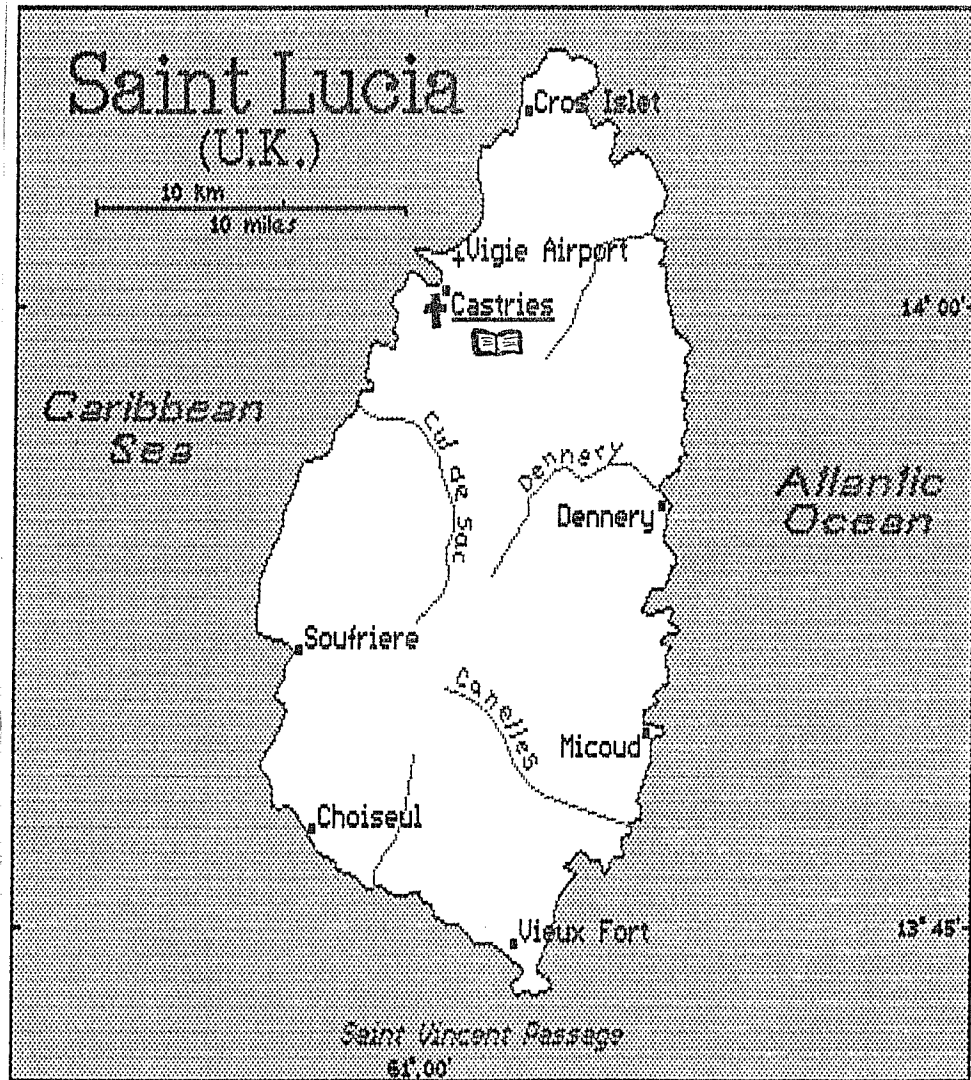


*SUCCESS IN  
THE CARIBBEAN:  
The Story of the WELS  
Mission in St. Lucia*



By: Thomas Mielke  
Senior Church History  
February 14, 1994

INTRODUCTION:

The mission work carried on by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the Caribbean is a very interesting story. Different types of mission outreach work, such as developing and fostering Christian day schools, are often used in this vast area of islands. Our Antiguan mission, the strongest English-speaking mission within the Caribbean, was already started, complete with a school (staffed with WELS teachers), when the WELS began to oversee its operation. As an inheritance from the now defunct Federation of Authentic Lutherans, a group of congregations who broke off from the Missouri Synod when it began fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and who amalgamated with the WELS and ELS in the mid 1970's, the WELS adopted this mission work ~~in~~ and consequently had a presence in the Caribbean other than the Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican mission. The slow but steady growth of this Antiguan mission, along with contacts from visiting people from other Caribbean islands, inspired its missionaries during the 1980's to begin looking out toward these other islands as possible mission sights. While there was a strong Christian presence on most islands, there was very little orthodoxy. Through contacts with relocated members from the Antiguan congregation, our current mission on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia was begun.

It is my intent in this essay to show how the mission in St. Lucia was developed: its beginnings, its nurturing and its growth. The information found in this work was compiled largely

from correspondence and newsletters from the Caribbean area, the South Atlantic District Mission Board, and the Board for Home Missions. Also prominent among my sources was an interview conducted with Pastor Peter Kruschel, the Assistant Administrator for the Board for Home Missions. Only direct quotes of the above sources will be footnoted, with the understanding that most of the information contained in the paper came from these sources. It is my hope that the work accomplished in St. Lucia over the past decade will be an inspiration and catalyst for continued growth in this area ripe for the harvest of souls for the Lord. While this mission, as every mission in the world, is unique in its development, one can easily see the Lord's hand at work in this exciting area of the world known as the Caribbean.

St. Lucia background: St. Lucia is a relatively small, but somewhat advanced island in the southern part of the Caribbean. It's area covers approximately 238 square miles. It is an independent state which had it's beginnings as a French colony. It was overrun by the English during the French and Indian War, and became an English colony. English is the chief and official language on the island. An early letter from the South Atlantic District Mission Board to the Board for Home Missions staff gives some more in-depth information:

St. Lucia is very different and yet very similar to Antigua. The similarity lies in the type of government each has. Both are part of the British Commonwealth and so are heavily influenced by the English parliamentary system. Both use the same East Caribbean currency. Both appear less developed than the French islands and

Barbados. But the similarities end there. It seems that St. Lucia is more developed than Antigua. The government seems more orderly and concerned for the welfare of its people. Education seems to have been given a higher priority.<sup>1</sup>

There is a large Roman Catholic presence on the island, with a good number of Protestant religions and non-Christian religions represented as well. The climate is ideal for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, making it self-sustaining with regard to food consumption. The population on this island, made up of natives and expatriates, is in the area of 140,000. The majority of people living on the island are natives, but there is a small percentage of Asians and Europeans living on the island.

Having this background of the island in mind, we can begin the interesting story of our mission work in St. Lucia.

#### I. ITS BEGINNINGS

The first contacts our synod men had with the people of St. Lucia came from two families who were expatriates living on the island. The Suris and the Flemings were both expatriates from the country of India. Both families had Lutheran background in India and, as doctors, had a desire to reach the United States to practice medicine. Apparently, the Caribbean was a "stepping stone" for them to get there. Establishing residence first on Antigua, where there was a need for doctors, they and their families were served by a non-WELS Lutheran layman by the name of Donovan. Donovan received his "training" from radio broadcasts

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter from the South Atlantic District Mission Board to the WELS Board for Home Missions staff, dated November 16, 1985, p.1.

of "The Lutheran Hour," and from some books he had obtained. He gathered many Lutherans around him on Antigua, and the Suris and the Flemings were among them. Donovan passed away in the late 1970's, and the families gravitated toward our mission in Antigua, eventually becoming charter members of our St. John's Church on the island.

In the early 1980's the doctors and their families left Antigua and later took up residence on St. Lucia. The letter mentioned earlier helps to explain the move:

After they were forced to leave Antigua (because of government animosity toward East Indians) they went back to India, then to St. Lucia, then to the States (for about 18 months) and finally back to St. Lucia. They may dream about returning to India some day, but that day probably lies in the distant future. They have given up all thoughts of coming to the U.S. They tried it and didn't find it to be the Eden they were looking for.<sup>2</sup>

While on Antigua, both families became close with Darrell and Helen Dobberpuhl, WELS teachers serving in Antigua. The doctors kept in close contact with the Dobberpuhls. Upon returning to the United States, Helen Dobberpuhl wrote a heartfelt letter to the Board for Home Missions expressing her doctor friends' desires to be served in St. Lucia. Word got back to the then current chairman of the South Atlantic District Mission Board, Pastor Peter Kruschel, who had visited Antigua years before and had been served by the doctors there when his child became ill on the trip. He, together with the Antigua

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.2.

coordinator Pastor John Huebner, while on a visit to Antigua in the Fall of 1985, took a side trip to St. Lucia to speak with these doctors, who by then had been joined by another family of Lutherans, the Rajus. All of these families lived nearby the city of Castries, the chief city in St. Lucia, and had set up a clinic in that city. They expressed a sincere desire to be served to nurture their Lutheran faith on an island with no Lutheran presence on it. Soon thereafter it was decided that something had to be done for this small, but dedicated group of Christians.

Kruschel and Huebner also had the opportunity to speak with others during their trip to St. Lucia. In a correspondence to the Board for Home Missions, they recalled the discussions they had:

We met with a Methodist clergyman and with the Minister of Cultural Affairs. Our impression from speaking to them is that the churches are expected not only to preach the Gospel but also to take an active role in improving (the) social and economic lot of the people. In fact the Minister of Cultural Affairs told us that very bluntly.<sup>3</sup>

Later in the letter, the two men recalled information on the desires of the families on St. Lucia:

These people genuinely want a Lutheran church for St. Lucia. Presently they are members of a local Methodist congregation. They joined this church because they found it closest to their Lutheran church. They have no loyalty to this church -- as evidenced by their invitation to us and the fact that they do not send their children to the Methodist school...Dr. Raju (said) he was a third generation Lutheran and wanted to

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.1.

maintain the faith of his fathers...On several occasions they made the remark: We want a Lutheran church for St. Lucia.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, these Christians were pleading for help in their Christian nurturing, a plea that would not go unnoticed.

## II. Its Nurturing

Seeing the desires and needs of this small group of believers in St. Lucia, Kruschel and Huebner, upon approval from the Board for Home Missions, set up a schedule with the missionaries serving in Antigua, Pastors Richard Seeger and Larry Zessin. The Antiguan missionaries would travel once or twice a month to St. Lucia, where they would serve these people on a limited but regular basis. Using funding obtained from the South Atlantic District Mission Board, they would distribute Sunday School, confirmation class and Bible class materials to the doctors, so that they and their children could be educated in the true Word of God. Videotapes of Antiguan church services would also be shared, for use when the pastors could not be on the island. At this time the pastors from Antigua also visited Grenada, where another prominent family from the Antiguan mission, the Sylvesters, had taken up residence. They, too, received similar materials and services.

St. Lucia became an extension of the Antiguan mission. With help from the South Atlantic District Mission Board, plans were discussed as to how the "mission" in St. Lucia might reach out to

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.2

others on the island. While the majority of the people on the island were churched, there were many who were fallen-away Catholics. The non-Christian forces at work on the island (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons) were gaining a foothold, and it was believed that this island would be a location with as much potential for growth and future self-support as the mission on Antigua, although the numbers were not as large within the St. Lucian "mission." Plans were discussed regarding advertising in the local newspaper, on local radio, and perhaps even on cable television. A free medical clinic was also discussed, with one of the doctors volunteering his services for several hours a week. Support and aid also came from the lay people on Antigua, who were very eager to reach out to other islands, where they had relatives and friends living.

However, with the minimal manpower in Antigua, worsened by occasional vacancies due to Antiguan missionaries accepting calls back to the mainland, visits were often limited. Yet the previously mentioned method of outreach and service to St. Lucia (and Grenada) continued until 1990, with success as far as nurturing the few members, but relatively little success in the area of outreach.

### III. ITS GROWTH

In May of 1990, as a result of a request by the Board for Home Missions and funding from the "Lift High the Cross" offering, the Antiguan mission was assigned a candidate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Matthew Wobeck, on a temporary



basis. He was to help the missionaries with the work on Antigua so that they could work more intensely on St. Lucia and Grenada and also seek outreach possibilities on the other islands in the Caribbean. In October of 1990, Pastors David Kehl and Mark Henrich of the Antiguan mission began to hold weekly services at Castries, St. Lucia. While there had been little growth in the mission on St. Lucia, the Board for Home Missions decided that weekly pastoral care was needed. Pastor Peter Kruschel explains:

One of our goals in Home Missions is to try to help a congregation reach self-support as soon as possible. One of the other goals is to have local ownership of the mission work, so that it's not entirely dependent on the missionary to get the work taken care of. That was a hard thing for the doctors in St. Lucia to understand, and I'm not sure they fully understand that yet. They have kind of what we would call a "world mission mentality," where the missionary comes in from the outside. He does the work, and they come to worship. They were convinced that nothing could be done in St. Lucia unless there was a missionary on-site, in the field, working. Finally, we decided that the only way we were going to prove the field was to have a man actually on-site, and as a part of his work he would have to do an awful lot of training of the nucleus that was there.<sup>5</sup>

But by December, the missionaries realized that it was becoming increasingly difficult to carry on that work and at the same time maintain the congregation at Antigua properly. Pastor Kruschel, who has traveled between Antigua and St. Lucia says, "To get from Antigua to St. Lucia requires almost a day's travel, and that's when everything is working well...It's kind of like 'We fly when we want to fly.'" The missionaries expressed their

---

<sup>5</sup> Interview conducted with Pastor Peter Kruschel, January 28, 1994, in Milwaukee, WI.

concerns to the Board for Home Missions, and it was decided that Pastor Wobeck would serve on St. Lucia. He was to be guided and helped by the Antiguan missionaries, but would reside on St. Lucia and be a pastor to the growing flock on the island, until his short-term assignment was completed. In addition to his shepherding duties, he was also to more intensely explore the island for outreach possibilities. This was the first step toward obtaining a full-time, permanent missionary to serve on the island.

Growth was seen with this method of mission work, and in October of 1991, the Board asked for approval for the calling of a permanent exploratory pastor to reside in St. Lucia. Meanwhile, a Caribbean newsletter written by the Antiguan missionaries, shared some wonderful news about St. Lucia with the other Caribbean Lutherans:

December 15, 1991 was an exciting day for Trinity Lutheran Church in Castries, St. Lucia. This day was Charter Membership Day for Trinity Lutheran. Although we have been worshipping in St. Lucia for 3 years, this Sunday was set aside as a time to become officially organized as a church. Pastor Wobeck was pleased to report that 20 adults and 10 children showed their unity of faith and desire for a Lutheran Church by becoming charter members on that day.<sup>6</sup>

At this same time, the Lutherans in the Caribbean learned that St. Lucia would soon have its own permanent pastor. In the Summer of 1992, Pastor Joel Jaeger, previously a European chaplain residing in Germany, arrived to serve as missionary to

---

<sup>6</sup> "The Caribbean Lutheran," newsletter published by the Antiguan mission, Volume 1, Number 3, February 1992.

St. Lucia.

Since Pastor Jaeger's arrival, the church has continued to grow and now boasts a membership of over fifty. Regular Sunday services are held in a rented office area, complete with pews and chancel furniture hand-crafted by members. However, self support seems to be far off at present. Pastor Kruschel elaborates:

In a way (the St. Lucian mission) is being operated pretty much like we would start many of our new home missions in North America. They're learning to be more and more self-sufficient. I don't know if they'll be ready to become self-supporting any time real soon. Stewardship is something that they either are not capable of raising enough funds to support themselves or in many cases they just have no understanding of what the needs are and that they should actually be taking care of some of those needs... These people, for the most part, are either new Christians or this concept of self support is an entirely new concept to them. They're used to British colonial rule or to have the "mother church" in Germany or America take care of all their needs... They can't get used to the idea that maybe some of their own income should go for church support.

However, the same could have been said in connection with the Antiguan mission 15 years ago. Though yet to be self supporting, the Antiguan mission has been making great strides in stewardship in recent years. Pastor Kruschel attributes that to the school, where members can be trained in proper stewardship without pre-conceived ideas. Perhaps, in time, the St. Lucia mission will also see more results in the area of stewardship, for the Lord's Word does not return to him empty.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Pastor Kruschel, January 28, 1994.

CONCLUSION:

Kruschel characterizes the success we have had in St. Lucia as "reasonably satisfying." As with any mission work, the work is very slow in producing results, but there are results. But one can clearly see that the mission in St. Lucia has been a worthwhile investment of synodical dollars. When one includes children, the majority of the membership in the congregation are natives. However, at this point, loss of the expatriates in the church, the doctors, Peace Corp workers, and other expatriates would be difficult to handle. It is truly evident that the Lord is showering his blessings upon our work in St. Lucia. From its humble beginnings as a small group of relocated families to a full-fledged church with over 50 members, the evidence is striking, considering that this has taken place in a mere 7 years, with the first four or five years showing virtually no growth. Having a resident pastor has helped these people to learn more and more about what it means to share the Gospel message. I truly pray that more and more missions can be opened in the Caribbean, an area truly ripe for the harvest of souls for the Lord. Perhaps the lessons learned in Antigua and St. Lucia will help that outreach, to the glory of God alone.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

"The Caribbean Lutheran," newsletter of the Lutherans in the Caribbean region. Volume 1, Number 3, February 1992.

Interview with Pastor Peter Kruschel, Assistant Administrator for the WELS Board for Home Missions, conducted on January 28, 1994, in Milwaukee, WI.

Various correspondence between the WELS Board for Home Missions and the South Atlantic District Mission Board, dating from 1985 until 1989.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 W. Seminary Drive, 65W  
Mequon, Wisconsin