



The Early History of the Pacific Northwest District

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I. The Early Years: 1884-1918

The history of the Pacific Northwest District began in Tacoma Washington. In 1884 seven families got together to organize a German Lutheran church. They needed a pastor so they called a pastor by the name of F. A. Wolf who was currently serving in Fremont, Ohio in the Ohio Synod. Pastor Wolf accepted the call and St. Paul's church was organized in Tacoma on March 22, 1884. The congregation built a frame church and it was dedicated on April 29, 1894. On January 28, 1895 St. Paul's church withdrew from the Ohio Synod and was granted acceptance into the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin And Other States. It is recorded that Pastor Wolf's salary was \$25.00 a month.

Mission work in our synod was a little different in our Synod back then and mission work in the PNW was no exception. Pastor Wolf's objective was to find Lutherans who didn't have a church. Throughout the early part of the history of the Pacific Northwest it was thought best to just do mission work in smaller villages and stay away from the bigger cities. George Frey, in a conference paper, quotes Wm. Lueckel on early mission work:

"Pastor Lueckel writes: "In the early years the Wisconsin Synod had a different concept of mission work than it has today. Mission opportunities in cities like Seattle and Spokane were not exploited. The first missionaries soon saw the need and the advisability of sending a man to explore new fields in the populous communities of the state and the wisdom of providing a chapel for his work if necessary." He adds the commentary, "It took many years before the synod saw the wisdom of such a procedure. One might concede the necessity of sending a pastor to do mission work among the Indians. The white heathen in cities like Seattle, Spokane and Portland did not elicit such consideration. The work of the Wisconsin Synod in the Northwest was for too many years limited to activities in smaller towns and villages. This is one reason why it is sometimes difficult to begin new missions in the larger cities where other Lutheran Synods have already been active for 75 years. Today many old Wisconsin Synod Lutherans are members of other synods and the sectarian churches because there was no Wisconsin Synod church to serve them when they came west" (3-4).

Even though the officials of the Wisconsin Synod had let St. Paul's of Tacoma into the Synod they weren't quite sure about doing mission work way out in the west. J. P. Koehler thought that the Wisconsin Synod shouldn't be spending money on this little church in the west but that this church should have been referred to the Missouri Synod which was already active in that part of the country. J. P. Koehler talks about the Church Expansion Policy and it's dealings with the west at the time:

"The greatest lure (for those working with the Expansion Policy) was that of the west... The congregation (St. Pauls) ought to have been directed to Missouri, which already was located at Tacoma. But that didn't suit Pastor Wolf... Covering the case the report of the commission adds: "The hope is held out that the congregation will soon grow, though it may not become large. The commission so reports but offers no opinion as to feasibility. Likewise, the commission refers the matter of Pastor Wolf in Tacoma, WA, to Synod, since it was not in a position to get a clear picture of the conditions there. If we are to do anything the commission recommends that the superintendent of church extension make a trip there to satisfy himself whether there are any prospects for us to do successful mission work there." ...Synod's resolution was to the effect that the superintendent undertake the exploration trip and in the event of poor prospects for Wisconsin turn the fields over to Minnesota or Missouri.

Bendler and Praeses von Rohr went west and returned with the report that the West is beautiful, perplexing, and expensive; still a land of the future, but then abounding with prospects. ..."The Missourians are at work in the West, and their work ought not to be hampered. But the Tacoma congregation has a right to remain with us and should not be forced to unite with Missouri. It might do to suggest union with Missouri, but if she wants to stay with us, we dare not abandon her. Of all the Lutheran churches she has the best location in the city and the greatest prospects. In case we are going to continue the mission, we ought to place two or three pastors there." These reports were not given undivided credence in Synod but the majority abided by them...Tacoma was henceforth supported" (196-197).

And with that, our roots in the PNW had been established.

In 1902 old age forced Pastor Wolf to retire. Henry Viestenz of Baraboo, who had been in Tacoma seeking better health, served the vacancy. Pastor Wolf and his wife moved to San Francisco but returned a year later. Wolf died in Tacoma in 1909 at age 71.

In 1903 a Seminary graduate named G. A. Ernst was assigned to St. Paul's. He served there until 1907. During this time Ernst received word that there were Lutherans in the north central part of the state that were looking for a church. These were people who had moved from the Midwest. Ernst did some mission work in that area of the state and on October 22, 1905 Grace church in North Yakima came into existence. The first pastor at Grace was J. Ebert. Grace had a rough beginning. Ebert didn't stay long and in the first five years Grace had several different pastors. The big problem, however, was with the Missouri church on the other side of town. Grace church became known as the "opposition church" since the people couldn't understand why there needed to be another Lutheran church in the same town. This problem escalated and turned into an inter-synodical case. It took until 1912 for this case to be resolved when an inter-synodical committee ruled in favor of the Wisconsin Synod church and let it remain there.

In 1907 the Mission Board of the Wisconsin Synod recognized the need of missionaries to the north central part of WA and sent Martin Raasch to Leavenworth. Pastor Raasch was a bachelor at the time and built his own house. He was installed Aug. 4, 1907. While he was there the congregation built St. Paul's church in Leavenworth which was completed in March of 1911. Raasch also started a preaching station in Mansfield.

Raasch's field included Grant, Chelan, and Douglas, and Okanogan Counties. This was basically the whole north central part of the state. Lueckel writes:

"It was an immense territory and a chronicle of those days tells about the hardships and difficulties under which the missionary served the scattered

Lutheran families whom he contacted. "Anyone familiar with the topography of the State of Washington and the means of travel available at that time -- those were horse and buggy days -- will understand that this was a difficult field to serve. When Raasch served Okanogan where he had contacted a few Lutheran families, he went by train from Leavenworth to Wenatchee and waited there many hours for a branch line train to take him to Okanogan 95 mls. to the north. This was a trip of 120 miles from home. When he served Mansfield he again traveled to Wenatchee by train and waited for hours until he could travel another 75 miles to Mansfield on a combination freight and passenger train. When he went to Low Gap (Grant County) he travelled 75 miles by train to Quincy where a member of his flock met him with horses and a lumber wagon and drove him 15 or 20 miles to the south over a lonely trail through sage brush country. He said that on his first trip he breathed a sigh of relief when his farmer host at last said, "In about thirty minutes we will be home." Tired and hungry the missionary was finally welcomed by the farmer's family" (4-5).

In 1910 the Mission Board recognized the need to help Raasch and sent Fred E. Stern to St. John's Mansfield where he and his family moved into a 14 x 20 house. While there he started other preaching stations in the surrounding areas. Stern also had a challenge working in this area as the historian writes in *Continuing In His Word*:

"Okanogan and Mansfield were about sixty miles from Mansfield up the Columbia and Okanogan rivers. The missionary would leave his home early in the morning and travel by stage (later the trip was made with a hired livery team) and arrive at Omak in the evening. Services were held and the children were instructed that same evening. The following day the pastor would drive thirty miles to Brewster, conduct services, instruct the children, and make the necessary calls. Wenatchee, seventy miles from Mansfield, was another charge of missionary Stern. Besides he served Withrow, a congregation organized in 1911, Leavenworth, and Mansfield. When, in 1916, Pastor Stern received a call to Watertown, Wisconsin, his seven missions in the Pacific Northwest lost a faithful and zealous missionary" (126).

In 1907 Reinhold Ave-Lallemont accepted the call to St. Paul's in Tacoma. In 1910 L.C. Krug from Whitehall, WI came to Yakima and served Grace. In 1910 St. Paul's of Tacoma built the brick church that is still used today. It was dedicated on Nov. 20, 1910. All three of the other Wisconsin Synod pastors were present there at Ave-Lallemant's new church:

L.C. Krug (new ^{man} guy to Yakima); Martin Raasch (Leavenworth); Fred E. Stern (new ^{man} guy in Mansfield). The day after the dedication, Nov. 21, 1910, was held the first pastoral conference. And the day after that was the first communion service in St. Paul's church at which the four attended.

Pastor L. C. Krug, who had recently come to the PNW had an influential part in the history of the District. When Krug arrived he started looking for mission opportunities. George Frey tells us of what he remembers about Krug's mission strategy:

"I recall Pastor Krug, who was pastor of Grace congregation in 1911, telling of doing canvass work with two other pastors in Ellensburg prior to the establishment of the congregation there. He said they first would find a city directory and check out the names that were German, and these would be the people they called on. They would likely be either Lutheran or Catholic" (2-3).

Through this method Krug started a preaching station in Ellensburg. He also served Lutheran families in Cowichee, Athenum, and Mabton.

In 1912 the mission board of the Wisconsin Synod recognized the need to help Krug with his area. The synod sent Pastor R. Siegler to help. At this time Krug had received word that there were some Lutherans in Lewiston, Idaho and Clarkston, Washington who were looking for some pastoral care. Krug sent Siegler to investigate. As it turns out the field in that far east side of the state was ripe for harvest and Siegler formed St. John's in Lewiston Idaho. Siegler also traveled to Kennewick and formed Zion on the west side of the city. Zion was formed when Siegler discovered 10 Lutheran families who were living there. Siegler and the congregation in Zion started building a church for themselves in Kennewick in 1911 but the construction was suspended until 1912. During this time Siegler accepted a call to Wisconsin. In 1912 S. Probst was called to serve Zion in Kennewick. Probst served until 1918 when he accepted a call to Northwestern College in

Watertown, Wisconsin. In 1918 F. Reddin was called to take over as ^fPastor in Kennewick. But things didn't work out too well for Reddin in Kennewick. Reddin was very German and the congregation in Kennewick was very English. There was a clash between the two which Reddin recognized right away when he arrived and within a month he left. After that Zion tried to get another pastor but the workers were few. The congregation called for a pastor for a while but none of them accepted the call. After a short while, when some of the prominent members of Zion moved away, the church closed its doors and the property was sold to the Norwegian Lutherans.

Getting back to 1912, Pastor Krug who was serving Grace in Yakima became ill and at the advise of his ^{doctor} Dr. he decided to take a leave of absence. Krug moved to Kennewick in 1912 (at the time that Siegler was building up the church there). He lived in a modest house on the edge of town hoping to recover.

While sick in Kennewick Krug got an urgent call from two laymen who desired to have him visit some families in the Hanford and White Bluffs area which was up the Columbia River to the north of Kennewick 45 miles. Despite his health, Krug responded and went to the area. Officials from the synod urged Krug to remain there even though he was ill. Krug found Lutherans in Hanford and in White Bluffs just as the laymen had said. When deciding where to meet for services the people decided to meet in White Bluffs since the majority of the members were from that town. On Sept. 12, 1912 St. Paul's of White Bluffs was founded. Despite his bad health, Krug moved to White Bluffs to serve the people there. In 1918 a frame church was erected and dedicated to the Lord in White Bluffs.

Skipping ahead in history we find that this church in White Bluffs had an unfortunate end. During WWII the Federal Government took over 500,000 acres of land in that area which

included the town of White Bluffs and Hanford. Beginning in 1943, the government used the land creating the Atomic Energy Commission. On this site plutonium for the atomic bomb was made. The government forced all the people living in this area to leave. St. Paul's church in White Bluffs also had to leave. When many of the members moved out of the area the church closed. Pastor Krug, who was still living, retired after that and moved to Yakima where he died in 1958. The Hanford site is still in operation today and several of our WELS members are employed there.

Back to 1912. During this year the Pacific Northwest Pastoral Conference was founded. The pastors met twice a year. The pastors all looked forward to this time together. They were all so far apart that they never saw each other much. This time together served to strengthen them and renew their zeal for spreading the Word.

Also in 1912 a very influential man in PNW history was called into the field. In July of 1912 Pastor Frederic Henry Karl Soll was called to replace Krug at Grace in north Yakima. Soll was 43 years old (which was "old" when compared to the ages of some of the Sem/graduates that were often assigned to the PNW). He had a lot of experience in his background. He had been serving in the parish ministry since 1891, and also served as the old Michigan Synod treasurer, and as Vice President of the Michigan Synod. From 1907 to 1912 he served as the President of the Wisconsin Joint Synod. In 1912 some thought that his life took on a strange course when he accepted the call to the newly organized mission field of the PNW. And I suppose it did, compared to his previous lifestyle, but this just shows his conviction to preaching the gospel to all the ends of the earth. It has been reported that some of the officials of the Synod were glad that he was going out west to work. They told him to make sure that things were still confessional out there. Many were still apprehensive about the whole idea of mission work in the west calling it the "burial ground" of the Wisconsin Synod. They wanted Soll to keep the brothers on the

conservative path. The young graduates and pastors who were serving in the west greatly benefitted from Soll's experience. Many of the young pastors had many difficulties adapting to the way of life and the ministry when they arrived in the west and Pastor Soll helped them and gave them much needed advice.

Soll worked faithfully in the PNW. When he arrived in Yakima in 1912 to serve Grace, the congregation was struggling. While he was there the congregation became independent. Soll also served many other missions in the area.

In 1916 Soll started a district newspaper to strengthen the reader's faith and also to inform the reader of what was going on in the other churches around the District. He called it the *Evangelist*. He published it monthly and the subscription price was \$.25 per month. The monthly paper ran into the 1940s but was almost discontinued two years after Soll introduced it:

"TO THE READERS AND SUBSCRIBERS OF THE EVANGELIST"

With a sorrowful mind for some time the manager of the evangelist has noticed the falling off of revenues and receipts for this paper and, after much thinking on this subject, I had come to the conclusion rather to give up the paper, at least temporarily, than to run it with an ever-growing deficit; but then I received some letters so kind and encouraging together with enough money to pay off the debts, that I saw that the *Evangelist* has place in our church work, especially at the present time, when on account of many vacancies and the influenza epidemic so much of our work is upset. Therefore, God helping, the *Evangelist* shall be continued" (Dec. 1918).

In 1918 when the Joint Synod of Wisconsin granted District status to the congregations and missions in the Pacific Northwest, Soll was elected president of the District. He served as the first president until 1938. Soll suffered a heart attack shortly after the death of his wife in 1939, and in 1940 he died in Yakima. Soll had served in many different places and

states, and had held many different offices, but Lueckel tells us what Soll thought of his time in the PNW:

"The years and the labors in the Pacific Northwest were the most blessed and satisfying of his whole life, in spite of many hardships and obstacles" (NWL 28:1 p12).

The brothers in the Pacific Northwest had great respect for this man. W. Lueckel writes in the Northwestern Lutheran and told of the funeral:

"President William Lueckel preached the English sermon, glorifying Jesus Christ, Who gives His church faithful servants and Who crowns their labors with His blessing (I Cor. 4:1,2). Pastor T. Adascheck preached the German sermon (Phil. 1:21). The pastors W. Amacher and E. Kirst assisted in the services and the brethren of the District were honorary pallbearers. The overcrowded church testified to the respect and love which church members and friends had for their pastor and friend. Interment was made at Yakima, Washington.

Frederic Soll was a man of rare gifts and talents. Following a natural bent for languages, he was a diligent student of the Scriptures to the very end of his life. His clear grasp and concise summary of a problem was often seen at pastoral conferences and synod meetings. Many a young pastor whose first call lead him to an isolated mission in the Northwest, was benefitted by his sane and fatherly counsel. His wife and conservative leadership has been a blessing for our whole Pacific Northwest District these many years. But in the Lord's school of life he had also learned the lesson of humility and service. He was ready to serve his Lord faithfully, wherever he might be called.

May the memory of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ abide with us!" (28:1 p13).

From this writing it is plainly evident how much an influence F. Soll had on the early beginnings of the District. Later on in this paper I will get into the issues which took place during Soll's presidency in more detail.

Once again I go back to 1912 to talk about other mission expansion that branched off into different directions than what I have already written about. Pastor Kirst was called to

awkward
sentence

Ellensburg in 1912 and served there until 1918. He also established missions at Cle Elum and Roslyn.

1912 was also the year that the Wisconsin Synod first reached down into Oregon. Two members who had moved to Portland from Ellensburg sent word that Portland would be a good mission field. As a result, a preaching station opened. In 1913 a Seminary graduate was called to serve in Portland full time. Within a year the graduate went back to Wisconsin. But in 1916 Pastor F. Eppling accepted the call to Portland. Eppling explored the eastern part of Oregon and recommended to the synod mission board that a missionary be sent out there. Wm. Lueckel was called as a missionary to enterprise Oregon. In 1918 Eppling died suddenly of apoplexy leaving another vacancy to be filled in the PNW District.

Filling vacancies in the District was a very difficult thing to do. And it was hard for the pastors who were already there to help out until a vacancy^{congregation} got its own pastor. The distances were so great between the different places and the travel was slow that it was impossible to give adequate attention to all the people in the area. Many pastors didn't accept calls into the Northwest because the way of life was too hard and some still thought of the mission work in the west as being the "burial grounds" of the Wisconsin Synod. Financial reasons kept some from going as well. The pastor would receive \$50.00 per month. If the missionary had a growing family money would be tight. The missionaries were also on their own for transportation. Many of them traveled by train but they still needed to get to the station. If the missionary had wealthy parents or in-laws he could maybe afford a Model T. Many graduates were assigned out there because the veterans didn't want to go. Many of the graduates found life tough and had many reasons for accepting calls back to the Midwest. Lueckel tells of one reason why a young pastor in the west might be tempted to go back east:

"And, when a prospective mother-in-law in Wisconsin let a bachelor missionary in the West know that he would have permission to marry her daughter when he accepted a call to Wisconsin, that could be an added temptation to leave and let someone else take over in the West" (9).

Those young pastors had tough decisions to make!

With the lack of workers in the west came the inevitable result of slow growth among the missions. Some pastors from other Districts sometimes criticized the efforts in the west as this one pastor said half jokingly to President Soll, "After all, Fritz, what do you have out there in WA? I have more communicants in my one congregation than you have in your entire District." This was probably true, but at the same time it showed a lack of understanding of how difficult it was for the missionaries in the west.

But the western mission did draw support from some. Often a person had to experience the west in order to gain an understanding of the field. Rev. A. C. Haase from St. Paul travelled to the west with Pastor F. J. Eppling shortly before Eppling accepted the call to Portland in 1916. Haase's travel log was printed in the October 7, 1916 edition of the Northwestern Lutheran. He writes:

"In the company of Rev. F. J. Eppling, we left St. Paul on the evening of Aug. 13th and traveled over the scenic route of the Northern Pacific Railroad. On Wednesday morning, Aug. 16th, we surprised the Rev. Soll and family and the reception we received was most cordial. During the day we had an opportunity of beholding one of the greatest miracles of the present day, the North Yakima Valley, formerly a sage brush desert, now transformed by irrigation into a veritable paradise. A soil composed mainly of ashes brings forth fruit trees, breaking with their burden; the wheat fields, artificially watered, yielded by actual count sixty-six bushels per acre. God has guided the thoughts of man and in this manner abundantly provided all the necessities for the maintenance of life in this world. Yet our missionaries report that, in spite of all these benefits, religious life is at a low ebb, and it requires the most patient labor and effort to win the people for the church.

...the conference met and for the writer's benefit each missionary gave a detailed account of his work. From these reports it was evident that all our workers in the far west are working faithfully and diligently under many disadvantages. The life of our pioneer missionaries in the far west is of great self-sacrifice; they should be remembered in the prayers of our fellow-Christians.

...As many people from our congregations in Wisconsin and Minnesota are making their homes in our western mission fields, let us remember that by the maintenance of these mission posts we are providing spiritual food for many of our old friends and that is why the writer is in favor of maintaining these long distance missions in the future, and asks all those interested in the extension of Christ's kingdom to kindly send an occasional message of good cheer to our missionaries in the far west. May God bless them and their noble work" (152).

II. The Pacific Northwest Conference Becomes A District: 1918

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In 1918 the old Wisconsin Synod became known as the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod Of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, And Other States. Now all the missions were under the supervision of the District Mission Boards. After this merger, officials had to figure out what to do with all the missions. Lueckel writes:

"The missions in the Northwest, however, presented a problem. They could have been combined with Dakota-Montana missions of the Minnesota District. Dakota-Montana became a District Synod in 1921. It was also suggested that the western missions be assigned to the Nebraska District. The old familiar proposal was also heard again, "Turn the entire western mission field over to the Missouri Synod." While these various plans were being considered some one made the suggestion that the western missions become a District Synod. It was an astounding suggestion and the missionaries and the churches in the west will be forever grateful to him who made it and to the Joint Synod for adopting it. No doubt the fact that F. Soll was exercising a stabilizing influence in the western missions had a bearing on the adoption of that suggestion" (11).

Then on August 18-21, 1918 all the Pastors and delegates of the Pacific Northwest were invited to Grace in Yakima in order to organize their District. We read first hand about this conference from Pastor (newly elected President) Soll as he wrote about it in the newspaper *Evangelist*:

"First Convention Of The Pacific Northwest District

It was a new venture for our little conference to branch out into a real synodical district with a full set of duly elected officers and a lot of business. Though a small gathering it was an earnest gathering of pastors and delegates. All except four had come in autos and departed in autos in order to reduce railroad fares. In addition we had the pleasure of the presence and advice of our beloved President, the Rev. Mr. G. E. Bergemann of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

In three fore-noon sessions Rev. R. C. Ave-Lallemant delivered a lecture on "The spiritual condition of the Church as reflected in her outward activities."

The officers elected for two years are: President, G. H. K. Soll; 1. Vice President, Rev. R. C. Ave-Lallemant; 2. Vice President, Rev. Louis Krug; Secretary, Rev. Wm. P. Hass; Treasurer, Mr. P. J. Walk; Railroad Secretary, Rev. F. J. Eppling; Visitor, Rev. R. C. Ave-Lallemant; Chronicist, Rev. L. Krug; Local Treasurer, Mr. Gustav Dochow" (August 1918 p2).

Later on the article President Soll explains to the readers how it will be beneficial to be part of a Synod:

"It was a new experience to the ministers once to attend synod. It was more novel to some of our delegates; they studied what the real meaning of a synod is and they were well satisfied. Agreeable as it is to meet old friends and to make new ones, this is not the main purpose. An Evangelical Lutheran Synod consists of Christian people who have and publicly confess the same Scriptural faith and who accordingly work in the same love....The efficiency of a synod or conference cannot be measured by the number, wealth, social standing, influence of its members, but only by their faith and their capability of preaching faith....Vain is the boasting of those who seek comfort for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in great numbers and material pull...Our Synodical District of the Pacific Northwest must never forget the unbreakable promise of him who said, Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom!" (Aug. 1918 p3).

After the convention in Yakima the pastors went home with a sense of belonging. They were now a recognizable part of the synod and no longer could they feel that they were not being supported by the Synod. At this time the number of communicant members in the entire ^{district} synod was 447.

But just because they were now part of the Synod didn't mean that all their problems were gone. They still had the problem of having a pastor shortage. In fact by the end of 1918 the District was in a terrible position. In the December issue of the *Evangelist* Soll tells about their position by writing:

"Our district is in great distress. The delicate constitution of Rev. E. Kirst has broken down under work and worry and he has resigned. Oct. 12, Rev. W. P. Hass left for Oconomowoc, WI. Nov. 26, Rev. R. C. Ave-Lallemant left for Monticello, MN, and on the morning of Nov. 27, Rev. F. J. Eppling was called home, dying instantly of apoplexy. The congregations and missions at Kennewick, Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Clarkston-Lewiston, Palouse, Tacoma, all in Washington, and Portland, Joseph, Enterprise, Oregon, are vacant. Though calls have been sent out, there is a scarcity of pastors and students, and our Pacific Northwest District has the drawback of great distance. The camp pastor, Rev. Baur, is helping out at Tacoma, but the care of the other fields lies mainly in the hands of the undersigned" (Dec. 1918 p.2).

After this distress notice, Soll gives them some instruction and encouragement:

"First of all, you members, help us pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his harvest, for the harvest is great and the laborers are few, only four and just common human beings. Of these, Rev. L. Krug at White Bluffs has an awkward train connection and Pastors G. C. Haase and W. Lueckel are almost out of the question, not only because they are too far away, 300 miles and over to the nearest fields, but because in the winter the train service across the main range of the Cascades usually is interrupted, at times for weeks.

Have patience if services are few and far between. No field shall be given up; we are neither authorized nor inclined to do so, but be patient and do not forget that the influenza epidemic prevents proper arrangements to be made.

Meanwhile, you members, do not sit idle bemoaning the sad situation. If public services by a minister cannot be had often enough, arrange reading services....

If a minister is speedily needed for the sick and dying or for other occasions, please let me know and I shall try to come or send some of our pastors...

Keep up the household of your church, the buildings, the finances; the dues collected during a vacancy may come handy to pay off some debts, to have done necessary repairs, etc." (Dec. 1918 p.2).

Soll closes his article by encouraging them with the comfort of the Christmas season, "Lastly, remember, Christ is born, he has not come to sadden our hearts but to gladden them...Christ is born, our troubles are at end!" (Dec. 1918 p.2).

With that kind of leadership, President Soll led the PNW District into the 1920s. There was a continued pastor shortage through the 20s, but the Lord answered the prayers of the people and gradually the vacancies were filled and the overall communicant membership of the District rose.

III. The Growth Of The District: 1918-1996

Slow but steady growth was witnessed during the 1920s. Two missions were opened in Tacoma in 1925: Hope and Faith. Hope didn't survive but Faith (a daughter to St. Paul's) is still active today. In 1924 Grace in Yakima became financially independent. By the time of the District's 10 year anniversary in 1928, the number of pastors were 9 and they were serving 17 congregations. The communicant membership had increased to 628.

During the 30s the Snoqualmie Valley area proved to be fruitful and a church was organized in 1937. In 1938 members of Zion in Rainier, who previously belonged to the Ohio synod, applied for and were granted membership in the Wisconsin Synod.

During the 1940s the Wisconsin Synod began to work in the bigger cities of Seattle and Spokane. The mindset of doing mission work changed from just reaching out to the Lutherans to reaching out to all of the unchurched. As a result of this Grace in Seattle was organized. Trinity in Spokane was also organized as was a congregation in the Shadle Park area of Spokane, in the Spokane Valley, and also a congregation in south Spokane. During the 40s Grace in Yakima grew large enough to start a daughter on the west side -- Redeemer. Also near Yakima, Grace in Zillah was organized. By the end of the 40s the communicant membership of the Pacific Northwest District was at 1211, and there were 30 congregations.

The 50s were eventful years as well. By 1957 communicant membership was at 1602. The District was served by 19 pastors in 23 congregations. New congregations had been established in Edmonds, and also in Portland and Eugene Oregon.

However, during the late 50s the synod suffered a terrible blow. During the 1957 synod convention several memorials from individual members, from congregations, and from districts of the synod were presented calling for a split with the Missouri Synod. When the split did not occur many throughout our Synod were convinced that our Synod was losing its confessional stance. Among these people was the President of the Pacific Northwest District, M. J. Witt. Witt resigned from the Synod along with his congregation. Shortly after that three pastors in the Spokane area withdrew from the synod along with their congregations. The district also lost the pastor and congregation in Clarkston, WA, and Orofino, ID. Individual members throughout the District also left the Synod. The Pacific Northwest District was reported to have lost 1/3 of its members! Although the other Districts in the Synod also suffered losses, no other District in the Synod felt the effects of the losses as sharply as the Pacific Northwest District.

But by the 50th anniversary of the Pacific Northwest District in 1968, the District was back to 19 pastors and 24 congregations. The membership had risen to 1820. By 1980 there were 37 congregations with 3695 communicant members who were served by 29 pastors. Congregations had been established in Salem, Bend, and Corvallis, Oregon; and Renton, and Vancouver, Washington; Nampa Idaho; and Kelowna, British Columbia. Mission work had also begun in Alaska, and by 1980 five congregations had been established in that state.

In 1994 the Pacific Northwest District celebrated its 75th anniversary. After 75 years the District has the following numbers: 45 pastors serving 43 congregations with 4673 communicants and 6609 souls. The district has 9 Lutheran elementary schools with 33 teachers and 566 students. The District also has one Lutheran high school.

What will the future hold for the Pacific Northwest District? District President Widmann wrote these words which he read to the pastors and delegates at the 39th biennial convention in 1994:

"Will we nearly double in size during the next twenty years as we did during the last twenty? Only the Lord can answer that question, but I would like to think that the most productive part of the history of our District is still ahead of us. The power of God's pure Word is still among us in its truth and purity. The promise of God to bless the preaching of his gospel still stands firm...Our forefathers in this District have been faithful in passing along the wonderful gospel message to this generation. May that joyfully be said of us by future generations of WELS members in the Pacific Northwest District" (27).

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