project Christo Rey, Thoughts of Faith, the seminary in Peru, Ano Nuevo Clubhouse, which is a mother's club run by the mission in Peru, and funds for a fourth missionary in Peru when budget problems made it impossible for the Synod to support the extra missionary.

Contributions to Faith Mission Society are reported in almost every issue of 'Mission News.' This report usually lists the total of the donations sent in since the last issue and the names of the individuals and groups or churches which sent in contributions since the last issue. Once in a while a full financial report for the previous year will be printed. In the April 1976 issue it was reported that $14,535.33 had been received and distributed in 1975 by Faith Mission Society as designated by the contributors. By comparison, the May 1987 issue reported that $23,037.91 had been contributed in 1986 and that the total since 1972 was $258,608.43. When the contributions of 1987 are added, a total of $278,608.43 has

been distributed by Faith Mission Society since it was founded in 1972. That is an average of about $17,500 per year for the cause of missions. Faith Mission Society is certainly fulfilling one of its stated goals, "To increase mission resources by greater financial support."[10]

What has all of that money been used for? Many of those uses have been listed and explained above--Thoughts of Faith, Project Christo Rey, Home missions, LCF, mission work in Peru, etc.... But what are some of the specific things that money has provided? The April 1976 issue lists some of the specific things that were provided through the money designated at that time for the Peru mission. Some of those specific things are improvements in the Mission House, medical care for the sick including help during a typhoid epidemic, work study grants, a VBS session in the mountains, a study retreat, the purchase of Bibles and a fimstrip projector, and materials for a chapel. The list could go on and on. Rev. Olsen said that the money provided by Faith Mission Society, especially in the early years of the mission in Peru, allowed many things to be done which would not have been done otherwise. This work included work on the office and resident buildings and special trips by the missionaries to take the Gospel to other parts of Lima and Peru. Rev. Teigen also said that Faith Mission Society contributions allowed more materials and books to be printed in Spanish, more charitable work to be done, and more funding for the seminary program.

[10]"Lutheran Sentinel," Vol. 55-No. 9, May 11, 1972, p. 139.

Occasionally the Society will receive some undesignated gifts or gifts which are to be used wherever they are most needed. The Society's Board of Directors, which tries to meet about four times a year, then determines which fund needs or can best use those funds or they use them for the printing of 'Mission News.'

Although 'Mission News' is by far the major work of Faith Mission Society, it is not the only project or service that it offers or has considered offering. When the society was formed, one of its goals was to increase mission potential through training courses. The intent was to produce things such as Bible study courses which would focus on the topic of missions or training programs to help people become more mission minded and active in local mission work. Those courses and programs never became a reality though. Another project which has been started in the last year by Faith Mission Society is the establishment of a video library. This library has been mentioned in the last two issues of 'Mission News.' Currently they have two tapes on the New Age Movement, one tape on rock music, and three tapes on the Masonic lodge. This is just the beginning and they hope to increase the size of the library substantially in the near future. The tapes are offered to anyone who is interested. The only requirements are that the borrower pay the return postage and that they return the tapes when they are through with them so that others can use them too.[11] Mr. Marlin Goebel, the current

[11]"Mission News," Vol. XIX-No. 1, February 1988, p. 32.

executive secretary of Faith Mission Society and an editor of 'Mission News,' also says that the idea of giving scholarships has been discussed but that nothing definite has been decided yet either on how they will be given out or for what they will be given.

How well has Faith Mission Society fulfilled the five goals that it set forth for itself when it was organized sixteen years ago? Overall it has done quite well, but just because the goals have been met in the past doesn't mean that there is no reason to try to continue and expand on those goals. The Society's first goal was "To increase mission interest through timely information." This it has done very well through the number and variety of articles in each issue of 'Mission News.' Its second goal was "To increase mission ambition through a greater concern for lost souls." This has also been done through 'Mission News' which stresses the importance of spreading the Gospel to those who don't know it yet. Its third goal was "To increase mission potential through training courses." This goal as it is stated hasn't been reached. But even though no training courses have been produced, mission potential has been increased because mission interest and mission ambition, the first two goals, have been increased through 'Mission News.' Its fourth goal was "To increase mission resources by greater financial support." That this goal is being accomplished is evident in the nearly $300,000 that have been sent to support mission work through contributions to the Society. Its fifth goal was "To

increase mission accomplishments through more opportunities for service." This goal is being accomplished in a number of ways. This is being done through the contributions which allow more work to be done. This is done through articles which show ways that readers can get involved in mission work through things like LWMS or Project Christo Rey. This is also done through articles in 'Mission News' which promote evangelism both through the local congregation and through personal or friendship evangelism.

Faith Mission Society and 'Mission News' are important and beneficial both for the readers and for those who are written about. The people of Peru are the ones who are written about most often in 'Mission News.' Although very few of them can read or understand English, they benefit because they know that there are fellow Christians in America who know about them and love them and who are concerned about them as people and as souls who need the Gospel message of salvation. Rev. Teigen says that the Peruvians aren't aware so much of Faith Mission Society as a specific group. But they are aware of everything that their Christian friends in America are doing for them whether that be through the efforts of the ELS or Faith Mission Society. The work of Faith Mission Society is also important to the people of America. 'Mission News' is an excellent way of getting news and information about that far-flung mission work to the people who are supporting it and it brings that far-flung mission work much closer to home. It shows them that their

support of and prayers for mission work are not in vain but that their support of the preaching of the Gospel has been blessed by God. Because of those blessings of God, Faith Mission Society has been successful in its work in the past and can look forward to future success as they strive to increase mission interest, ambition, potential, resources, and accomplishments.

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