

THE CHURCH GROWS UNDER THE CROSS:
MISSION EXPANSION IN THE
WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN SYNOD,
1929-1983

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1929, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) was a small church body serving primarily German immigrants with congregations in twelve states, mostly in the Midwest; the only “foreign” work was a mission on the Apache reservation in Arizona. By 1961, WELS was still only in sixteen states, but WELS missionaries were working in Japan and Central Africa. By 1983, WELS was carrying out mission work in ten foreign nations and had a presence in every state. This mission expansion occurred despite extensive crosses the synod had to bear: the burden of a substantial debt during the Depression years and other financial challenges, a world war, a shortage of pastors at varying times, and a lengthy doctrinal battle with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) that ended in the painful severing of fellowship ties in 1961. In addition, extensive building projects on the ministerial education campuses of the Wisconsin Synod and the establishment and expansion of area Lutheran high schools and Lutheran elementary schools, as well as building programs at local congregations, were also ongoing during this time period. These various challenges and obstacles contributed to internal tensions over budget priorities and synod mission policies. Some of these crosses became catalysts for mission work. By examining primary source materials, this thesis endeavors to demonstrate that WELS had to persevere under numerous heavy crosses in order to carry out a vigorous mission expansion program at home and abroad, resulting in a nationwide and worldwide confessional church body.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The church this side of heaven has always been the church militant. She has always had to struggle with outside opposition and internal conflict, challenges and hardships, as she endeavors to carry out the mission our Lord has given her. A perusal through the book of Acts and the letters of Paul give evidence of the church enduring persecution, doctrinal disputes, cultural barriers, conflicts over mission priorities and strategies, and physical and financial hardships. Yet, the church continued to carry out her mission of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. And the Lord continued to grow his church as she struggled under a variety of crosses.

The same can be seen in the history of church bodies. Even through the times of difficulties and challenges, hardship and distractions, the Lord grows his church as she carries out the mission he has given her. This can be seen in the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS or Wisconsin Synod), especially during the years of 1929-1983 when WELS went from a small, immigrant, Midwestern church body to a nationwide and even worldwide synod. Despite facing the accelerated transition to English, a debt crisis, a prolonged doctrinal battle, internal conflict over ministry priorities, and the need to build up infrastructure, WELS carried out a vigorous and energetic mission program and the Lord granted growth through these efforts.

Caricature of WELS

Over the last seventy-five years, WELS has been saddled with the caricature that it is a church body “against” everything: Scouting, military chaplaincy, unionism, open communion,

and women pastors. Much of this caricature stemmed from the twenty-five-year doctrinal controversy with its then-sister synod, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS or Missouri Synod) over some of the above issues.¹

When the Wisconsin Synod broke fellowship ties with the Missouri Synod in 1961, “dire prophecies of the time from without and within loudly proclaimed” a tragic outcome for the Wisconsin Synod.² Mark Braun notes, “There were ‘prophets of doom’ who predicted separation from the LCMS would spell the demise of the Wisconsin Synod... Fears were voiced that Wisconsin ‘in Linus-like fashion’ would take its ‘security blanket of anti-Scouting/chaplaincy/ecumenism, theological conservatism and sit in the corner sulking.’”³ For example, Dr. Ralph Gehrke, a professor at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, the WELS preseminary college, wrote to President Oscar Naumann that breaking ties with the much larger LCMS would be “...leading our church on a course which cannot but shorten the hand of

¹From 1872-1963, WELS and LCMS were members of the Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (Synodical Conference). Beginning in 1938, the Wisconsin Synod began calling attention to and then protesting new policies in the Missouri Synod regarding the acceptance of Scouting, involvement in the government’s military chaplaincy program, and especially the Missouri’s Synod’s negotiations with the old American Lutheran Church without dealing with past doctrinal disagreements with its constituent synods. Finally, the Wisconsin Synod broke fellowship ties with the Missouri Synod in 1961 and withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963. Mark Braun in his published doctoral dissertation, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003) thoroughly recounts this history. Armin Schuetze in his history of the Synodical Conference, *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 241-395, also gives a complete recounting of these events (Armin Schuetze is the author’s grandfather). A shorter treatment can also be found in Edward Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 198-208. Fredrich’s book is a well-researched and very readable history of the Wisconsin Synod. The fact that one chapter of his history is devoted to this twenty-five-year event indicates the impact it has had on the history of WELS.

²Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 198.

³Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 342.

the Lord and cripple our inner health and development for years to come.”⁴ Braun records that Richard Jungkuntz, also a professor at Northwestern, proclaimed dramatically just prior to the 1961 convention, “Brethren, it is one minute to twelve for the Wisconsin Synod.”⁵

Outside of the synod, voices like Dr. Theodore Graebner lamented what he viewed as legalistic tendencies in the Wisconsin Synod and an inability to recognize changing times and circumstances. He viewed the stance of the Wisconsin Synod as a detriment to the impact Lutheranism could have on the larger culture.⁶ Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President Edmund Reim recounted an incident where a Missouri Synod leader “referring to the difference in size between the two synods... rather condescendingly pointed out that in his opinion this was due to the fact that while Wisconsin was chiefly concerned about *conserving* the Gospel, Missouri was busy *spreading* the Gospel.”⁷ After WELS withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963, a brief article in *Time* described WELS as “the isolated synod.” “The break with Missouri leaves the nation’s fourth largest Lutheran Church as isolated as when it began... Without question,

⁴Ralph Gehrke to President Oscar J. Naumann,” 22 May 1960, box 01, folder 004, The Oscar J. Naumann Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 342. Just prior to the 1961 convention, both Gehrke and Jungkuntz left the WELS to accept teaching positions in LCMS institutions. See Joel Otto, “How the Break with the Missouri Synod Moved the Wisconsin Synod Forward in Christ,” (Presented to Manitowoc Pastor-Teacher Conference, 1 October 1999), 10, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3548/OttoBreak.pdf>.

⁶Mark Braun, “Theodore Graebner: Bellwether of Changes in the Missouri Synod,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 106, no.3 (Summer 2009): 186-216.

⁷Edmund Reim, “As We See It: A Little Strength,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 40, no. 20 (4 October 1953): 310 (emphasis in original).

Wisconsin is now the most rigidly fundamentalist of all Lutheran groups.”⁸ Reading between the lines, the question in this description is: How can a strict, isolated Lutheran church body make any headway in America?

Perhaps just as much a caricature was the Wisconsin Synod’s own self-perception in the 1930s-1950s. For much of its history, the Wisconsin Synod relied on the Missouri Synod to do mission work outside of the Midwest, especially to English speaking populations. To be sure, WELS had been working among the Apaches in Arizona since 1893.⁹ The Wisconsin Synod presence in Arizona led to worship services being conducted in places like Phoenix and Tucson as early as 1910.¹⁰ Congregations in Nebraska dated to 1866¹¹ and the Nebraska Synod had existed as a separate church body before merging with the Wisconsin Synod. The Pacific Northwest District, with congregations and preaching stations in Washington and Oregon, was established in 1918¹² and the Dakota-Montana District, with congregations and preaching

⁸“Religion: The Isolated Synod,” *Time* 23 April 1963, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,875118,00.html>.

⁹For an excellent summary of the first hundred years of the Wisconsin Synod’s mission work to the Apaches, see Theodore A. Sauer, Harold R. John, Ernst H. Wendland, eds., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People: A Century of WELS World Missions* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 22-62.

¹⁰Charles E. Found, *The Cradle and the Crucible: A History of the Forming of the Arizona-California District* (Self-published, 2003), 22-27.

¹¹Philip Zarling, ed., *Good News on the Great Plains: A History of Nebraska District Congregations* (Self-published, 2001), 152-154. St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, the first Lutheran congregation in Nebraska, was founded when a group of German Lutheran farmers immigrated to Norfolk, Nebraska, in 1866 from Ixonia, Wisconsin.

¹²The story of the founding and early development of the Pacific Northwest District is told in William Lueckel, *History of the Pacific Northwest District* (Self-published, 1968).

stations in North and South Dakota and Montana, was established in 1920.¹³ But these efforts were primarily in rural communities gathering German Lutheran immigrants.¹⁴ It supported the work of the Synodical Conference among the African-Americans in the South which had been going on since 1877, although its support was rather minimal.¹⁵ WELS was more involved with the Synodical Conference's mission work in Nigeria, beginning in 1934, especially providing manpower.¹⁶ When evaluating the state of WELS mission work as the Depression hit, it is safe to say that independent efforts, both home and "foreign,"¹⁷ were limited in scope and number. If members moved to urban areas outside of the Midwest, they were transferred to the nearest Missouri Synod congregation. WELS seemed content to let the Missouri Synod do the heavy lifting in home and world mission work.

¹³The story of the founding and early development of the Dakota-Montana District is told by Karl G. Sievert in his essay, "Preaching the Gospel on the Dakota-Montana Plains or A History of the Dakota-Montana District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod," in *Fifty Years of God's Blessings in the Dakota-Montana District, 1920-1970* (Self-published, 1970), 4-16. A committee produced this book. Their names are not mentioned.

¹⁴Exceptions would be Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona; Tacoma, Washington; and Portland, Oregon, although all of these cities were more growing towns in 1930 than booming metropolises.

¹⁵Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 72-75, 129-158.

¹⁶Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 159-177; Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People: A Century of WELS World Missions*, 117-128; Justus Kretzmann, "The Synodical Conference Begins Work in Nigeria," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (August 1972): 181-191; Henry Nau, *We Move into Africa: The Story of the Planting of the Lutheran Church in Southeastern Nigeria* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945). Wisconsin Synod pastor William Schweppe was one of the key missionary leaders in Nigeria. Norbert Reim, George Baer, Edgar Greve, William Winter and Alvin Werre were other WELS pastors who served on the Nigerian mission field during the 1940s and 1950s, while teachers E. J. Baer and R. A. Spangenberg were WELS teachers in Nigeria.

¹⁷The work on the Apache reservation has always been classified as "foreign" or "world" mission work because of the cultural and language issues.

The Wisconsin Synod saw itself as the little sister to the Missouri Synod. It was content to remain the “country cousin” to “Big MO.” It simply had not enjoyed the same numerical growth. Edmund Reim’s words in 1953 are telling. “It must be granted that compared with the impressive numbers of Missouri, of which we are constantly being reminded, we are a small body. It must be granted that even proportionately our growth is not as strong.”¹⁸ Reflecting on the synod’s identity during this timeframe, James Schaefer commented in 1976, “The Wisconsin Synod was the barely discernible shadow of the Missouri Synod.”¹⁹ Writing in 1960, a year before the break, Carleton Toppe identified the WELS disease as “small synoditis.”

Small synods can easily develop inferiority complexes. They see the grand scale on which larger church bodies carry out their projects, the impressive totals they run up, the variety and scope of their activities—and they feel like apologizing for their own efforts and achievements...

Synod members that constantly make unfavorable comparisons between the modest progress of their synod and the impressive accomplishments of a larger body, risk contracting the malady of defeatism. They are in danger of making only half-hearted efforts at furthering new undertakings; they may even lapse into a do-nothing attitude.²⁰

One would not have expected such evaluations if there were not some truth to the self-perception of many in WELS that they belonged to a small church body. In 1927, WELS consisted of 153,506 communicant members in 488 congregations and 259 preaching stations served by 494 pastors spread over twelve states but concentrated primarily in Wisconsin,

¹⁸Reim, “As We See It: A Little Strength,” 310.

¹⁹James P. Schaefer, “Stewards of the Mysteries of God in Today’s World,” presented to Arizona-California District of WELS, 22-24, June 1976, 11. <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2011/SchaeferStewards.pdf>.

²⁰Carleton Toppe, “Small Synoditis,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 47, no. 23 (6 November 1960): 355. Toppe served as president of Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, from 1957-1987.

Minnesota and Michigan.²¹ This compares to the LCMS which had 2,851 pastors serving 687,643 communicant members in 2,694 congregations and 890 preaching stations located in forty-five states and five Canadian provinces.²² By 1960, while the Wisconsin Synod's communicant membership had grown fifty-three percent since 1927 (637 pastors serving 235,073 communicant members in 829 congregations located in only sixteen states²³), it still lagged well behind the Missouri Synod's communicant membership, which had grown by 140 percent since 1927 (4,506 pastors serving 1,652,320 communicant members in 6,144 congregations located in all fifty states, six Canadian provinces and a dozen Latin American nations²⁴). In addition, the Missouri Synod had an extensive home and world mission program. The Missouri Synod's budget for missions for 1928 was nearly \$800,000.²⁵ In comparison, the

²¹*Parochialbericht der Acht Distrikte der Allgemeinen Ev.-Luth. Synode von Wisconsin u. a. Staaten für das Jahr 1927*, 64. "Communicant members" indicates teens and adults who have completed an extensive course of instruction, usually based on Luther's *Small Catechism*, and are able to receive Holy Communion. Congregations are served by a resident pastor, while preaching stations are either remote groups of people who receive pastoral service occasionally or are newly formed missions which have not progressed to formally organizing as a congregation.

²²*Statistical Year-book of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States for the Year 1927*, 168. The statistical totals also include congregations in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Mexico. The work in Argentina and Brazil was primarily among German immigrants and was substantial enough that there was an Argentina District and a Brazil District. One presumes that the work in Mexico and Cuba was established enough to warrant those congregations becoming associated with the district in the closest proximity.

²³*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1960*, 68.

²⁴*1960 Statistical Yearbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, 174.

²⁵*Statistical Year-book of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for 1927*, 196.

little Wisconsin Synod's efforts appeared minimal and meager.²⁶ Their professors did not all have doctorates. Their publications didn't always seem as "polished." They could never measure up to the "big boys."

Toppe made this diagnosis in 1960 so he could offer an encouragement.

Our Wisconsin Synod is not a large church body, but it is large enough to move forward. It is large enough to do more and greater things in the kingdom of God than it has done in the past. And, under God, it will be more likely to accomplish them if it values the talent God has supplied to it than if it sighs for the ten talents it supposed God has given to another.²⁷

It is the contention of this author that more was being done in the face of numerous challenges—under heavy crosses, if you will—than those at the time, or even later, might have acknowledged. While Toppe's encouragement that WELS was large enough "to do more and greater things in the kingdom of God" certainly proved true in the 1960s and 1970s, there is also ample evidence that WELS was endeavoring to proclaim the gospel despite some severe challenges, some heavy crosses, already before Toppe wrote his encouragement.

The Challenges Faced by WELS

²⁶The budget for the various mission programs was \$459,387 for the two-year budget cycle of 1927-1929, *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States*, 17-23 August 1927, 87. The operative word is "appeared." In reality, considering that the Wisconsin Synod was about one-fifth the size of the Missouri Synod and its mission budget was about twenty-eight percent of the Missouri Synod's budget for various mission enterprises, the Wisconsin Synod did not have anything to hang their head about.

²⁷Toppe, "Small Synoditis," 355. In the original, this entire paragraph is printed in bold.

In order to gain a greater appreciation for what the Lord accomplished as WELS labored under the cross during the middle decades of the twentieth century, an overview of the challenges faced by WELS is helpful.

Beginnings

On 26 May 1850, three German Lutheran pastors met at Salem Lutheran Church in the town of Granville, Wisconsin,²⁸ to form the beginnings of what is now the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Even though the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod, both German Lutheran church bodies, had congregations in Milwaukee, these three pastors chose to start a new fellowship. Coming from German pietistic mission houses in Basel, Erlangen, and Barmen, among others—and especially the *Langenberger Verein*, a mission society whose purpose was to reach out in North America—these three pastors were not favorable toward those pastors who wanted to be exclusively Lutheran in doctrine and practice according to the Lutheran Confessions.²⁹ They wanted the freedom to serve Reformed groups, as well as Lutheran.³⁰

²⁸What was Granville is now on Milwaukee's far northwest side. This congregation is still in existence. The author and his family are members at this church and the author's wife is a kindergarten teacher in the church's Lutheran elementary school.

²⁹Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 2-8. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 19-25.

³⁰The story of the beginnings of the Wisconsin Synod is told in Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* and Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. One example serves to illustrate the less-than-confessional leanings of the early founders of the Wisconsin Synod. In the original copy of the constitution, the section about the doctrinal position of the new synod is altered. A statement about the Lutheran Confessions is crossed out and the words, "Bible Christianity," are written in the handwriting of the first president.

While WELS had such a beginning, it soon moved toward a more confessionally Lutheran doctrinal position by refusing to accept pastors and money from the unionistic European mission societies and by carrying out doctrinal discipline within its pastoral ranks. With the guidance of several confessional pastors and the encouragement of Missouri Synod President C. F. W. Walther, the Wisconsin Synod was one of the charter church bodies in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (Synodical Conference), founded in 1872 and including the Missouri Synod as one of its key members.³¹ The constituent synods retained their identity and administration. The Synodical Conference was created as a way for the member synods to encourage each other in doctrinal matters, to provide a forum for addressing concerns between local congregations, and to give the opportunity for working together in matters of publishing and mission work. One of the first cooperative tasks was to begin mission work among the recently emancipated Blacks in the South.

Ministerial Education

One of the challenges facing the Wisconsin Synod in its earliest decades was a shortage of trained and qualified Lutheran pastors. The pastors coming from Germany often did not profess a confessional Lutheran position in doctrine and practice. This was due to the Reformed influence of the mission houses in Germany. Training for pastors in America was fraught with issues of travel, cost, and quality. In 1863, the fledgling Wisconsin Synod opened its own seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin, with a college founded in the same location two years

³¹The story of the founding of the Synodical Conference is told in Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*.

later.³² With the Minnesota Synod and the Michigan Synod merging with the Wisconsin Synod by 1917, the ministerial education system grew to include the seminary,³³ the pre-seminary college and preparatory high school in Watertown, the teacher-training college and preparatory high school in New Ulm, Minnesota, a preparatory high school in Saginaw, Michigan, and a preparatory high school in Mobridge, South Dakota.³⁴ Maintenance, expansion, and funding of these schools became and remained a high priority for WELS. The Mobridge school was established in 1928. A major building was constructed on the New Ulm campus in 1928. The new campus for the seminary was dedicated in August of 1929.

Early Mission Work

The Wisconsin Synod desired to spread the gospel. Its earliest decades were focused on gathering into congregations German Lutheran immigrants who were settling in Wisconsin from

³²For the history of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, see John Brenner and Peter Prange, *Jars of Clay: A History of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1863-2013)* (Mequon, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Press, 2013). For the history of Northwestern College, see Erwin Ernst Kowalke, *Centennial Story: Northwestern College, 1865-1965* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1965) and Carleton Toppe, *Holding the Course: Northwestern College 125* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1990). As part of the 150th anniversary celebration of ministerial education on the Watertown campus, Roger Kobleske, *Lives Prepared for Service: 1865-2015* (Self-published, 2015) has provided a recounting of ministerial education on the preparatory school level with particular emphasis on the high school level in Watertown.

³³For a brief period (1870-1878), the Wisconsin Synod's pastors were trained at the Missouri's Synod's Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. In 1878, the Wisconsin Synod reopened its seminary in Milwaukee. It moved to Wauwatosa, a suburb of Milwaukee, in 1892, and finally to its current location in Mequon, a northern suburb of Milwaukee, in 1929.

³⁴Through a series of closings, relocations and amalgamations, WELS currently operates a three-tiered, four school system: Preparatory high schools in Watertown (Luther Preparatory School) and Saginaw (Michigan Lutheran Seminary); college for pre-seminary and teacher training in New Ulm (Martin Luther College); seminary in Mequon (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary).

such regions as Pomerania, Brandenburg, Holstein, Saxony, Hanover, and Württemberg.³⁵

Through the Synodical Conference, the Wisconsin Synod was involved with the mission work in the South. There was a desire to reach out to non-Christians. In 1893, mission work was begun on the Apache reservation in Arizona.³⁶ That was the extent of “foreign” mission work until the early 1930s when the Synodical Conference began work in Nigeria.³⁷ As mentioned above, there was home mission work being done, but it tended to be centered in rural areas where German Lutheran immigrants had settled.

Language Issues

The focus on German Lutheran immigrants illustrates another challenge faced by the Wisconsin Synod as the 1920s drew to a close. German had been the primary language used in the Wisconsin Synod in the nineteenth century. Worship, catechetical instruction, elementary school instruction, and ministerial education were done almost exclusively in German. The use of German as the predominant language continued well into the twentieth century. For example, an official English language synod newspaper, or magazine, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, was not founded until 1914.³⁸ While the onset of World War I served as a catalyst to hasten the introduction of English into the Wisconsin Synod, it was still very common into the 1930s for

³⁵Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 38-39.

³⁶This work continues today.

³⁷Several Wisconsin Synod men were key missionaries (see footnote 16).

³⁸The name was changed to *Forward in Christ* in 2000, reflecting the theme of the 150th anniversary of WELS.

congregations to have at least one weekly service in German.³⁹ The education at the ministerial education schools, especially the seminary, continued to have a strong German component into the 1940s.⁴⁰

It becomes easy to see why there would be a struggle for a church body to reach out to a largely English-speaking populace when the pastors were still spending extensive time and energy perfecting their German skills. It is easy to see why the Wisconsin Synod would have concentrated its early mission efforts on communities of German immigrants. This transition to English, still ongoing in the 1930s, was another challenge the Wisconsin Synod faced as it endeavored to carry out a vigorous mission program.⁴¹

The Debt

³⁹First German Lutheran Church in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, one of the largest Wisconsin Synod congregations at the time, can perhaps serve as an example of how the language transition progressed. The first English language service was a mission festival service in 1912. Within a couple of years, it was being held twice a month. By 1922, an English service was incorporated into the Sunday morning worship schedule, although the ratio of attendance in the German services compared to the English was 7 to 1. By 1955, that ratio was reversed. A German service continued until the early 1960s, *100 Years of God's Grace, 1855-1955: First German Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Self-published, 1955), 21. This author served as a pastor at First German from 1996-2001.

⁴⁰Armin Schuetze, a 1940 graduate of the seminary, related in an interview that some of the courses were still taught in German, especially the courses taught by Professor August Pieper. Students were expected to write a German sermon and several papers also had to be written in German. Armin Schuetze, interview with the author, October 2015.

⁴¹Already in 1918-19, August Pieper, longtime professor at the seminary (professor from 1902-1941; seminary president, 1930-1937), explored this issue in his essay, "Unser Übergang ins Englische," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 15, no. 4 (October, 1918): 233-259; 16, no. 1 (January, 1919): 43-66; 16, no. 2 (April, 1919): 121-138; 16, no. 3 (July, 1919): 179-187; 16, no. 4 (October, 1919): 257-276. It is just a bit ironic that an essay exploring the transition into English was written in German and surrounded by English language articles in the *Quartalschrift*. Pieper's essay was condensed and translated by John Jeske and published as "Our Transition into English," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (Spring, 2003): 85-105.

With the onset of the Great Depression, the Wisconsin Synod soon found itself saddled with a crippling debt which reached \$750,000.⁴² While this was not a result of the seminary building project⁴³ since all funds were on hand at the time of the dedication, building projects on other campuses⁴⁴ and numerous years of deficit spending left the synod in a situation where professors' and missionaries' salaries were cut and paychecks were delayed. Few seminary graduates were assigned each year and graduates often had to wait well over a year to receive an assignment.⁴⁵ Offerings from congregations to the synod shrank because of financial crises felt in local churches. Voices were heard crying for mission expansion at home and especially

⁴²According to various websites which calculate inflation, this would be a debt of between \$13.4 and \$13.7 million. By way of comparison, the Missouri Synod, which had about five times more members than the Wisconsin Synod, had a debt of about \$1.2 million which would be the equivalent in 2015 dollars of between \$21.5 and \$22 million. To compare another way, in 1934 dollars, the Wisconsin Synod debt amounted to \$3.13 per baptized member, while the Missouri Synod debt equated to about one dollar per baptized member.

⁴³Although some authors, most recently *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language and People*, 113, place a sizable portion of the debt on the seminary building project, the reality is that the funds were entirely on hand for the seminary project before building commenced. See Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 190-191. Other synod building projects, combined with the deficit spending and the synod serving as a "bank" to loan money to congregations for their own building projects, led to the synod debt.

⁴⁴A large classroom building was constructed at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm in 1928. During the same year, Northwestern Lutheran Academy, a preparatory boarding high school, was opened in Mobridge, South Dakota.

⁴⁵Armin Schuetze related in an interview that in 1933, the year he graduated from the high school department on the New Ulm, Minnesota, campus, his brother graduated from the seminary and his sister graduated from Doctor Martin Luther College, the teacher training college in New Ulm. Neither of them received assignments immediately. This author's grandfather, Rudolf Otto, was one of twenty-six graduates from the seminary in 1934. While he did not receive an assignment immediately, by September he had accepted a call to serve in the Apache mission. See Timothy M. Otto, "A History of the Life and Ministry of Rudolf Paul Otto," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Church History Paper, 1997), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3554/OttoRPOtto.pdf>. Even by 1940, when Schuetze graduated, only three out of twenty-five graduates received assignments immediately.

abroad. Others urged caution. Either way, the debt would have to be retired before mission work could be carried forward.

Internal Conflict

During the years of the Depression, the synod debt, as noted above, caused conflict within the ranks of the synod. As will be noted later, it put a damper on mission efforts and loomed like a cloud over any proposals to expand. But the debt was not the only cause of internal conflict in WELS. A controversy broke out in 1924 that led to further internal conflict, even to the point of losing pastors, professors and congregations. This is known in WELS history as the Protes'tant Controversy.⁴⁶ It gets its name because of the protests lodged by numerous pastors, professors, and congregations over the handling of several incidents throughout the synod. The first incident occurred in March 1924, when a thievery ring was uncovered involving over twenty Northwestern College students. The faculty issued punishments, but the governing board of the college overruled the faculty. In protest, two professors immediately resigned and two more resigned in subsequent years.⁴⁷ A second incident involved two female teachers at St.

⁴⁶There have been several complete treatments of the Protes'tant Controversy. Edward Fredrich devotes an entire chapter to it in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 154-163. Fredrich also wrote, "The Protes'tant Controversy," *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 2:2 (Fall 1984):19-32. Elmer Kiessling provides many interesting details in *The History of the Western Wisconsin District* (Self-published, 1970), 11-28. Mark Jeske provides an extensive treatment in his senior church history essay, "A Half-Century of *Faith-Life*: An Analysis of the Circumstances Surrounding the Formation of the Protes'tant Conference," 1978, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2397/JeskeProtestants.pdf>. John P. Meyer, the son of long-time seminary professor Joh. P. Meyer, wrote an essay from the perspective of a personal recollection, "The Historical Background Which Led to the Formation of the Protes'tant Conference," (Presented to the Florida Pastoral Conference of the South Atlantic District, Fall 1976), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3303/MeyerConference.pdf>.

⁴⁷Kowalke devoted a chapter to this incident and the effect it had on Northwestern College in his definitive history of the college, *Centennial Story*, 180-187.

Paul's Lutheran School in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, who accused their pastor of being a false prophet because, in their opinion, he was lax in carrying out discipline and failed to preach against the ills of society. They were eventually suspended for their actions. Protests ensued in the Western Wisconsin District.⁴⁸ A seminary professor, Gerhard Ruediger, lost his teaching position because of his public support of the teachers and public protest of their suspension. A third issue surrounded a controversial essay presented by Pastor William Beitz, "God's Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith," in which he made sweeping judgments about the poor spiritual life of Wisconsin Synod congregations and criticized the preaching and seminary training of the synod's pastors.⁴⁹ The paper's controversy led the Western Wisconsin District leaders to appeal to the seminary faculty for a "Gutachten" or "official opinion" about the paper. While the seminary faculty proceeded to produce such a "Gutachten" with the signatures of the entire faculty, Professor J. P. Koehler, who was also serving as seminary president, subsequently withdrew his signature and protested the seminary's actions. He was suspended from duties in 1929 and his call was terminated in 1930.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Mark Jeske reports that the Western Wisconsin District lost almost ten percent of its pastors in the late 1920s over the various issues, "A Half-Century of *Faith-Life*," 2.

⁴⁹The Beitz essay is available on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary online essay file. <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/389/BeitzGods.pdf>.

⁵⁰"The Opinion ('*Gutachten*') of the Theological Faculty of Wauwatosa, on the Essay Entitled: "God's Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith," tr. by Otto Gruendemann, *Faith-Life* 51. no. 5 (September/October, 1978): 12-25. See also J. P. Meyer, "A Brief Review of the Pamphlet *God's Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith*," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 25, no.2 (April 1928): 135-160 and J. P. Koehler, "Beitz's Paper and the *Gutachten*," 1 August 1929, translated by Earle Treptow, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2593/KoehlerBeitz.pdf>.

The ripples of this controversy were still felt well into the 1930s. Protests continued to be heard. At the 1933 synod convention, President G. E. Bergemann was voted out of office and replaced by Pastor John W. O. Brenner. While the blame for failing to stem the loss of pastors, congregations and even missions⁵¹ cannot all be laid at the feet of President Bergemann, dissatisfaction over how matters were handled and the synod debt needed a scapegoat.⁵² The Protes'tant Controversy, as well as the mounting synod debt, were crosses born by the Wisconsin Synod as the effects of the Great Depression were being acutely felt.

Doctrinal Controversy

If these conflicts within the Wisconsin Synod were not enough, controversy broke out with the Missouri Synod which would occupy the attention of WELS for the next several decades. In 1938, the Missouri Synod began making overtures to the recently formed American Lutheran Church (ALC).⁵³ These overtures toward fellowship were made without consulting the other church bodies of the Synodical Conference. This led to twenty-five years of doctrinal debate and discussion leading to the Wisconsin Synod terminating fellowship with the Missouri

⁵¹ An example would be the loss of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Theophil Uetzmann, a 1924 seminary graduate, was assigned to serve as an assistant pastor at First German Lutheran Church in Manitowoc and start the new mission congregation on the north side of Manitowoc. He was one of the "protesters" and in 1927 led Immanuel out of the Wisconsin Synod. When he retired in 1967, he urged the congregation to get a Wisconsin Synod pastor and rejoin the synod. See *Northward in Christ: A History of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1917-2000* (Self-published, 2000), 226.

⁵² This was the only time in Wisconsin Synod history when a synod president was voted out of office. Edward Fredrich provides a succinct analysis of what led to Bergemann's ouster in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 186-188.

⁵³ The ALC was a 1930 merger of the Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio Synods.

Synod in 1961 and withdrawing from the Synodical Conference in 1963. The issue was the biblical doctrine of church fellowship.⁵⁴ The Wisconsin Synod's stance was (and remains) that unity in doctrine is necessary before any kind of joint expressions of fellowship should take place. The Missouri Synod contended that if there was partial agreement, then there could be some expressions of fellowship; the more agreement, the more fellowship.⁵⁵ The Wisconsin Synod suffered internal strife during these discussions. Some pastors felt that a termination of fellowship should have occurred as early as 1953. As the 1950s wore on, these voices grew in number and volume. By the late 1950s, numerous pastors, teachers and congregations withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod. Some congregations suffered splits.⁵⁶ On the other hand, there were others encouraging more patience and more time. Several congregations, pastors, and teachers left the Wisconsin Synod to join the LCMS.⁵⁷ In other words, there was a great deal of tension within the ranks of the Wisconsin Synod.

The result of the break of fellowship was that the Wisconsin Synod withdrew from the work in Nigeria in 1963. In addition, the Wisconsin Synod's presence in the United States was

⁵⁴For a fuller Wisconsin Synod perspective of the doctrine of church fellowship, see Curtis Jahn, editor, *Essays on Church Fellowship* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996).

⁵⁵The account of the break with the Missouri Synod is the subject of Mark Braun's doctoral dissertation, *Tale of Two Synods*. He provides the fullest treatment, although Schuetze and Fredrich also give considerable space to the events and results.

⁵⁶In 1960, many of these congregations, pastors and teachers formed the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). This church body remains in existence. As of this writing WELS and the CLC are engaged in doctrinal discussions.

⁵⁷This went both ways. Several LCMS congregations, including the mission congregation in Antigua, joined WELS.

primarily limited to the Midwest. Since the Missouri Synod was about six times larger than the Wisconsin Synod and had congregations in every state, when Wisconsin Synod members moved outside of the Midwest, they could be transferred to those Missouri Synod congregations. As the breach widened and Wisconsin Synod leadership recognized the inevitability of a break, the question was repeatedly raised: In an increasingly mobile society, how are we going to serve Wisconsin Synod members who move outside of the Midwest since we no longer have the option of transferring them to a Missouri Synod congregation? Since areas outside of the Midwest are growing rapidly, isn't it about time the Wisconsin Synod carried out mission work in these rapidly growing communities? And since we are making a stand that the Missouri Synod has drifted from its earlier confessional roots, might we be the needed voice of confessional Lutheranism throughout the nation and the world?

Ministerial Education Concerns

The debt, the Depression, and the outbreak of war prevented any building projects and limited maintenance on the ministerial education school campuses for two decades. In addition, the need for more pastors and teachers was becoming increasingly evident. Elementary schools were bursting at the seams and more congregations were opening Lutheran elementary schools. The 1950s saw the opening of five new area Lutheran high schools throughout the Wisconsin

Synod.⁵⁸ Eleven more were opened during the 1970s.⁵⁹ These educational endeavors not only required more teachers (some of whom were pastors), they also required monetary resources from the congregations in the areas where they were started, as well as time and energy.

If mission work was to expand, more pastors would be needed. In order to accommodate more students, as well as address the maintenance concerns on the campuses, aggressive building projects would be necessary. Obviously, such extensive capital projects would be costly. To serve more students, enlarged faculties would be required.

Conclusion

A crippling debt. Language issues. Internal strife. Doctrinal controversy. Capital expenditures. Where does all of this leave mission work? Could a church body find the financial resources, the energy and the focus to carry out an expanding mission program at home and abroad? Would the dispute with the Missouri Synod cause the Wisconsin Synod to dissolve?

⁵⁸ An area Lutheran high school is supported by a federation of congregations in a particular region. Prior to the 1950s, there were area Lutheran high schools in Milwaukee (Wisconsin Lutheran High School) and Fond du Lac, Wisconsin (Winnebago Lutheran Academy). During the 1950s new area Lutheran high schools opened in St. Paul, Minnesota (St. Croix Lutheran High School), and Manitowoc (Manitowoc Lutheran High School), Appleton (Fox Valley Lutheran High School), Lake Mills, located about twenty miles east of Madison (Lakeside Lutheran High School), and Onalaska, Wisconsin, near La Crosse (Luther High School). Currently, there are twenty-six WELS area Lutheran high schools serving over 5,600 students in eleven different states.

⁵⁹ The following area Lutheran high schools were opened during the 1970s: Michigan Lutheran High School (St. Joseph, Michigan); Shoreland Lutheran High School (Somers, Wisconsin, between Racine and Kenosha); Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School (Jackson, Wisconsin, northwest of Milwaukee); Huron Valley Lutheran High School (Westland, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit); California Lutheran High School (originally in Garden Grove, California; now located in Wildomar, in southern Riverside County); Arizona Lutheran Academy (Phoenix); Evergreen Lutheran High School (originally in Kent, Washington; now located in Tacoma); Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School (New Ulm, Minnesota); Nebraska Lutheran High School (Waco, Nebraska); Northland Lutheran High School (Wausau, Wisconsin); West Lutheran High School (originally in Hopkins, Minnesota; now located in Plymouth, a northwestern suburb of Minneapolis).

Would the break with the Missouri Synod cause the little Wisconsin Synod to go into its shell and slowly die? By 1945, the debt was retired and there was a surplus. A mission team was dispatched to Africa in 1949 to find a suitable mission field. Missionaries were on the ground in Japan in 1951 and Africa in 1953. Beginning in the 1940s and accelerating in the 1960s and 1970s, home missions were started across America. Today, the WELS has congregations in virtually every state and is involved in some form of mission work in over twenty foreign nations.

The stories of WELS mission efforts in various locations have been told in district histories,⁶⁰ numerous essays and articles by people involved in mission work, and countless church history papers by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary seniors.⁶¹ Edward Fredrich's book on the history of the Wisconsin Synod recounts in broad strokes the entire history of mission work

⁶⁰WELS is divided into twelve geographical districts: Arizona-California, Dakota-Montana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Atlantic, Northern Wisconsin, Pacific Northwest, South Atlantic, South Central, Southeastern Wisconsin, and Western Wisconsin. While the three Wisconsin districts are the smallest geographically, they are the largest in terms of membership and number of congregations. Each district has a district president. The twelve district presidents, together with the synod president and two synod vice presidents comprise the Conference of Presidents which is tasked with the oversight of doctrine and practice, the support and funding of the synod's work, the calling of pastors and teachers, and the placements of graduates. Many of the districts have written histories of the development and growth of their districts, often in the context of district anniversaries.

⁶¹Until 2011, every senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary had to write a church history paper on an original topic. Most of these covered various areas of history, either congregations, pastors or professors, in the Wisconsin Synod. All of them can be found on the online essay file on the website of the seminary (<http://www.wls.wels.net/resources/essay-files/>). This assignment has since been replaced by a broader and more extensive thesis assignment which the seniors are required to complete as part of graduation requirements.

in WELS, especially tracking expansion and growth,⁶² while a variety of authors contributed to a book focusing especially on world missions.⁶³

This thesis intends to add to the historiography by focusing on the decades when the Wisconsin Synod was transformed from a small, Midwestern Lutheran church body to a worldwide Lutheran church body known for its confessional stance. 1929 was the year when the new campus at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was completed and the Great Depression hit the nation with the subsequent crippling debt for the synod. 1983 marks the end date for this study because that is the year that WELS had a congregation in every state and the last two districts were formed: North Atlantic and South Central. It will endeavor to look at more specifics, especially in the area of home missions, than the broader view offered by Fredrich. It is especially the intention of this thesis to tell this story in the context of the numerous events, issues, and challenges which the Wisconsin Synod faced during these crucial decades. In many ways, these events, issues, and challenges were crosses that the Wisconsin Synod bore as it strove to carry out the Great Commission.⁶⁴ But they were crosses which served to help the

⁶²Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*.

⁶³Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People*.

⁶⁴This author is using a definition for the Christian's cross that is broader than persecution or ridicule for the sake of the faith, although that is an important part of the immediate context of Jesus' words in Matthew 16:13-28, Mark 8:27-38, and Luke 9:18-27, where he urges Christians to "deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow me." However, the essence of the Christian's cross is self-denial and the internal struggle that accompanies self-denial and forces the Christian to realize that their only hope and comfort is in the cross of Christ and his Word and sacraments where the blessings of Christ's cross are distributed and received. In a way, therefore, the definition of the cross of the Christian—whether individually or collectively as a church—becomes whatever causes the Christian or the church to struggle to follow Jesus and his will. Daniel M. Deutschlander expounds on this in his book, *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections on His Cross and Ours* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008). He devotes an entire chapter to the special crosses of pastors and the visible church (195-222), which is especially applicable to the topic of this thesis.

Wisconsin Synod understand its identity and place in the larger Christian world. In so doing, I intend to give an answer to those who characterize WELS as a church body turned in on itself and only concerned about preserving pure doctrine and not about sharing the gospel of Jesus. It is the prayer of the author that a telling of this segment of church history in this context will also serve to inspire a new generation to see how the Lord continues to grow his church under the cross as WELS bears new crosses in its efforts to continue carrying out mission work in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

HOME MISSION EXPANSION IN THE 1930s-1940s

The fall of 1929 was a conflicted time for the Wisconsin Synod. On the one hand, Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota, had been operating for a year and the enrollment stood at twenty-two, up from sixteen at the close of the school's first year.⁶⁵ The new seminary campus in Thiensville (Mequon), Wisconsin, had been dedicated on 18 August 1929, with an estimated attendance of 15,000 people at the dedication services.⁶⁶ Enrollment reached an historical peak of sixty-seven, up from fifty-three in 1928-29.⁶⁷ The Apache mission field was served by experienced and gifted men. On the other hand, the Protestant Controversy was still causing division within the synodical ranks and the seminary president, J. P. Koehler, was spending the school year on a mandated one year leave of absence.⁶⁸ The synod debt stood at just over \$650,000 and was casting a pall over the prospects of growth, although the 1929

⁶⁵Hans Johannsen, "Like a Tree Planted by the River of Waters," ed. Wayne TenBroek, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 11, no. 2 (October 1993):13.

⁶⁶Brenner and Prange, *Jars of Clay*, 164. There are wide angle photos from the dedication day showing the crowds seated on benches on the hillside with the newly built seminary looming at the top of the hill. The Wisconsin Synod congregations in the Milwaukee area were encouraged to cancel their Sunday morning services to enable their members to attend the dedication services.

⁶⁷Brenner and Prange, *Jars of Clay*, 309.

⁶⁸The convention received writings from Koehler on the one side and Pieper and Meyer on the other, demonstrating a clear split on the seminary faculty. A "Special Committee" of the convention brought a resolution with a plan for resolving the controversy. That Koehler's call was terminated in 1930 and the controversy continued to drag on is evidence that the controversy continued to occupy the time and energy of the synod. *Proceedings of the Twentieth Biennial Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 14-21 August 1929, 20-23.

synod convention approved a budget of \$1,150,000 for the next biennium; \$440,788 was for the various mission endeavors of the synod.⁶⁹ The Wisconsin Synod, despite the various crosses it was bearing, appeared determined to carry out a vigorous mission program. The ability to put that determination into action was greatly hindered by the stock market crash in October 1929, and the downward economic spiral of the Great Depression. Yet, the synod expended a great deal of effort in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the area of home missions, to expand the synod's mission efforts.

A Cross: Dealing with the Depression and the Debt

There is no question that the debt was a real problem, even before the stock market crash. A church body does not accumulate a debt of over \$650,000 overnight. The Wisconsin Synod had long been saddled with a problem of inadequate funding for its ongoing work. Although special collections often helped alleviate crises and assisted with special projects (like the new seminary), as the 1920s wore on, the debt slowly increased. Collections for building projects fell short of what was needed. A letter from President John W. O. Brenner to Professor E. E. Kowalke, president of Northwestern College and chairman of the synod's Debt Retirement Committee, dated 28 February 1937, breaks the debt down in approximate numbers. \$300,000 came from building projects in New Ulm, Saginaw, Mobridge, and in Arizona (presumably on the Apache reservation). Budgetary deficits up to 1933, especially interest on the debt, amounted

⁶⁹*Proceedings of 1929 Convention*, 54.

to \$170,000. An additional \$170,000 was borrowed for the Church Extension Fund to help congregations fund their own building projects.⁷⁰

Proposals for necessary building projects on campuses and additional mission work were met with cries that the synod debt needed to take precedence. The pall this cast over the synod's efforts at mission work can be seen in the General Mission Board's report to the 1933 synod convention.

The resolution adopted by Synod several years ago, and still in active force, to the effect that no new stations causing Synod additional expense, and the heavy cuts of the sums allowed by Synod's adopted budget speak for themselves and largely explain the lack of progress in some of the branches in our work the past two years. In all fields saving and retrenching were forced to be observed to the degree that it should be apparent to every member of Synod that in the one great work the Lord has entrusted us to perform, *the work of missions*, we are practically standing still. This in the face of the fact that everywhere the fields are ripened and ready to be harvested.⁷¹

The zeal and desire to carry out mission work was evident. But the debt was holding the synod back. The budget had been slashed. Four years after the synod had adopted a budget of over \$1.1 million, it now stood at \$410,321 with only \$158,914 devoted to missions (compared with over \$440,000 in 1929).⁷² Clearly, the debt and the depressed economy were taking its toll.

⁷⁰John W. O. Brenner to E. E. Kowalke, 28 February 1937, box 04, folder 145, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

⁷¹*Report of the Twenty-second Meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 2-9 August 1933, 57. The General Mission Board was tasked with overseeing all the synod's mission work. The Board consisted of a pastor and layman from each of the eight districts of the synod (*Constitution of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, Article X, Sec. 1, 1933). In the 1950s, the General Mission Board was split into the General Board for Home Missions and the General Board for World Missions.

⁷²*Report of 1933 Convention*, 139.

Salaries for professors and missionaries were cut. New mission openings were curtailed. The Apache mission was operating with a third of what had been budgeted only four years earlier.

This financial cross is apparent in the minutes of the General Mission Board. Among the reports at meetings in 1933, St. Luke's congregation in Kenosha, Wisconsin, was facing a debt of \$51,000, while the Mount Lebanon mission in Milwaukee had to repay immediately a bank note of \$1,755 or the bank would seize the property of their school. Both were requesting help from the synod.⁷³ The representative from Michigan reported that the state was being hit by bank failures, while crop failures in Nebraska were affecting the Rosebud, Herrick, and several other mission fields.⁷⁴ Writing nearly forty years later, Professor Karl Sievert recalled the devastating effects of the Great Depression and the synod's debt.

The economy of the land had reached a low state indeed. The products of the fields that still grew had no price. In fact, the price of grain had taken a major tumble even before the drought had hit. For lack of money to buy fuel, many a farmer burned corn instead.

One can well imagine what effects these conditions had on our churches. It was not unusual to go to church in overalls. Children had perhaps two dresses or two pants at most... A number of self-supporting congregations were forced to apply for financial aid to the General Mission Board. And more than one congregation lost numbers of communicants, who were forced to leave, when they lost their farms and other possessions. Nevertheless, it was during these years that our people joined with fellow-Christians in other districts to help pay Synod's huge debt. And the pastors and other workers in the church fared no better than their people. The General Synod was forced by

⁷³Minutes of the General Mission Board, 29-30 May 1933, 102-103, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives. Minutes from the General Mission Board meetings from 1919-1946 are bound in one volume and the pages are numbered consecutively.

⁷⁴Minutes of the General Mission Board, 23-24 October 1933, 105, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

the economic conditions of the land to cut salaries severely, and then it was often late in coming.⁷⁵

Early efforts were made in the Michigan District to tackle the debt. Beginning in 1931, Edgar Hoenecke, pastor of St. Peter's in Plymouth, Michigan, and later a member of the General Mission Board, was producing periodic "bulletins" which were sent to the pastors of the Southeastern Conference of the Michigan District and any others who requested them. In 1932, the entire Michigan District began receiving them and at the 1933 convention the entire synod adopted "the Michigan Plan."⁷⁶ These "bulletins" were usually two-sided, four-column productions on over-sized paper. They often included photos, graphs, and charts, as well as informative and motivational articles regarding the synod's work and the debt.⁷⁷ From letters between Hoenecke and Synod President Brenner in 1934, one gets a picture of what was included in these "bulletins:" explanations of the origins of the debt; the hindrance the debt was placing on the synod's efforts to expand mission work; suggestions for a solution for the debt;

⁷⁵Sievert, "Preaching the Gospel on the Dakota-Montana Prairies," 11. Sievert served as professor and president at Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota, from 1928-1979.

⁷⁶*Report of 1933 Convention*, 91-93.

⁷⁷In the chapter on this era in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, Fredrich laments that there is no full collection of these "bulletins" available (note 14, 288). However, in a letter written toward the end of his life, Edgar Hoenecke says that he has all but one in his files (Edgar Hoenecke to Marcus Manthey, 12-25 July 2000, supplemental folder, Edgar Hoenecke biographical file, WELS Synod Archives). As of this writing, that file has not been found. Two bulletins, numbered "One" and "Two," have been discovered in a file that had been assembled by Pastor David Rossin in the 1930s. These are dated December 1933, and January 1934, when Hoenecke began producing the "bulletins" for the entire synod. There are some individual "bulletins" in the Brenner collection from 1935-1939, box 04, folders 145-146, WELS Synod Archives. The September 1935 "bulletin" is numbered "22" and the February 1939 "bulletin" is numbered "32." That gives some indication how frequently they were produced. More recently, as the WELS Synod Archives were being relocated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, a folder was discovered with several additional "bulletins."

descriptions of the synod's work; scriptural articles encouraging Christian giving.⁷⁸ Hoenecke had reproduced some of the charts and graphs on to poster-sized paper for use in presentations he was making to local Michigan District congregations.⁷⁹

The suggestions for a solution were a sticking point prior to the 1935 synod convention. The synod budget for the 1933-35 biennium called for annual payments of \$25,000. This covered the interest on the debt. Hoenecke wanted to urge a larger collection that would put a dent in the principal, while Brenner said that such a suggestion went beyond the scope of what the synod had resolved to do. A special emphasis would be appropriate to raise the \$25,000 that the synod failed to pay in the first year of the biennium, but anything further would have to wait.⁸⁰ Hoenecke was clearly frustrated by this seemingly conservative approach. He felt this was just adding to the problem.⁸¹ It is clear, however, from the extensive correspondence between President Brenner and Pastor Hoenecke, that Hoenecke was endeavoring to carry out his work under the auspices of synodical leadership.

⁷⁸Edgar Hoenecks to John W. O. Brenner, 8 August 1934, box 04, folder 147a, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives. This letter also included on the back of one of the pages a handwritten chart depicting "The Story of Supply and Demand or The Evolution of the Debt."

⁷⁹Edgar Hoenecks to John W. O. Brenner, 3 September 1934, box 04, folder 147a, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

⁸⁰John W. O. Brenner to Edgar Hoenecks, 6 September 1934, box 04, folder 147a, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

⁸¹Hoenecke to Brenner, 3 September 1934.

At the 1935 convention, Brenner's first convention as president, the debt loomed over the synod's work. In the opening remarks of his president's report, he summarized the reality that the debt was hindering the work of the synod.

If we had submitted ourselves wholly to the mighty working of His Spirit, our joy would be greater. We would then not have so many candidates standing idle in the marketplace. New mission fields could have been opened. It would have been possible to restore the cuts in salaries, enabling the men in the direct service of our Synod to do their work with greater joy without suffering hardships and incurring debts. And our synodical indebtedness could have been materially reduced.⁸²

His report noted thirty-two pastoral candidates without a call, including some who had graduated in 1932.⁸³ Yet, Brenner also remarked that the debt had not grown, and interest payments had been made. He credited Hoenecke's "Michigan Plan" for this success. He then said:

Our task as a Church demands that we restore the cuts in salaries and expand our missionary endeavors. The interest on our debt annually consumes a large sum which could well be used in placing our candidates. In this connection, I call attention to a Memorial by Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, in which we are called upon to lean with greater faith and confidence upon the promises of God, which cannot be without effect.⁸⁴

The "Memorial" by Hoenecke was apparently his report on how the "Michigan Plan" had been doing over the previous two years. It had distributed almost 694,000 "bulletins" and over 2,500 "placards," presumably the poster-sized versions of the bulletins suitable for displaying in

⁸²*Proceedings of the Twenty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 7-13 August 1935, 8.*

⁸³*Proceedings of the 1935 Convention, 10.*

⁸⁴*Proceedings of the 1935 Convention, 10.*

a church or for presentations. He then called for this work to continue.⁸⁵ A resolution was passed “that an earnest, concerted, co-operative effort be made during this biennium, to raise a sum sufficient to cover our present indebtedness,” even giving the suggestions that individuals commit to \$100 or more to help liquidate the debt over the next two years and that a three-man committee be formed to organize the effort.⁸⁶ Northwestern College President E. E. Kowalke was appointed to chair the committee and Hoenecke continued to assemble the material for the “bulletins.” While the debt was not liquidated in two years, the committee worked for the next ten years until the debt was paid off in 1945.

*Mission Efforts in the “Heartland” States during
the Depression and World War II*

The rationale for this resolution shows that the debt was a cross for the synod’s mission endeavors.

WHEREAS, the indebtedness of our Synod has for years, and has again this year, proved itself to be the one great obstacle that enters the consideration and final disposition of every synodical project as a deterring and determining factor; and

WHEREAS, the mere thought of said indebtedness has curtailed and is even now actually hampering the work of our Synod in all of its departments, particularly the one

⁸⁵*Proceedings of the 1935 Convention*, 97-99. I say “apparently” because there is nothing else attached to his name in the *Proceedings*.

⁸⁶*Proceedings of the 1935 Convention*, 106-107. In several places, including Fredrich’s *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 191-193, Hoenecke explains the drama at the end of the convention, that he stood up and made a motion to liquidate the debt. Brenner called him out of order. But a respected layman from New Ulm, Frank Retzlaff, who was at the back of the auditorium with his hat in hand, seconded the motion. The vote had to be called and it passed with a large majority. However, Frank Retzlaff is not listed among the voting delegates to the 1935 convention. Hoenecke mentions that he was a member of the Board of Trustees. But he is not listed as an advisory delegate of the Board of Trustees. The names of E. Benjamin Schlueter and John Witt, the 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents of the synods, appear as the members of the committee that brought the resolution. It is possible that Hoenecke made the motion, it passed, and Brenner appointed his two vice presidents to formulate the proper wording for the resolution. But the fact that Retzlaff’s name is not listed among the convention delegates is a conundrum.

great work of the Church of God here on earth—the work on the field of missionary endeavor.⁸⁷

Despite the debt “hampering” mission endeavors during the years of the Depression and World War II, missionary work continued, especially in the “Heartland” states of the synod: Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. The minutes of the General Mission Board, reports of the district mission boards, and congregational histories give evidence of these efforts in the face of financial obstacles.

During the 1920s, the Milwaukee metro area was expanding to the north and west, and the western suburbs were growing. The cities of Racine and Kenosha were also experiencing population growth. Numerous mission efforts were begun during the decade of the 1920s: Atonement, Mount Lebanon, and Garden Homes on the north side of Milwaukee; Fairview on the west side; Woodlawn and Good Shepherd’s in West Allis, a Milwaukee suburb; Epiphany in Racine and Bethany in Kenosha. When the Depression hit, all these missions had newly constructed church buildings, schools, and a parsonage, not to mention the salaries of the pastors and often more than one teacher. The debt of these individual missions was sizable. For example, at the end of 1936, Atonement’s debt was nearly \$32,000. Mount Lebanon carried a debt of over \$28,000. Epiphany had a debt of almost \$30,000.⁸⁸ The newly-established congregations’ ability even to pay the interest on these debts was challenging. In many cases, much of the debt was

⁸⁷*Proceedings of the 1935 Convention*, 106. While Schlueter and Witt may have their names attached to this resolution, the language is that of Hoenecke.

⁸⁸Southeast Wisconsin District Mission Board Report, December 1936, box 13, folder 475, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

owed to the synod's Church Extension Fund.⁸⁹ Because repayment to the Church Extension Fund was slow, money was not available for other missions. Mention of the debt load of these missions was always in front of the General Mission Board.⁹⁰

Despite the financial challenges, mission work was faithfully carried out. The Lord blessed several of these mission with remarkable growth. At the end of 1936, for example, Atonement reported 250 communicant members and fifty students in the school.⁹¹ This is only seven years after the founding of this mission. Two years later, Atonement had grown to 352 communicants and the school was booming—up to 133 students.⁹² While the growth in some other missions was not quite as striking, it was still noteworthy over the same two years: Mount Lebanon from 170 to 200 communicants; Fairview from 390 to 415; Epiphany from 265 to 315; Woodlawn from 152 to 200; Bethany from 254 to 295. In 1933, the General Mission Board heard the report that Garden Homes was “growing rapidly. An increase also of pupils attending

⁸⁹The purpose of the Church Extension Fund was to loan money to mission congregations at a lower interest rate for the purchase of land and the construction of parsonages, church buildings, and schools.

⁹⁰For example, Minutes of General Mission Board, 22-23 May 1939, 139, box 01, folder 110, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁹¹Southeast Wisconsin District Mission Board Report, December 1936.

⁹²Southeast Wisconsin District Mission Board Report, December 1938, box 13, folder 475, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

day school of Garden Homes.”⁹³ At the end of 1936, Garden Homes reported 262 communicant members.⁹⁴ By 1938, it was a self-supporting congregation.⁹⁵

Milwaukee wasn't the only metropolitan area where mission work was going on. Detroit was exploding in population during the 1910s and 1920s.⁹⁶ Recognizing this, the Michigan District Board started numerous missions in Detroit during this timeframe: Zion in 1913; Our Savior in 1920; Ascension in 1921; Mount Olive in 1927; and Hope in 1930. In addition, in 1940, a group broke off from a congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod over an internal conflict and founded Paul the Apostle in Detroit which became a Wisconsin Synod congregation. Zion quickly became a dual parish⁹⁷ with an already-established Wisconsin Synod congregation. In addition, missions had been started in Lansing and Flint during the 1920s: Zion in Lansing in 1922 and Emanuel and Grace in Flint in 1921 and 1929.⁹⁸

⁹³Minutes of the General Mission Board, 23-24 October 1933, 106.

⁹⁴Southeast Wisconsin District Mission Board Report, December 1936.

⁹⁵“Self-supporting” means that a congregation no longer receives any kind of subsidy from the synod’s budget. It is responsible for its own financial support. This also means that it is no longer overseen by the mission board.

⁹⁶Detroit more than tripled in population from 1910-1930, growing from 465,766 to over 1.5 million people, “Detroit History,” www.historydetroit.com.

⁹⁷“Dual parish” is the designation for a situation where two congregations are served by one pastor. This is usually done when at least one of the congregations is too small to support its own pastor.

⁹⁸Lansing saw its population more than double from 1910 to 1930, from just over 31,000 to just over 78,000 people, “World Population Review, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/lansing-population/>. Flint’s population quadrupled during the same timeframe, from 38,500 to over 156,000, “World Population Review,” <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/flint-mi-population/>.

While Emanuel in Flint was blessed with phenomenal growth in its early years,⁹⁹ most of the efforts in these growing Michigan cities enjoyed slow but steady growth throughout the first half of the 1930s. In 1937, the Michigan District Mission Board reported that Our Savior's in Detroit had 106 communicants, Ascension had 143 communicant members, Zion in Lansing stood at eight-six communicants, Mount Olive in Detroit numbered eighty communicants, and Hope in Detroit and Grace in Flint, the two newest mission starts, both had ninety-eight communicants.¹⁰⁰ Sunday school was a key mission strategy in a number of these large city missions. In the statistical reports during the 1930s, there was a column entitled "S. S. and Christenlehre."¹⁰¹ This was a Sunday morning educational hour for both children (Sunday school) and adults. In 1938, the Hope mission reported an average of 205 attending this education hour, while Mount Olive averaged 135 and Grace averaged 120. That same year, Hope had twenty-nine children baptisms, eleven adult confirmations, and two adult baptisms.¹⁰² Those numbers, especially the high number of children baptisms, would seem to indicate that the

⁹⁹By 1927, Emanuel already had 242 communicant members. It was no longer considered a synod-supported mission in 1937, but it still carried debt with the Church Extension Fund, Michigan District Mission Board Report, May 1937, box 10, folder 383, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁰⁰Michigan District Mission Board Report, May 1937.

¹⁰¹"Christenlehre" literally means "Christian teaching" or "Christian instruction."

¹⁰²*Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1938* 10. An "adult confirmation" is an adult who has joined the congregation after an extensive instruction course, usually twelve to twenty-four lessons. This is an indication of new members through evangelism. Children are usually confirmed at the end of 8th grade after receiving one to three years of instruction based on Luther's *Small Catechism*. When someone is confirmed, they become a "communicant" member and can receive the Lord's Supper.

Sunday school was drawing children and families into the congregation. Certainly, the rapid growth of these Michigan cities in the previous decades contributed to a large audience for these new missions. But it is clear that these congregations were especially targeting the children of the neighborhood and their families in their outreach efforts.

Over the next decade, these congregations enjoyed even more growth as a result of their mission efforts. By 1948, Ascension had grown to 170 communicants and Our Savior's stood at 204. Zion had one hundred communicants and Grace was up to 167 communicant members. Hope and Mount Olive more than doubled to 170 and 208 communicant members, respectively.¹⁰³ This group of six congregations reported sixty-one adult confirmations and eighteen adult baptisms. Perhaps most significant is that all but one of these six congregations were independent from synod support.

Mission efforts in Milwaukee and the growing urban areas of Michigan are mentioned to highlight the fact that the synod was seeking to sustain mission work in areas where the population was expanding, even as the source of funding was shrinking. The other major urban area in these three states, the Twin Cities, did not receive as much mission attention as Detroit and Milwaukee. The population growth of Minneapolis and St. Paul wasn't as stunning as Detroit's. In addition, there were already several well-established congregations in the Twin Cities. Pilgrim was a Minneapolis mission started in 1923. By 1934, it had 240 communicants and was already self-supporting. Two missions were started in St. Paul in the 1920s: Mount

¹⁰³*Statistical Report of The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1947-1948*, 4.

Olive in 1921 and St. James in 1928. Mount Olive stood at 215 communicants in 1934, while St. James numbered 290 communicants.¹⁰⁴

Much of the other mission work in these “Heartland” states was done in medium-sized cities and small, rural communities which were scattered throughout Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. The Northern Wisconsin District is a perfect example. In 1937, the district mission board reported that thirteen mission pastors were working in twenty-one locations. All these locations were small towns in northeastern Wisconsin or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.¹⁰⁵ It was reported that one mission pastor, C. Henning Jr., was conducting services at a C. C. C. camp with an average attendance of one hundred people. President Roosevelt’s “New Deal” was offering mission opportunities. The board report also noted the challenges of how a congregation is to construct a building when no funds are available from the Church Extension Fund. Other financial matters were mentioned in the report. Two congregations reduced the amount they received from the synod. The mission pastors were receiving the salary code set up by the synod (which was still at a reduced level). The debt load was reported. However, despite these financial challenges, the district mission board reported that two missionaries and four new mission locations had been started during 1937 and among the various mission stations there had been forty-two adult confirmations and nine adult baptisms.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴*Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1934*, 14-17.

¹⁰⁵North Wisconsin District Mission Board Report, May 1937, box 12, folder 434, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁰⁶North Wisconsin District Mission Board Report, May 1938, box 12, folder 434, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

The report from the district mission board of the Western Wisconsin District to the General Mission Board is a good illustration of what was generally going on in the mission endeavors of these “Heartland” states.

Marshfield has become self-supporting. Has not been paying back regularly on Church Extension loan. Madison [Eastside Lutheran], change in pastors. Is growing. Has school and a large Sunday School. La Crosse [Mount Calvary Lutheran] is growing rapidly. Doing its full share for the work of the Synod. Candidates have been called to Rice Lake, to Bruce, to Mercer. Eventually to call a new man to Prentice-Tripoli-Spirit. Oconomowoc is growing, pastor teaches school. Goodrich also growing.¹⁰⁷

This district report summarizes several realities of the time. Growth was occurring as the result of the mission efforts. There were challenges financially. Efforts were being made to place pastoral candidates.

Mission Efforts Outside the “Heartland” States

The mission efforts outside of the “Heartland” states were similar. There was a desire to work in some bigger cities (like Seattle, Tacoma, Denver, and Phoenix), but the vast majority of the work was done in the smaller towns and rural communities of the Dakotas, Montana, Washington, Nebraska, Arizona, and Colorado. For example, in 1937, the Nebraska District Mission Board detailed nineteen missionaries serving thirty-four communities in Nebraska, Iowa, Colorado, and South Dakota.¹⁰⁸ In 1938 the Dakota-Montana District Mission Board

¹⁰⁷Minutes of the General Mission Board, 20-21 May 1935, 117, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives. Madison (population of about 60,000) and La Crosse (about 40,000) were medium-sized cities. Marshfield (about 9,000) and Rice Lake (about 5,500) were small cities. Oconomowoc (about 4,300) was a growing community between Milwaukee and Watertown. The remainder were small communities in northern Wisconsin or Upper Michigan.

¹⁰⁸Nebraska District Mission Board Report, May 1937, box 11, folder 410, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

reported twenty-five missionaries serving fifty-six stations in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana.¹⁰⁹ With only a few exceptions, every missionary in these two districts was serving two—and several were serving three—different small communities.

The missionaries in these two districts faced numerous hardships in the Depression years. Travel, of course, was a challenge between several different fields. Requests were often heard for financial assistance to purchase automobiles and to buy gas. Sometimes, the distance between locations served by a single missionary exceeded one hundred miles. Crops were damaged by drought and grasshopper plagues. Congregations lost members who were forced to move to find work. Yet, the Dakota-Montana District Mission Board reported an increase of 179 communicants among its various mission outposts in 1937, a growth of over eight percent from the previous year.¹¹⁰ One congregation, St. Paul's in Timber Lake, South Dakota, accounted for seventeen adult confirmations and five adult baptisms in 1938.¹¹¹

Despite the adverse conditions, efforts were made to find new areas for mission efforts. An example of this is the state of Colorado. When the Depression began, there were no

¹⁰⁹Dakota-Montana District Mission Report, October 1938, box 10, folder 370, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives. Some South Dakota churches are in the Nebraska District and some are in the Dakota-Montana District. The different dates for some of these examples are necessitated by the fact that some reports are missing in the archival material. An interesting find in box 01, folder 001, of the Dakota-Montana District Collection in the WELS Synod Archives is a map with push pins indicating the location of every Wisconsin Synod and every Missouri Synod pastor in the Dakota-Montana District in 1934. It is marked to note other locations where a pastor was serving. It noted whether the Wisconsin Synod fields were self-supporting or mission fields. For the most part, the two synods kept their distance. The vast majority of the Wisconsin Synod fields were subsidized by the synod and came under the oversight of the General Mission Board.

¹¹⁰Dakota-Montana District Mission Report, October 1938.

¹¹¹*Parochial Reports of 1938*, 7.

Wisconsin Synod congregations in the state. By 1934, there were four pastors serving ten different locations in the state.¹¹² By 1936, two additional pastors were working in twelve locations in the state and the Colorado Conference of the Nebraska District was formed.¹¹³ By 1938, another pastor and five locations were added to the work in the state.¹¹⁴

Recognizing the potential in the state, the General Mission Board sent Pastors J. Gauss and I. P. Frey on a ten-day exploratory trip throughout the state.¹¹⁵ The result was that in 1939, Pastor Frey was called to serve as the General Missionary for Colorado.¹¹⁶ The result is seen in the statistics for 1940: twenty-five locations served by eleven pastors. Of these twenty-five

¹¹²*Parochial Reports of 1934*, 21. One location, St. Paul's in Sugar City, Colorado, was not an official member of the synod, although the pastor was a Wisconsin Synod pastor. It appears that the congregation continued in this status until the early 1950s when it is no longer listed in the statistical report. Today it is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Three of the other locations were established mission congregations (Fort Morgan, Platteville, and Hillrose). The remainder were preaching stations. This early history of WELS mission work in Colorado is related by N. Martin Mielke III, "The Wisconsin Synod in Colorado: The Early Years of the Wisconsin Synod's Mission Work in Colorado," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1997) <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3318/NielkeWisconsinSynodColorado.pdf>.

¹¹³*Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1936*, 26. In the Wisconsin Synod, each district is made up of conferences which consist of a number of congregations in a geographical area. The pastors of a conference typically meet one or more times a year to worship, study, and hear about the work of the synod and other ministries.

¹¹⁴*Parochial Reports of 1938*, 26.

¹¹⁵"Report of Exploration Committee," 17-20 May 1938, box 01, folder 006, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives. This extensive report of Gauss' and Frey's trip runs ten pages of 8 ½" x 17" paper and even includes a German report of over five pages. It includes details of their trip through Colorado and Arizona.

¹¹⁶Matthew Frey, "Imitating the Apostle: The Lord's Work Through Immanuel Paul Frey," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 2005), 17-19, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1674/FreyImmanuelFrey.pdf>.

locations, five were established congregations and another eight were well on their way.¹¹⁷

Efforts had also resulted in work beginning in several locations in the greater Denver area. The work grew so quickly that in 1942 the Colorado Mission District was formed. This meant that a separate administrative committee would oversee the work done in Colorado, even though the congregations formed in Colorado would continue to be part of the Nebraska District.¹¹⁸ Efforts continued to find new places for outreach. The district mission board chairman reported the following in 1945.

A survey was made by the Chairman and pastors to the Southwest of the State of Colorado and City of Albuquerque, New Mexico... In some places new chapels are needed. We have come to the conclusion that schools are sorely needed, but have not found a solution for our problem... Your Chairman has traveled thousands of miles in the interest of our Mission. South Pueblo, Golden and Cheyenne, Wyoming are trying to start or complete chapels, but progress is very slow.¹¹⁹

Despite the challenging financial situation, funds were expended to expand the work in an area where there had been no previous Wisconsin Synod presence. The fact that these missions were doing almost all their work in English indicates that this was more than just gathering German immigrants.¹²⁰ Rather, it was an effort to start churches in communities where

¹¹⁷*Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1940*, 28.

¹¹⁸This situation continues to the present.

¹¹⁹Colorado Mission District Board Report, 1945 box 10, folder 361, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collections, WELS Synod Archives.

¹²⁰The statistical reports for 1940, 1942, and 1944 have the column “% of work done in English.” All of the missions started in the Nebraska District except two during those years were showing 100% of their work done in English. The exceptions were a couple of missions started in small towns in Colorado.

there was the potential for a Lutheran church. This funding was often made available because other missions in Nebraska had become self-supporting.

The Pacific-Northwest District did not face the same adverse natural conditions. In fact, the district mission board reported in 1937 that members from the congregations in drought areas were moving to the towns and cities of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon. The report lamented: “Our few missionaries in this vast territory cannot possibly serve all these people. More than ever before we need a missionary-at-large.”¹²¹ The 1938 report commented on the need to open new fields, especially in the larger population areas. Even in the Pacific Northwest, mission efforts were primarily in the small towns. The problem continued to be financial. There simply was not money to open many new fields throughout the 1930s. Through some consolidation of fields, enough money was saved to open a new mission in Snoqualmie, Washington, about thirty miles east of Seattle, at the end of 1937. By Easter of 1938, ten adults had been confirmed.¹²² That same year, Good Hope in Ellensburg, Washington, just over one hundred miles east of Seattle, confirmed ten adults and baptized five adults.¹²³ While there were established congregations in Portland, Tacoma, and Yakima and a missionary working a different area of Tacoma, the Pacific Northwest District Mission Board expressed the great need for work in Seattle, Spokane, and expanded work in Portland. It was not until 1941 that the Pacific

¹²¹Pacific Northwest District Mission Board Report, October 1937, box 12, folder 445, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹²²Pacific Northwest District Mission Board Report, May 1938, box 12, folder 445, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹²³*Parochial Reports of 1938*, 32-33.

Northwest District received a missionary-at-large, Pastor F. E. Stern, who was then able to begin work in Seattle.¹²⁴ Grace in Seattle was organized in 1943. Meanwhile, work started in Spokane in 1942 and Trinity congregation was organized in 1944. Within four years, two additional exploratory efforts were underway in Spokane.

One last area outside of the “Heartland” districts deserves mention: Arizona. Because of the work done on the Apache reservation since the early 1890s, it was only natural that other outreach efforts would take place in Arizona. Grace Lutheran Church in Tucson was founded in 1905, although it was still not an official member of the Wisconsin Synod even though it was served by a Wisconsin Synod pastor, E. Arnold Sitz.¹²⁵ In 1927, four pastors were serving ten other locations in Arizona.¹²⁶ By 1934, this had been reduced to three pastors serving six places.¹²⁷ Despite this drawback, the Arizona Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District was established by 1936. This conference included the missionaries serving on the Apache reservation.

¹²⁴Pacific Northwest Mission Board Report, 1941, box 12, folder 445, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹²⁵For more information on this complicated situation, see Thomas Kneser, “The Tucson Case,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1981), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2581/KneserTucsonCase.pdf>; a very extensive treatment is given by Peter M. Prange, “Pastor E. Arnold Sitz and the Protestants: Witnessing to the Wauwatosa Gospel” (unpublished essay) <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/4079/PrangeSitz.pdf>.

¹²⁶*Parochialbericht für 1927*, 12-13.

¹²⁷*Parochial Reports of 1934*, 36-37. One of these pastors and locations, Zion Lutheran Church in Phoenix, was an established congregation. The remainder were missionaries serving mission congregations or preaching stations.

The reduction of pastors in Arizona, however, was only a temporary setback. While the cross of financial struggles stifled growth for several years, the exploratory team of Gauss and Frey spent three weeks in Arizona in March of 1938.¹²⁸ To better oversee the many opportunities for mission work in Arizona, the Arizona Mission District Board was established in 1940. Work expanded quickly, thanks in part to the exploratory work of F. E. Stern, who served as the missionary-at-large for Arizona from 1939-1941, before accepting a similar position in the Pacific Northwest District. By 1942, eight missionaries were serving fifteen locations throughout Arizona.¹²⁹ The number was reduced to seven missionaries serving nine locations because Resurrection in Phoenix, Grace in Glendale, and St. John's in Winslow became self-supporting in 1945.¹³⁰ The first cross-cultural home mission was started in 1948 when Pastor Venus Winter was called to serve the Spanish-speaking population in Tucson.¹³¹

A Cross: Manpower Issues

The efforts to begin new mission locations, even in the small communities of the Upper Midwest, were important in the 1930s because of the surplus of pastoral graduates. The

¹²⁸Frey, "Imitating the Apostle," 16.

¹²⁹*Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1942*, 48.

¹³⁰Minutes of the General Mission Board, 15-18 October 1945, 186, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹³¹Sauer, ed. *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language and People*, 228-9. See also Thomas Behnke, "La Iglesia Luterana De San Pablo, Tucson, Arizona: WELS' First Spanish Mission" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1982), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/380/BehnkeSpanishMission.pdf>.

Depression years saw virtually no retirements. It was very typical for only one or two graduates to receive an assignment at graduation time, and often these assignments were for the tutor positions at the colleges or prep schools.¹³² Some of the larger congregations tried to make use of graduates, especially in their schools.¹³³ But there was always concern expressed about these workers “standing idle in the marketplace.”¹³⁴ In 1933, the minutes of the General Mission Board contain the following note: “The Michigan D. M. Board petitions the G. M. Board to try and find ways and means to place the candidates for the ministry, there being many fields, and we should not become slack in the work.”¹³⁵ Similar sentiments were echoed at mission board meetings and synod conventions throughout the 1930s. The General Mission Board minutes reflect that each district was regularly reporting how many candidates it could take in its district missions. Unfortunately, not all of these could be filled because of the financial cross due to the Depression and the synod debt. There was also the heartbreak felt that the salaries for missionaries and professors were being cut throughout the 1930s.

¹³²“Tutors” were graduates who were serving as dormitory supervisors and teachers at the preparatory high schools and ministerial colleges of the WELS. The position of “tutor” continues today at Luther Preparatory School, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and Martin Luther College. Every year, several pastoral graduates and teacher graduates are assigned to be tutors. These positions are usually for two years.

¹³³For example, First German in Manitowoc called the following men to serve as temporary pastoral assistants: Harold Eckert, Gerhard Struck, Orval Kreie, Herbert Kesting, Carleton Toppe, and Armin Roekle, *100 Years of God’s Grace: First German*, 22.

¹³⁴President Brenner used this phrase in his report to the 1935 synod convention, *Proceedings of 1935 Convention*, 8.

¹³⁵Minutes of the General Mission Board, 29-30 May 1933, 101.

This remained the case until the early 1940s. While 1940 was still a difficult year for placing seminary graduates,¹³⁶ the situation began to improve as the synod's improving financial situation allowed for an increase in mission openings, from three to five new missions per year to seven to eleven new missions per year.¹³⁷ In addition, the synod was able to restore salary cuts and even increase salaries for the missionaries and professors during the early 1940s.

Mission work, however, had to be, if not curtailed, at least slowed down in the late 1940s because of a manpower shortage. The increasing number of mission starts, beginning in 1940, quickly exhausted the workers "standing idle in the marketplace." The improved financial situation in the nation and in the synod allowed for both the start of new missions and the retirement of pastors who had previously not been in a financial position to do so. It also did not help that there were several classes during the 1940s that numbered less than twenty and the class of 1949 had only ten graduates. There were probably several factors contributing to the low numbers. During the Depression, the fact that so few graduates received calls immediately undoubtedly led to less intensive recruitment efforts and fewer young men considering the pastoral ministry. World War II also played a factor, especially at Northwestern College where some students enlisted in the military and the number of students and graduates shrunk

¹³⁶The author's grandfather, Armin Schuetze, was a 1940 graduate from the seminary. He recalls that only three of the twenty-two graduates that year received assignments on graduation day (he was assigned to serve as a tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary). During the 1930s, the students resigned themselves to the fact that most would not get calls immediately.

¹³⁷Conrad Frey, "Manpower Survey: Preliminary Report," 12 May 1949, 4, box 05, folder 171, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

drastically from 1943-1946.¹³⁸ These lower numbers at Northwestern led to the small seminary graduating classes in the last half of the 1940s. The report of the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board to the General Mission Board in 1947 became a refrain echoed by the other district mission boards. “The shortage of men is sorely felt.” The Michigan District Mission Board even went as far as to say that no new fields will be considered in the near future because of the shortage of pastors.¹³⁹

Conrad Frey’s 1949 “Manpower Survey” report offered some solutions. The most obvious, of course, was urging more intensive recruitment efforts. The synod would have to invest in buildings on the campuses of the ministerial education schools to prepare for larger enrollments. This is precisely what the synod did during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.¹⁴⁰ Frey also encouraged the mission board to consider consolidating some fields. Perhaps the most pertinent to this discussion was his recommendation that the synod’s mission activity should keep in mind its availability of manpower.

The matter of manpower often appears to be a challenge for the church’s mission activities. When sufficient workers are available, the funds to start new missions are sometimes

¹³⁸Kowalke, *Centennial Story*, 196, 279.

¹³⁹Minutes of the General Mission Board, 1-8 May 1947, 204-206, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁴⁰A film was produced for Northwestern College in 1947 to both recruit students and encourage financial support for much-needed buildings on the Watertown campus. The film is in a documentary style and very professionally done. It was recently digitized and posted on Facebook. A VHS copy resides in Box 059, The Northwestern College Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

lacking. When sufficient funds are available, the workers are often too few. The harvest, however, is always plentiful.¹⁴¹

Local Mission Work and Synodical Growth

Despite the financial challenge of the 1930s and the manpower challenge of the 1940s, many of the established congregations of the synod carried out vigorous evangelism in their communities in addition to the mission efforts on a synodical level. The Holy Spirit blessed their faithful labors with visible results. Consider some examples as evidence. In 1938, Emanuel in Lansing, Michigan reported eleven adult baptisms and twenty-four adult confirmations, St. John's in Minneapolis had nine adult baptisms and forty-one adult confirmations, Emanuel in St. Paul recorded six adult baptisms and twenty-nine adult confirmations, and St. Martin's in Winona, Minnesota, had eight adult baptisms and twenty-nine adult confirmations.¹⁴² In 1942, St. Stephen's in Adrian, Michigan, had ten adult baptisms and nineteen adults confirmations, Immanuel in Mankato, Minnesota, reported seven adult baptisms and twenty-three adult confirmations, Siloah in Milwaukee baptized six adults and confirmed thirty-one adults, and St. John's in Baraboo, Wisconsin, had five adult baptisms and thirty-five adult confirmations.¹⁴³ In 1946, Grace in Benton Harbor, Michigan,¹⁴⁴ had eight adult baptisms and twenty-four adult

¹⁴¹Cf. Matthew 9:35-38.

¹⁴²*Parochial Reports of 1938*, 9, 25, 61.

¹⁴³*Parochial Reports of 1942*, 11, 17, 57, 69.

¹⁴⁴Today, this congregation is located in St. Joseph, Michigan.

confirmations, Emanuel in New London, Wisconsin, had six adult baptisms and twenty adult confirmations, Nain in West Allis, Wisconsin, recorded five adult baptisms and twenty-five adult confirmations, and Friedens in Kenosha, Wisconsin had seven adult baptisms and twenty-three adult confirmations.¹⁴⁵

A unique example of locally-supported mission work occurred in Manitowoc, a city on the shores of Lake Michigan about eighty miles north of Milwaukee. As the American industrial war machine was ramping up in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Manitowoc's shipbuilding industry was put to work building submarines. This resulted in an influx of people into Manitowoc and a housing boom on the west side of the city. First German, located in downtown Manitowoc, started and supported a mission on the west side. The district mission board report noted this. "It is worthy of mention here also that Pastor Koeniger's congregation in Manitowoc founded a mission on the West Side of the city on its own initiative, purchased property, erected a church-school building, and, for the time being at least, provides the missionary."¹⁴⁶ This mission became Bethany. In 1944, Bethany reported a membership of 193 communicants and six adult confirmations.¹⁴⁷ First German members were also instrumental in partnering with the mission board to start a mission on the north side of the city. This became Grace congregation. In

¹⁴⁵*Statistical Report of The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1945-1946*, 5, 17, 24, 26.

¹⁴⁶North Wisconsin District Report to the General Mission Board, May 1941.

¹⁴⁷*Parochial Reports of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States of 1944*, 40, 41.

1944, Grace reported a membership of 181 communicants.¹⁴⁸ The General Mission Board resolved to send a letter of commendation to First German “for interest shown in founding and helping finance new missions in that city.”¹⁴⁹

Evangelism efforts by both established congregations and synod-supported missions during these two decades resulted in numerical growth for the Wisconsin Synod. The Spirit blessed the synod’s proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments so that the synod grew numerically from 153,506 communicant members in 1927¹⁵⁰ to 214,425 in 1950.¹⁵¹ This was an increase of over twenty-eight percent over nearly a quarter century.

Conclusion

The financial crisis caused by the Depression and the synod’s debt was a heavy burden for the Wisconsin Synod during the 1930s. Manpower issues were challenging: too many workers in the 1930s and too few in the last half of the 1940s. Yet, the Wisconsin Synod carried out a rather vigorous mission program during these two decades, despite these crosses the synod had to bear. The home mission efforts detailed in this chapter demonstrate this. Mission work was even extended beyond the Midwest. Work was begun in Colorado and expanded to the point

¹⁴⁸*Parochial Reports of 1944*, 40.

¹⁴⁹Minutes of the General Mission Board, 11-13 October 1943, 159, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collections, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁵⁰*Parochialbericht für 1927*, 64.

¹⁵¹*Statistical Report of The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1949-1950*, 33.

where the Colorado Conference was formed in 1936, and the Colorado Mission District was established in 1942. While there was a drawback in the mission effort in Arizona in the early 1930s, by the end of the 1930s the work had expanded so that the Arizona Conference was formed in 1936, and the Arizona Mission District was established in 1940. What has not been mentioned is that the Wisconsin Synod continued to support the mission work on the Apache reservation in Arizona, as well as work among Lutherans in Poland. As a member of the Synodical Conference, the synod supported mission work among the African-Americans in the South and the newly started mission work in Nigeria.¹⁵² There was no shortage of mission endeavors and efforts at expanding those endeavors during the 1930s and 1940s in the face of numerous challenges which made such efforts difficult.

The 1930s and 1940s were clearly challenging times for America. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the Wisconsin Synod had to bear numerous crosses during this time. But it did not stop the synod from endeavoring to bring the good news of Jesus to others. The Lord enabled this small church body, which was struggling to shed its German identity and break out of its Midwestern roots, to carry out mission work where the opportunities were present and as resources allowed, despite numerous challenges. Overcoming some of these challenges paved the way for future work; some created new crosses, as will be seen in future chapters.

¹⁵²The support of the work in Nigeria especially came in the form of manpower (footnote 16).

CHAPTER 3

“INTO ALL THE WORLD...”—JAPAN AND CENTRAL AFRICA

When the Wisconsin Synod met in convention at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, during the opening days of August in 1945, there was an upbeat mood. The end of four years of war was near at hand and, in fact, the delegates would learn of the bombing of Hiroshima on the last day of the convention. In addition, the efforts at repaying the synod debt for the last ten years finally resulted in the liquidation of the debt and a reserve fund stood at \$350,000.¹⁵³ These developments have led this convention to be described as a “happy convention.”¹⁵⁴

The end of the war, combined with the repayment of the debt and subsequent surplus, energized those who had pushed for concerted efforts to repay the debt so that the Wisconsin Synod could contemplate carrying the gospel to the world. Every effort to expand mission work beyond the border of the United States had been deterred because of the debt. Money was now available. The world was hurting from the war. But with the war ending, transportation overseas would again be possible. The time seemed ripe.

¹⁵³*Reports and Memorials for the Twenty-eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 1-7 August 1945, 39.

¹⁵⁴Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* has a chapter entitled “The Happy Convention,” 41-47. Edgar Hoenecke also regularly used this term to describe the 1945 convention, for example, in his “‘Reflections’ on the World Mission Development in the Wisconsin Synod,” presented at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Mission Seminar, 1978.

Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, the chairman of the Executive Committee for Indian Missions, used his report to the 1945 convention to set the synod's sights to starting an overseas mission. The bulk of his report was on the state and progress of the work on the Apache reservation. However, the introduction to the report is where he attempted to expand the synod's horizons. After quoting two Scripture passages that speak about taking the gospel to the heathen of the world (Isaiah 49:6 and Acts 1:8), Hoenecke applied these scriptural exhortations to the current situation of the synod.

The vastly increased opportunities resulting in so many ways from the present war,—these are our opportunities; the grave responsibilities, not of reconstruction, but of regeneration by the Gospel of the hearts and lives of literally hundreds of millions,—these are our responsibilities in the Wisconsin Synod!

We cannot shirk these issues much longer with impunity; we have had the precious Gospel preserved to us for one hundred years, we have become well established with all the means for carrying on a full program of work, as our Lord outlined it, and we will have world-wide opportunities in profusion, especially if the Lord should give to the arms of our nation the victory for which we pray.

Nor dare we salve our consciences with the fact that others are doing this part of the work. This can never absolve us of our own responsibility in view of His world-wide commission and of the almost illimitable, world-wide horde of lost souls which are not being reached by present missionary activities.

As your committee in charge of the only heathen mission, and that within our own borders, which our Synod conducts independently, we earnestly urge this session of our Wisconsin Synod to take thought and action in the matter of mission work among those who have no opportunity to hear the sound of the saving Gospel. Because there are still vast stretches in Asia, Africa, South America and in the islands of the seven seas where this sound has not been heard in our day, and because communication and transportation improvements will presumably bring them within our easier reach after the war, and because world time is becoming short (Matthew 24:22), may we plead that consideration of a wider mission program be undertaken with dispatch.¹⁵⁵

President John Brenner declared Hoenecke's exhortation "out of order," even though Hoenecke's report had already been read at the May meeting of the General Synodical

¹⁵⁵*Reports and Memorials for 1945 Convention*, 9.

Committee of which Brenner was the chairman. At that meeting, it was met with no objection. The General Mission Board endorsed Hoenecke's report and encouraged him to present it without change to the convention. Therefore, this should not have come as a surprise to President Brenner.

Putting the best construction on Brenner's reaction, one could surmise that Hoenecke was out of order to bring up new business in a report on current mission work. However, evidence of caution on Brenner's part can be gleaned from his "Biennial Report of the President." After acknowledging that "our Lord calls us to be alert and ardently zealous in his work," he went on to say, "But let us be prayerfully careful that ours is not a 'zeal not according to knowledge.' Being energetically active is not always an acceptable service to the Lord that furthers his purpose for his Church."¹⁵⁶ Later in his report, he was even more pointed.

At this convention, let us be conservative in our thinking and planning, neglecting no real need in our work, but avoiding the enthusiasm characteristic of our days, lest we in an abnormal time create obligations for ourselves that will prove too great when normalcy returns.

Yes, we should expand, God forbid that we deny our faith by becoming stagnant, but let our expansion be by a quiet steady progress in which the available manpower and the means to employ it keep pace with each other.¹⁵⁷

Perhaps Brenner was trying to preempt Hoenecke's enthusiasm. It did not work, if that was his intention. There was lively debate on the convention floor. Hoenecke objected to Brenner's ruling that his exhortation was out of order by citing Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the passage he had cited earlier from Isaiah 49. Many voiced their approval of the

¹⁵⁶*Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 1-6 August 1945, 10.

¹⁵⁷*Proceedings of 1945 Convention*, 17.

synod embarking on overseas mission work. Others, especially synodical leaders like Brenner who had weathered the storm of the Depression and the synodical debt, were reluctant to commit the synod to an effort that could incur new debt. Others felt that the synod should have a direct call from a foreign land, similar to Paul's "Macedonian" call in Acts 16.¹⁵⁸ Some even thought the whole debate had been staged.¹⁵⁹

The debate resulted in the passing of the following resolution: "Resolved that the President appoint a committee to gather information regarding foreign fields that might offer opportunity for mission work by our Synod. When ready, this committee shall report the results of its study, first to the General Mission Board and then to the Synod."¹⁶⁰ This marked the beginning of a new chapter in the mission work of WELS. But this chapter came with its own share of crosses to bear as the synod struggled to expand its gospel proclaiming efforts.

A Cross: Internal Tension

¹⁵⁸Acts 16:6-10 recounts Paul's vision of a man from Macedonia calling for help. This led Paul to enter the European continent and begin mission work in the Macedonian city of Philippi.

¹⁵⁹The *Proceedings* of the convention simply have the resolution that was adopted by the convention. The drama that played out on the floor of the convention is recounted in Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People*, 143-144; Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 220; Edgar H. Hoenecke, "The WELS Forty-niners," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 8; Edgar H. Hoenecke, "'Reflections' on the World Mission Development in the Wisconsin Synod," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 75, no.3 (Fall 1978): 6; and James Naumann, "The Personalities and Factors Involved in the WELS Decision to Enter Africa in 1951" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1975), 5-6, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/3409/NaumannWELSDDecisionEnterAfrica.pdf>. Naumann especially notes that many of the vocal supporters of new mission efforts came from Hoenecke's pastoral conference, the Southeastern Conference of the Michigan District.

¹⁶⁰*Proceedings of 1945 Convention*, 34.

The first cross could already be seen on the 1945 convention floor in the debate over the resolution to explore starting overseas mission work. There were at least two sides to the issue: men, many of whom were in synodical leadership positions, who urged caution in entering what would undoubtedly be an expensive endeavor, and the “mission brethren” who saw this as the time for aggressive work. To his credit, even though Brenner would have been numbered among the cautious, he appointed a committee made up of men from both camps. The chairman of the newly formed Committee on Foreign Missions was Arthur Wacker, pastor at Salem, Scio, Michigan (near Ann Arbor), chairman of the Michigan District Mission Board, close friend of Hoenecke, and a passionate and vocal proponent for foreign mission work. Henry C. Nitz, pastor at St. John’s in Waterloo, Wisconsin, and an experienced missionary on the Apache reservation, was another well-respected voice for the synod’s mission work. Synod First Vice President E. Benjamin Schlueter and Pastor Leonard Koeniger of First German in Manitowoc and longtime chairman of the Board of Trustees were voices of caution. Professor Edmund Bliefert of Dr. Martin Luther College completed the committee. With such a group, it is easy to see why there was tension.

Disagreement quickly developed over what the synodical resolution entailed. How aggressive should the committee be acting to “gather information”? Wacker, presumably supported by Nitz, believed this meant actively seeking information about promising fields and then proving to the synod that these fields were worth entering. Those representing the synodical leadership believed that this simply meant receiving information that might be directed to the

committee.¹⁶¹ The impasse was such that a special committee consisting of Professor Carl Lawrenz of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Pastor Henry Shiley representing the General Mission Board, and Pastor Gerald Hoenecke of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, was assigned the task of interpreting the synod resolution. The committee determined that the responsibilities of the Foreign Missions Committee involved gathering, studying, and reporting information on possible foreign fields. Gathering information could include actively seeking information, but it did not authorize “personal, on-the-spot investigation.” Studying information meant evaluating the merits of a field and the ability of the synod to support work in that particular field given the challenges that might be present. Reporting the information meant working through the General Mission Board and then bringing any new field to the synod in convention for approval.¹⁶² This seemed like a victory for the “mission brethren.”

Reflecting many years later,¹⁶³ Edgar Hoenecke believed that this tension had roots that went back to the two influential professors of the seminary from its days in Wauwatosa: J. P. Koehler and August Pieper. Hoenecke, recounting especially the beginning of the Wisconsin

¹⁶¹Information in this paragraph comes from a document by Arthur Wacker entitled, “The Procrastination of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod in pursuing the course set by the Synod in Convention in August, 1945,” Wacker, Arthur, Biographical Files, WELS Synod Archives. This was a hand-written document from Wacker’s mission files which Hoenecke transcribed and deposited in the WELS Synod Archives and in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary online essay file, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/521/WackerMission.pdf>. Wacker presented these comments to the Southeastern Pastors’ Conference of the Michigan District in early 1951. Wacker is very frank in his disappointment in the WELS leadership.

¹⁶²“The Report of the Committee Appointed To Study The Functions And Scope Of The Foreign Missions Committee,” box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives. Fredrich mentions it in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, note 4, 290.

¹⁶³This paragraph summarizes Hoenecke’s thoughts expressed in his “Reflections,” 1-5.

Synod's work on the Apache reservation, spoke of Koehler's philosophy that some church bodies have the mission to remain small and compact and grow internally and that beginning new ventures could distract from that mission.¹⁶⁴ Koehler also commented that the "mission brethren's" insistence that unless a church body is engaging in heathen mission work it is not carrying out the Great Commission was "dogmatism with a streak of pietism."¹⁶⁵ In contrast, Hoenecke recalled Professor Pieper frequently mentioning the need to reach out into all the world with the gospel during his lectures on Isaiah. In addition, Hoenecke quoted from Pieper's essay to the 1919 synod convention, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," where Pieper chided the synod for its lackluster efforts to carry out both mission and education work. At a time when the transition to English was in full force, Pieper encouraged the synod to see the opportunities and get to work.

Don't you see the vast throngs of English people milling about your house, crowding around your open door, the innumerable multitude of those who would also like to hear something of the glorious thing which the Lord has poured into your happy heart? Don't you see the millions of children who are waiting for you to take them also on your lap in Christian schools to tell them, too, about this wonderful thing that has entranced and enraptured you? Oh, don't you see the shining eyes of the thousands of dark-haired lads and the yearning in the glances of the thousands of blond-haired maidens who, enchanted by your own beaming face, are also eager to learn the Gospel of God's grace and to place themselves into the Lord's service in church and school to shout it loudly to the multitude that is thronging about your house?

It is high time! The sun is still shining and the day is still with us; but it is toward evening and the day already far spent!¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 196.

¹⁶⁵Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 198.

¹⁶⁶August Pieper, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," tr. by Heinrich Vogel in *The Wauwatosa Theology, Volume 3*, ed. by Curtis Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 296-345.

With such influential professors espousing different viewpoints on mission work, it is no wonder that there were tensions among members of the synod. That it took some time to work through these tensions, therefore, is not surprising. The Committee on Foreign Missions had its marching orders. However, due to the death of Professor Blieferticht and the pressing pastoral and synodical duties of several other committee members, the committee never actually met again. Still, a report was assembled and ready for presentation to the 1947 synod convention. Presumably, Wacker was the man who assembled the report. Wacker reported that the entire committee then met in Manitowoc a month before the convention to discuss the report and pass it.¹⁶⁷ There was reluctance on the part of two committee members to sign the report, partly because they had tendered their resignations from the committee and partly, one assumes, because they did not support the resolutions offered in the report. Nevertheless, the report was signed and ready to present at the convention.

In his president's report to the convention, Brenner noted that Professor Blieferticht had died and that three committee members had tendered their resignations from the committee, but Brenner had not accepted their resignations. He indicated that the convention would have some important decisions to make.¹⁶⁸ Wacker complained that the full report was never printed and that when the report was presented on the convention floor, Brenner indicated that it was one man's report. He also related that Brenner used his position as chairman of the convention to

¹⁶⁷Wacker, "Procrastination," 5.

¹⁶⁸*Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 6-12 August 1947, 16.

attempt to stifle debate, engage in debate, and prevent the resolutions from coming to the floor for a vote. According to Wacker, the original resolutions were reworded until they finally were presented. Wacker himself finally called the question and the vote was overwhelming in favor of the three resolutions.¹⁶⁹

The brief report and resolutions, beginning again with a quote from Isaiah 49:6, dismissed the committee with thanks, authorized the expansion of the synod's work into "foreign heathen fields," and gave the General Mission Board the task of continuing to investigate and explore the "most promising fields." But before any actual work would be done, the General Mission Board would have to report to the General Synodical Committee for "further instructions."¹⁷⁰ According to Wacker, this neither made sense, since the General Mission Board was comprised of thirty experienced men capable of making decisions about mission work, nor constitutional, since the General Synodical Committee was not given such power by the synod constitution.¹⁷¹ While Brenner felt repudiated by the convention's decision to move forward,¹⁷² Wacker felt that he retained control of the matter by his chairmanship of the General Synodical

¹⁶⁹Wacker, "Procrastinations," 5-6. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 222. Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribes, Language, and People*, 144-145.

¹⁷⁰*Proceedings of 1947 Convention*, 51. The General Synodical Committee was made up of representatives of the various boards and entities of the synod. It met about twice a year to evaluate the bigger picture of the synod's work.

¹⁷¹Wacker, "Procrastinations," 6.

¹⁷²Both Wacker and Hoenecke mention that Brenner felt "disavowed by this convention." Recollecting many years later, Hoenecke puts Brenner's statement into the context of the 1951 synod convention decision, Edgar Hoenecke to Marcus Manthey, 25 August 2000, Hoenecke, Edgar, Supplemental Folder, Biographical Files, WELS Synod Archives. Wacker, however, says that this occurred at the 1947 convention. Since Wacker's "Procrastinations" statement was prior to the 1951 convention, Brenner must have stated this in connection with the 1947 convention decision. Either that, or he made the statement twice.

Committee. Nevertheless, the synod had made the commitment to enter foreign heathen mission work.

It should be noted that, while these tensions were clearly evident and had to be resolved before decisions could be made, none of the men who urged caution were “anti-mission.” They were opposed to sending Wisconsin Synod missionaries to begin an overseas mission at this time. This could especially be said of President Brenner. He was one of the first to advocate and undertake ministry in the English language. He had even learned the Slovak language in order to reach out to Slovaks on the southside of Milwaukee. In a letter penned late in his life, Hoenecke went to great lengths to defend Brenner’s actions and attitudes, insisting there was no personal animosity between Brenner and Hoenecke.¹⁷³ He especially highlighted Brenner’s efforts to pay down the synodical debt, specifically mentioning how Brenner made use of Hoenecke’s “Michigan Plan.” He also commented that in Brenner’s 1945 president’s report to the synod convention, Brenner noted, “Until now we have not been planning to enter into foreign fields, but the Lord may call us to such work at any time. May we then be ready to respond to his call, willing to work and to sacrifice.”¹⁷⁴ While Brenner may have been waiting for a “Macedonian” call from a specific foreign group, Hoenecke saw this as evidence that Brenner was not opposed to foreign work.

¹⁷³ Hoenecke to Manthey, 12-25 July 2000. In a postscript, Hoenecke enumerates a number of personal interactions with Brenner that give evidence to a friendship between the two men. See also Marc Frey, “The Mission Zeal of President John Brenner,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1980). <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1673/FreyJohnBrenner.pdf>.

¹⁷⁴ *Proceedings of 1945 Convention,*” 17.

A Cross: Further Delays in Entering Africa

In their report, the Committee on Foreign Missions made note of several potential fields of labor. “Two such fields are located in the Orient; two are in Africa. One beckons to us from the islands of the South Pacific.”¹⁷⁵ At its first meeting after the convention, the General Mission Board heard more specifics about some of these fields from Wacker. China, Somaliland, French West Africa, and British Indo China were proposed as possible fields for further exploration and investigation. The board decided to limit their investigation to two fields: French West Africa and China. They decided to send Arthur Wacker to French West Africa. The plan was for him to meet up with the experienced missionary to Nigeria, William Schweppe. Pastor Timothy Adasheck, another member of the board, was selected to make an on-site investigation in China. He would meet up with a Missouri Synod missionary.¹⁷⁶

This rapid decision-making is impressive. The General Mission Board attempted to ride the wave of enthusiasm and keep the momentum going. But this momentum soon ground to a halt. By its May meeting, China was no longer a viable option because of the course of the civil war in that nation and the advances of Communism. Instead, a second Africa location, Northern Rhodesia, was added for investigation. It was decided to send Wacker and Adaschek to visit the Upper Volta region of French West Africa and Northern Rhodesia, accompanied by Schweppe. However, Adaschek requested to be excused because his congregation in Yakima, Washington,

¹⁷⁵*Proceedings of 1947 Convention*, 51.

¹⁷⁶Minutes of the General Mission Board, 13-16 October 1947, 219, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collections, WELS Synod Archives.

did not want him to be gone for so long. The board voted to send him anyway, assuring the congregation that a vacancy pastor would be provided to them.¹⁷⁷ However, that assurance was not enough. Adaschek was unavailable.

At the same meeting, Edgar Hoenecke was chosen as the alternate to accompany Wacker on the exploratory trip. With Adaschek unavailable, Hoenecke was approached. He also declined because his congregation in Plymouth, Michigan, was undergoing a relocation. However, after several other people declined, he agreed to go, and his congregation gave their support so that the project would not completely stall. These delays pushed the trip from the original plan of the summer of 1948 to the spring and summer of 1949.

The fascinating story of Wacker and Hoenecke's 4,000-mile trek through the southern regions of the African continent and their search for a virgin mission field is told in extensive fashion by Hoenecke himself.¹⁷⁸ What is worth noting is that there were still divisions in the synod administration about this exploratory work. The General Mission Board seems to have placed the planning and preparation for the trip in the hands of Hoenecke and Wacker. It's interesting that in the minutes of the General Mission Board there is no mention of the exploratory trip in the meeting of October 1948 or the meeting of May 1949 (by which time Wacker and Hoenecke were in Africa). It appears that the two men were working through the mission board chairman, Pastor William Roepke. For example, Roepke prepared and signed a

¹⁷⁷Minutes of the General Mission Board, 20-26 May 1948, 228-9, box 01, folder 001, The WELS Board for Home Missions, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁷⁸Hoenecke, "The WELS Forty-niners," 3-67.

letter to the French consul in Chicago vouching for Wacker and Hoenecke because their journey could take them through parts of French-controlled Africa.¹⁷⁹ A letter from Roepke to Brenner gives further evidence of this, as well as provides insight into the ongoing tensions. Roepke reports a phone conversation with Hoenecke and then Hoenecke's request for credentials from the synod president that would facilitate the obtaining of travel visas for some of the African nations. He prefaces his requests with this statement. "Now I know how you, one of our Synod's most ardent promoters and supporters of missions,—and that's no flattery, believe me,—feel about this particular endeavor. Yet, I fervently hope that you may, even though probably reluctantly, grant the request and send credentials to Hoenecke and Wacker."¹⁸⁰ Roepke goes on to express his own feelings.

How I feel about this trip, you know. May I add that, to my way of thinking, this exploration trip fits in well with our Synod's Centennial celebration. Not the dollars and cents, of course, but the humble effort to possibly widen the scope of our beloved Synod's work for the great cause of our Savior's Kingdom. What the result of this trip will be depends solely on the grace of God. May God our Savior's gracious presence and care attend Wacker and Hoenecke on their trip. I know you'll join me in that prayer.¹⁸¹

Clearly, people were aware that Brenner, while he was a supporter of missions, was not an enthusiastic supporter of this endeavor at this time. One assumes that the credentials were provided. In fact, when Wacker and Hoenecke arrived in New York City and were making final preparations for their voyage across the Atlantic, a last-minute line of credit was provided from

¹⁷⁹A carbon copy is located box 01, folder 005, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁸⁰William Roepke to John W. O. Brenner, 16 February 1949, box 01, folder 005, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁸¹Roepke to Brenner, 16 February 1949.

the synod in order to prevent the delegation from being stranded in a foreign country without any money. Presumably, Brenner approved that line of credit.¹⁸² Wacker also noted that Brenner did not allow others to derail the exploratory mission, even when the Board of Trustees, which was concerned with cost overruns, wanted to cut the trip short. Brenner insisted that the synod in convention had authorized this exploratory trip, so it should be properly funded.¹⁸³

However, the two men who were embarking on this potentially hazardous journey were struck by the silence of the synodical administration. From New York City, the day their ship was departing, Hoenecke penned a letter to Brenner, expressing his disappointment in his synod president. After writing about the sacrifice he was making in leaving his family and congregation and communicating his confidence that he was carrying out the Lord's Great Commission, Hoenecke concluded his letter:

My heavy heart is because of my upright concern for you. Every secular agency with whom we have had dealings, also here in blasé New York, including the high officials of the City Bank, went out of their way with a warm, personal interest for our safety and success in a venture entirely foreign to their sphere of interest. They sent us on our way with genuine wishes for our safe return and success.

As your friend and brother, I have waited for months for a word from you, our president,—in vain.¹⁸⁴

In contrast, the men had received a warm send-off from pastors and members of Michigan District congregations at a special service held the Tuesday after Easter (18 April 1949). Pastor Karl Krauss, the president of the Michigan District, organized and participated in

¹⁸²Hoenecke, "The WELS Forty-niners," 13.

¹⁸³Wacker, "Procrastinations," 6.

¹⁸⁴Edgar Hoenecke to John W. O. Brenner, 29 April 1949, box 01, folder 005, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

the service. Roepke was unable to attend because of the distance from his home in Marquette, Michigan. But he sent an encouraging letter.

It is a momentous trip you and Wacker are about to take. My thoughts and prayers shall be with you all the way. I can think of no greater and more blessed Centennial thank-offering our synod could lay at our Savior's feet than a mission of our own among a people in a distant land, who are aliens and foreigners from the Kingdom of God...

God speed you on the way, keep you well and strong, and bring you safely home again!¹⁸⁵

More Delays

Even when they completed their three-month trip and had a report ready on their findings, tensions and delays continued. First, they hustled back to America with the hope of reporting in person to the synod convention meeting in Milwaukee. Because they were unsure if they would get back in time, they dispatched a letter to Roepke with an initial report. While Hoenecke was quarantined for several weeks upon his return because of a polio victim on his flight, Wacker was available to report in person. However, he was not summoned to Milwaukee and the written report they provided to Roepke was considered a report only for the General Mission Board and the General Synodical Committee and not meant for the entire convention. That, however, was not the intent of Wacker and Hoenecke. They wanted the 1949 synod convention to hear the report.¹⁸⁶ The official record of the convention mentions that Wacker and

¹⁸⁵William Roepke to Edgar Hoenecke, 18 April 1949, box 01, folder 005, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁸⁶Wacker, "Procrastinations," 6.

Hoenecke would be in Africa until the end of August and that no report had been received at this date.¹⁸⁷

Second, further delays occurred, and continued tensions were evident in the fall of 1949. Hoenecke and Wacker prepared an extensive report for the General Mission Board's October meeting and for the General Synodical Committee's October meeting.¹⁸⁸ The General Mission Board was of the opinion that the Northern Rhodesia field, especially the "Hook of the Kafue" region recommended by British officials in Northern Rhodesia,¹⁸⁹ "presents the Synod with an excellent opportunity to do foreign heathen mission work."¹⁹⁰ However, the General Mission Board also resolved "that the General Synodical Committee now has the definite responsibility to determine at this time the Synod's ability to enter in upon work in the most promising field."¹⁹¹ Upon hearing the report, the General Synodical Committee passed a motion "that the

¹⁸⁷ *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 3-9 August 1949, 60-61.

¹⁸⁸ "Report of Exploratory Mission in Africa" runs twelve double-spaced pages and includes breaks in the narrative where Wacker and Hoenecke played audio recordings of interviews with key people they encountered on their trip. It was a multi-media presentation, circa 1949, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives. A "Condensed Report of the African Exploratory Committee" was also prepared by Wacker and Hoenecke in 1951 for wider dissemination. This "condensed" report runs six single-spaced pages with wider margins, 7 August 1951, box 01, Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives (Note: The Edgar Hoenecke Papers are not yet sufficiently organized, so there are no folder numbers).

¹⁸⁹ Hoenecke provides a great deal of information about the "Hook of the Kafue" region in "The WELS Forty-niners," 51-53. "The Report of the Exploratory Mission in Africa" also provides details, 10-11. The "Hook of the Kafue" became something of a rallying cry for those advocating WELS to enter an overseas foreign mission.

¹⁹⁰ Minutes of the General Mission Board, 17-20 October 1949 (no pagination), box 01, folder 004, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁹¹ Minutes of the General Mission Board, 17-20 October 1949.

Conference of Presidents and the Executive of the Mission Board appoint a committee to study this report.”¹⁹²

In his 1951 report to the Southeastern Conference of the Michigan District, Wacker complained that the General Synodical Committee usurped authority from the General Mission Board and even the synod in convention. He argued that the convention had made the decision in 1947 to enter foreign mission work overseas. He added that the synod constitution gave the General Mission Board the authority to carry out the synod’s mission endeavors. He further complained that the committee that was appointed to study the report did not even include the chairman from the General Mission Board. The representative of the General Mission Board on the committee had publicly expressed his opposition to this venture. Finally, the committee was chaired by President Brenner.¹⁹³ While his complaints were certainly understandable, the General Mission Board had relinquished final decision-making authority to the General Synodical Committee, even though it was not constitutionally required to do so. And the General Synodical Committee desired that Roepke, as chairman (“Executive”) of the General Mission Board, should be involved in the selection of the committee. So, the chairman of the General Mission Board was actively involved.

¹⁹²Minutes of the General Synodical Committee, 19-20 October 1949, 4, box 01, Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁹³Wacker, “Procrastinations,” 7. The committee was comprised of President Brenner, Pastor Walter Pankow, a member of the General Mission Board, Pastor Norbert Paustian, pastor of St. Matthew’s in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, Mr. A. C. Haack, a member of the seminary’s Board of Control, Mr. William Stelljes, a member of the Dr. Martin Luther College Board of Control, Pastor Conrad Frey, serving at Our Savior’s in the Detroit area and soon to become president at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, and Pastor Arthur Voss, synod first vice-president and chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The establishment of yet another committee meant more delays. Over the next eighteen months, there was considerable debate and study by the committee about the best place to work, if work in Africa was to commence. Hoenecke and Wacker had made contacts and had conversations with a small group of German Lutherans who were struggling in Southwest Africa (later Zimbabwe). This was dismissed because of the connections this group had with the German state church, as well as concerns about the group's viability and the fact that they had not officially asked the Wisconsin Synod for help. There was also the possibility of work farther north in French Angola. Hoenecke and Wacker had intended to visit this region with Pastor William Schweppe, the Wisconsin Synod missionary who superintendent of the Synodical Conference mission in Nigeria. This plan was abandoned when they arrived in Africa and realized the difficulty of travel, especially during the rainy season.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, they had some idea of what that region might hold for mission work. This area was also set aside because of the need for missionaries to learn Portuguese and the fact that it was a region where Roman Catholic missionaries were very active.¹⁹⁵

Even with this progress by the committee, delays continued. While the committee had concluded that the Northern Rhodesia field held the most promise, they still wanted to postpone a decision until the fall of 1950 for four reasons. They felt it would be wise to speak with Schweppe, who was back in the United States on an extended furlough. They had now received

¹⁹⁴“Report of Exploratory Mission in Africa,” 2-3.

¹⁹⁵“A Brief Statement in the Interest of Northern Rhodesia,” 2, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives. The author and date of this document are uncertain. It was probably written by Wacker or Hoenecke, most likely in late 1950.

an appeal from the “Bleckmar Mission,” a free church Lutheran group in Southwest Africa. They were troubled “with a man-power situation and financial shortages.” And they were “concerned with conditions prevailing in the Church at large.”¹⁹⁶ This last point was a reference to the ongoing doctrinal discussions with the Missouri Synod which had been brewing for over ten years and were beginning to heat up in earnest.

Wacker complained that the last three points were irrelevant to the committee’s work because the synod had already decided in convention to proceed with an overseas mission. The only question before the committee was the location. He also raised the point that Schweppe was in the States and the committee never met with him.¹⁹⁷ His frustration grew when the committee had nothing to report in the fall of 1950 and had requested another six months. He acknowledged that during the winter of 1950-51 some work had been done. The committee was investigating the “Bleckmar Mission.” They were inquiring what would need to be done with the British government to begin mission work in Northern Rhodesia. They were attempting to get a handle on the costs in both money and manpower for such a venture.¹⁹⁸ To be fair, they were trying to do due diligence, but Wacker’s impatience is also understandable, considering the delays that had already occurred since the first synodical decision in 1945.

¹⁹⁶Foreign Missions Committee to the General Synodical Committee, 10 May 1950, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

¹⁹⁷Wacker, “Procrastination,” 7-8.

¹⁹⁸Wacker, “Procrastination,” 8. “Facts and Figures on Costs in Men and Money Foreign Missions, Report for the Foreign Missions Committee,” 30 April 1951, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives. This report was prepared by the secretary of the committee, Conrad Frey. He had also prepared the manpower survey for the General Mission Board in 1949.

The committee's final recommendation best illustrates the tension that was ongoing, as well as some of the obstacles that were potentially standing in the way of this new overseas venture. The majority of the committee resolved that, while the Northern Rhodesia field had the most promise for starting a new mission, this was not the right time for this particular type of mission work. They cited two reasons: the present condition of the church and the financial strain this would put on the Church Extension Fund.¹⁹⁹ One lone voice, Conrad Frey, disagreed in his own minority report. To his credit, Brenner allowed Frey's voice to be heard. Frey gave rationale for his dissent to both reasons of the majority. To the reason that the current dispute with the Missouri Synod required the Wisconsin Synod to devote more of its energies to preserving the truth, Frey replied, "The secretary does not feel that either he or the synod is compelled to make a decision between expanding into foreign missions and concentrating on the preservation of the truth. To him the disturbed condition of the Church is one reason we ought to expand into foreign heathen work at this time." To the financial reason, Frey acknowledged that the current home mission work was putting a strain on the Church Extension Fund. He argued that the current mission budget could handle the opening of a field in Northern Rhodesia because the cost would be no more than equivalent to one home mission during the first year and in subsequent years it would cost less.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹Foreign Missions Committee to General Synodical Committee and The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 14 May 1951, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁰⁰Foreign Mission Committee to General Synodical Committee and The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 14 May 1951.

One must admire Frey's willingness to speak up loudly and consistently enough to be allowed to present a minority report which would be heard by the entire synod convention which would be meeting in August 1951. Frey's emphasis on mission work is not surprising. He was the son of Immanuel P. Frey, who had been a mission explorer in Colorado in the late 1930s.²⁰¹ Until 1950, he had served Our Savior's, a congregation in the Detroit area that had been a mission congregation and was in the same Southeastern Conference of the Michigan District as Wacker and Hoenecke. Frey had a gift for statistical analysis and administrative work. He had produced the 1949 survey on manpower issues requested by the General Mission Board. In 1950, he had accepted the call to serve as the president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary and later he would serve as president of Dr. Martin Luther College.

The 1951 Synod Convention

The stage was set for another showdown at the next convention. The General Synodical Committee had spent four hours discussing both the majority and minority reports of the Foreign Missions Committee. Various motions were presented, defeated, rescinded, and amended. What finally prevailed was support for the majority report. An important side note is that the General Synodical Committee had heard about the request to send one or more pastors overseas as civilian chaplains to serve the many WELS members in the military. This request was forwarded to the General Mission Board.²⁰² The General Mission Board did not mention Africa at all in its

²⁰¹See the previous chapter.

²⁰²Minutes of the General Synodical Committee, 23-24 May 1951, 10, box 01, Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives. Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* says that the General Synodical

May meeting, but the board did appoint a committee to investigate sending civilian chaplains overseas and the board agreed to meet in New Ulm at the same time and place as the synod convention.²⁰³ The board's initial report to the convention only mentioned in passing that the Foreign Missions Committee had presented its findings to the General Synodical Committee.²⁰⁴ By this time, the film, "Africa Still Calls," a ninety-minute film about the potential in Africa, using footage and interviews recorded by Hoenecke from the exploratory trip, had been making the rounds in the synod for about a year and was generating interest and offerings.²⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Hoenecke and Wacker prepared a condensed version of their Africa report.

The day before the convention opened, the General Mission Board met at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm. The first item of business was Africa. Wacker presented a "brief but comprehensive report." Two seminary professors presented a plan to give financial assistance to the "Bleckmar Mission." This was tabled for later discussion. Information was given concerning work in Japan. A committee of five men was appointed to "formulate definite foreign mission

Committee agreed in principle with Frey's minority report, 172. The minutes do not indicate that, but rather state that the motion prevailed "to refrain from entering into this type of mission work at this time."

²⁰³Minutes of the General Mission Board, 18-24 May 1951 (no pagination), box 01, folder 005, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁰⁴*Proceedings of the Thirty-first Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 8-15 August 1951, 30.

²⁰⁵In "The WELS Forty-niners," Hoenecke relates that over \$18,000 was received in offerings connected to the showings of this film. This was more than enough to cover the costs of the exploratory trip. There are several letters from Hoenecke to Brenner in the Brenner collection that detail costs of producing the film, planned showings, the need for additional copies because the original copies were wearing out, and offerings that were being received. In one letter (Edgar Hoenecke to John W. O. Brenner, 21 February 1950, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives), there is a handwritten note from Hoenecke asking Brenner if he had seen the 1947 Northwestern College film. He remarked that he heard it was excellent. It is also interesting that the "Africa Film Committee" consisted of Hoenecke, Wacker, and Conrad Frey.

resolutions.”²⁰⁶ The committee worked over the two-hour lunch break and returned with resolutions to call two missionaries to Africa and two missionaries to Japan. The men in Japan would work with the Spiritual Welfare Commission²⁰⁷ to also serve military personnel in Japan and Korea. The synod should budget \$70,000 for these new ventures. The secretary of the General Mission Board was instructed to be ready to present these resolutions to the convention “in case the necessity presents itself.”²⁰⁸

In his opening report to the convention, Brenner made no mention of the Africa report or the decision of the General Synodical Committee. However, he had an interesting remark. “In many of the matters that will come before us, our vote will be the expression of our purely human judgment, and in such matters two faithful Christians may disagree. It is only natural that the majority resolution must prevail, and they of the minority will in true brotherly love submit to it and give their honest support to the measure.”²⁰⁹ Clearly, Brenner was anticipating a certain level of contentiousness.

²⁰⁶Minutes of the General Mission Board, 7-14 August 1951 (no pagination), box 01, folder 005, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁰⁷The Spiritual Welfare Commission, although under the auspices of the General Mission Board, had a separate budget. Its task was to serve Wisconsin Synod military personnel. It organized the mailing of letters and devotional books, attempted to get the names of WELS military personnel to local “contact” pastors who lived near bases, and, when necessary, called full time chaplains to serve larger bases. The Spiritual Welfare Commission’s 1951 synod convention report noted that Pastor Luther Voss was serving in the area of Camp Rucker in Dothan, Alabama, *Proceedings of 1951 Convention*, 64-65.

²⁰⁸Minutes of the General Mission Board, 7-14 August 1951.

²⁰⁹*Proceedings of 1951 Convention*,” 10-11.

The convention heard both the majority report and Frey's minority report of the Foreign Missions Committee. The General Mission Board was at the ready with its resolutions which would carry out the minority report. The convention floor committee tasked with addressing the resolutions recommended some alterations. The floor committee agreed that the synod should enter Northern Rhodesia with two missionaries. The committee also agreed that the synod should begin work in Japan, but that only one man should be sent to Tokyo and that he should be called by the Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission for the purpose of caring for Wisconsin Synod military personnel and "to investigate the mission opportunities in Japan."²¹⁰ This last phrase was altered by the convention, presumably to ensure that the primary work of the man would be related to the Spiritual Welfare Commission which was calling and funding him but that mission work would still be a secondary part of his work. The altered resolution set up the priority of work for the man who would be called to Japan. The convention approved the altered resolution.

The Wisconsin Synod had committed itself to world mission work. This is remarkable when one considers that the synod was on the front edge of numerous building projects at the campuses in Watertown, New Ulm, Saginaw, and Mobridge.²¹¹ In addition, the doctrinal disputes with the Missouri Synod were increasingly taking up attention, energy, and time. Yet, the push to begin work in Africa came from Conrad Frey who was the new president of

²¹⁰*Proceedings of the 1951 Synod Convention*, 54.

²¹¹By 1953, over \$1.7 million had been spent on buildings since the end of World War II, *Proceedings of the Thirty-second Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 5-12 August 1953, 132. At the same convention, a special offering was authorized to raise over \$1,000,000 for additional building projects.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, one of those campuses where extensive building projects were taking place.

Getting Started in Africa and Japan

The 1951 synod convention was not even adjourned when the General Mission Board took actions to start enacting the synodical resolutions. Wacker was appointed to head a three-man committee to prepare an agenda to discuss the many details of getting started in Africa. In addition, the secretary of the General Mission Board was directed to inform the Spiritual Welfare Commission that “they are to call a man for our work in Japan.”²¹² A good portion of the October board meeting was spent on various matters pertaining to the Africa mission: exactly where to go in Northern Rhodesia, since the “Hook of the Kafue” region had been given to a different church body; the philosophy that the Africa mission should have the goal of an indigenous church and how the mission might proceed to meet that goal; details like missionary furloughs and furnishings for the missionaries in Africa; and the election of an Africa Executive Committee with Wacker as the chairman.²¹³ Wacker and his committee had also sent a two-page letter to the Conference of Presidents two weeks before the meeting detailing what kind of men would be best suited to serve as the missionary team in Africa. They recommended two experienced men, one older with at least ten years of parish experience and one younger with several years of experience. They suggested that the men be mechanically-minded and an

²¹²Minutes of General Mission Board, 7-14 August 1951.

²¹³Minutes of the General Mission Board, 15-17 October 1951 (no pagination), box 01, folder 005, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

outdoors-types who could handle both fishing pole and gun. They should be married and if the wife was a nurse, that would be desirable.²¹⁴ Shortly after the meeting, the first two calls were issued.

A few days after the meeting, the Spiritual Welfare Commission issued the call to Pastor Fred Tiefel, who was serving in Spokane, Washington, to be the first Wisconsin Synod missionary in Japan.²¹⁵ He accepted and by the end of February was in Japan. He got right to work and was able to send a report in time for the General Mission Board's meeting in 1952. He was beginning language training and was told it would only take him about six months to learn the language. He was already carrying out Bible instruction with fifteen Japanese. At the meeting, the General Mission Board recommended that Pastor Tiefel's wife join him as soon as possible.²¹⁶ After Pastor Tiefel was informed of this decision, he sent a twelve-page letter detailing what he felt was necessary both for language study (it would take three to five years to gain fluency) and for buildings (a sizable home on a large lot for future growth of the mission). He also spoke about the tension he was experiencing between serving the military personnel and

²¹⁴Wacker, Engel, Westendorf to Conference of Presidents, 20 September 1951, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

²¹⁵Bruce Becker, Mark Freier, and Mark Henke, "Praising His Grace: The History of the Wisconsin Synod in Japan, 1957-1982, Book I (1943-1957)," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1982), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/302/Japan1BeckerFreierHenke.pdf>.

²¹⁶Minutes of General Mission Board, 12-13 May 1952 (no pagination), box 01, folder 006, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

reaching out to the Japanese people. Nevertheless, it was clear that work was getting done and the exploratory work in Japan was progressing.²¹⁷

Meanwhile, the Africa mission was not progressing as quickly. Wacker's committee gave a four-page report to the districts for their conventions during the summer of 1952.²¹⁸ The report reviewed the synod decisions that led to the efforts to begin work in Africa. It laid out the philosophy of an indigenous church with the optimistic goal that within ten years the only support needed would be "white workers." It gave some broad procedures for how to reach that goal. And it reported that six calls had been issued to this point. Four had been declined and two men were currently considering the call to be missionaries to Africa. Both men would decline those calls. It got to the point where the committee sent out a general letter to all the pastors of the synod requesting names for these missionary calls.²¹⁹

There was clearly ongoing tension about Africa, especially as the calls continued to be declined. In early June, after reading the General Mission Board reports, Brenner wrote to Karl A. Gurgel, the General Mission Board chairman. He expressed very bluntly, "So far as I am concerned, I favor Japan before Rhodesia." He did not feel that the synod was in a financial

²¹⁷Fred Tiefel to Spiritual Welfare Commission and Japan Committee, 29 May 1952, box 01, The WELS World Mission Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives (note: The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan is not sufficiently organized to identify folder numbers).

²¹⁸*Report to the Eight Districts of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, June 1952, 32-35. Typically, each district had its own convention in the even numbered years (while the synod met in convention in the odd numbered years) to hear reports and react to the synod's work. Every pastor, male teacher, and a lay representative from each congregation are still expected to attend these district conventions.

²¹⁹Wacker, Mennicke, Fischer to Wisconsin Synod Pastors, 3 October 1952, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

position to do both, but he did say that the board would have to make the decision on how to proceed.²²⁰

Despite objections from President Brenner, the General Mission Board, at its October meeting, decided to continue proceeding with starting a mission in Northern Rhodesia. The minutes quote directly from Wacker's report to the board.

We have opportunity to begin work not only on the most peaceful continent but in the most tranquil area on that continent. We are pointed to fields which the churches of N. Rhodesia have not penetrated and to which they are urging us to go. We would be privileged to work in a land in which a government, friendly to Christian mission, is sponsoring a subsidized development that gives promise to the hope of establishing an indigenous and self-supporting church. The land is rich, the climate healthy, and the country in its infancy. Where can we point to a field that offers more physical advantages? Add to these the important factor that we would be dealing with pure pagans who have already largely shed their tribal beliefs but have not yet been converted to some form of organized religious idolatry. Here is, indeed, a rare opportunity for a synod that has acquired only a beginner's license in heathen mission work.²²¹

The board resolved to continue the work of establishing a mission in Northern Rhodesia, as decided by the 1951 convention, despite "the circumstances which have until now retarded the progress in opening the mission field in Northern Rhodesia."²²²

Those circumstances were primarily the lack of anyone accepting the call to go to Africa. By the board's May meeting, that had changed. Pastor Albrecht Habben, pastor in Hastings, Nebraska, had accepted the call. In addition, Otto Drevlow, who had just completed his seminary

²²⁰John W. O. Brenner to Karl A. Gurgel, 7 June 1952, box 01, folder 003, The John W. O. Brenner Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

²²¹Minutes of General Mission Board, 9-16 October 1952, 1-2, box 01, folder 006, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

²²²Minutes of General Mission Board, 9-16 October 1952, 3.

training at Bethany Lutheran Seminary,²²³ had accepted an assignment to go to Africa. Mr. Paul Ziegler, a layman from the Hastings congregation, was hired to serve the mission as a handyman and oversee the building projects which would be necessary. By the May meeting, Pastor Habben and Mr. Ziegler were already on the way to Africa and expecting to arrive on the continent by 1 June. The Drevlow's, Mrs. Habben, and Mrs. Ziegler were planning to leave on 20 July. Habben and Zieger would begin exploring five possible fields in Northern Rhodesia.²²⁴ The 1953 synod convention heard the encouraging report about the missionaries arriving in Northern Rhodesia and even heard details about two mobile house trailers that would be sent with the second group.²²⁵

The same convention heard a personal report from Pastor Fred Tiefel about the work in Japan.²²⁶ The convention decided that the efforts in Japan, which had begun primarily under the auspices of the Spiritual Welfare Commission and was primarily to be focused on serving military personnel, would now have the priority of mission work among the Japanese (while still serving military personnel) and that two men should be called to carry out this work.²²⁷ Reports

²²³In the 1950s, students attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were not permitted to be married. Students who were married, especially men who decided a little later in life to become pastors, attended either Concordia Theological Seminary, at the time located in Springfield, Illinois (now located in Fort Wayne), or Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. Drevlow was already married.

²²⁴Minutes of the General Mission Board, 18-20 May 1953, 8-9, box 01, folder 006, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

²²⁵*Proceedings of 1953 Convention*, 41-42.

²²⁶Unfortunately, details of this report are not included in the *Proceedings*.

²²⁷*Proceedings of 1953 Convention*, 50.

from Tiefel over the previous year certainly influenced this action. For example, in a letter to Gurgel and Brenner in August of 1952, Tiefel included letters from various Japanese college students with whom he was having Bible studies. One letter, written and signed by the ten members who were “being taught the Bible by Tiefel-san in a home-class at Yokohama,” pleaded with the Wisconsin Synod “from the bottom of our hearts (with our whole heart)” that the synod would soon start a church and school in Japan. The three letters Tiefel included all mentioned the need for Japanese young people to have a solid spiritual foundation because they felt adrift as a result of the aftermath of World War II.²²⁸ Such letters felt like the “Macedonian call” that some leaders of the Wisconsin Synod were seeking.²²⁹

A Cross: Tensions with the Missouri Synod

It was inevitable that the doctrinal tensions with the Missouri Synod, which had been brewing since the late 1930s and escalating during the late 1940s, should have an effect on the mission work of the Wisconsin Synod, both positively and negatively. From a negative standpoint, these doctrinal battles resulted in Tiefel’s early efforts being lost to the synod.

Already in his letter of 6 August 1952 to Gurgel and Brenner, Tiefel mentioned that he had protested to the Missouri Synod in June 1952 regarding open communion practices that he

²²⁸Fred Tiefel to Karl A. Gurgel and John W. O. Brenner, 6 August 1952, box 1, The Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

²²⁹For an excellent overview of Tiefel’s work see Ben Enstad, “God Opens a Door in Japan, 1951-1956” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 2008), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1381/EnstadJapan.pdf>.

had observed.²³⁰ In a twelve-page handwritten report he sent to the Japan Committee ahead of the October General Mission Board meeting, he emphasized that the practices of unionism going on in the other churches doing work in Japan was a reason for the Wisconsin Synod to be committed to mission work in Japan. “Due to our peculiar position in the Synodical Conference, we have been exercised in the defense of doctrinal purity, both as to its essence and its terminology. Such a presentation of the doctrine is desperately needed in Japan at the present time.”²³¹ Tiefel himself was defending the position of the Wisconsin Synod to the Missouri Synod missionaries in Japan. He spent nearly two pages of his six-page letter to the Japan Committee detailing his presentation of a paper on the church and church fellowship and the reaction of the missionaries. He felt that this was “perhaps the most important function of your missionary in Japan in the interest of God’s Kingdom at the present time.”²³²

While Tiefel might have felt that defense of the WELS doctrinal position was a primary task, he was certainly engaged tirelessly in mission work. At the General Mission Board meeting in May 1954, it was reported that Tiefel was continuing his language studies, instructing Japanese university students who were also helping him translate the Gausewitz catechism into

²³⁰Tiefel to Gurgel and Brenner, 6 August 1952.

²³¹Fred Tiefel to Walter T. Maier, 21 September 1952, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives. Maier was the chairman of the Japan Committee.

²³²Fred Tiefel to Wilbur F. Dorn, 11 November 1953, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives. Dorn had been elected chairman of the Japan Committee earlier in 1953.

Japanese,²³³ and that he had purchased a home.²³⁴ A year later, the catechism translation, as well as a number of other Bible study materials, had been published, twenty-three students were in Bible instruction, three people had been confirmed and two baptized, the first worship service had been held, and a second home had been purchased.²³⁵ The 1955 convention heard this news about the progress of the Japan mission, as well as the fact that Tiefel and some of his students were working on indexing over 3,000 biblical and theological terms and “correctly translating the original meaning into Japanese.”²³⁶ This last item was felt by Tiefel, and even experienced Missouri Synod missionaries, to be especially important for the long term work. Tiefel also reported that he had completed twenty-seven essays on the teachings of the catechism which were also being translated into Japanese.²³⁷

Work was hampered, however, by the fact that no one was accepting the call to be the second missionary. In its report to the districts in 1954, the Japan Committee noted that Pastor

²³³The “Gausewitz” catechism was the catechism produced by the Wisconsin Synod in 1917 and revised numerous times, as late as 1953. It was referred to as the “Gausewitz” catechism because Pastor Carl Gausewitz, a key Wisconsin Synod leader in the first three decades of the 20th century, was the author of this exposition of Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*.

²³⁴Minutes of the General Mission Board, 17-19 May 1954 (no pagination), box 01, folder 007, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

²³⁵Minutes of the General Mission Board, 9-10 May 1955, (no pagination), box 01, folder 007, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

²³⁶*Proceedings of the Thirty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 10-17 August 1955, 42.

²³⁷Fred Tiefel to Wilbur F. Dorn, 11 October 1955, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collections: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

Herbert Birner had declined the first call because “he felt that age and the difficulty of becoming proficient in the language was sufficient reason for returning the call.”²³⁸ A year later, it was reported that seven men had declined the call and the situation was described as “desperate.”²³⁹

The confluence of these seven men declining the call, the resolution of the 1955 convention to postpone a decision on the termination of fellowship with the Missouri Synod until a recessed convention could be held in 1956,²⁴⁰ and then the decision of that recessed convention to “hold in abeyance” the resolution to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod because a “ray of hope” was evident²⁴¹ was a turning point in Tiefel’s attitude toward the Wisconsin Synod. Up until this point, his concerns over doctrinal aberrations had been directed solely at the Missouri Synod. Now they were directed at the Wisconsin Synod for its slowness to terminate fellowship.

²³⁸*Report to the Nine Districts of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, June 1954, 26. Pastor Birner died in 2018 at the age of 102. One has to wonder if he felt that he was too old or too young. At the time he received the call, he was 36 years old, but he had just been married the year before.

²³⁹*Proceedings of 1955 Convention*, 42.

²⁴⁰*Proceedings of 1955 Convention*, 86. The reason for postponing a decision was that the Missouri Synod had not met in convention since the early summer of 1953. Therefore, the Missouri Synod had not had the opportunity to officially respond to concerns that had been raised at the Wisconsin Synod’s 1953 convention. The Missouri Synod would not meet again until the early summer of 1956. That is why the decision was made to wait with a final decision.

²⁴¹*Proceedings of the Twentieth Biennial Convention of the Western Wisconsin District, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 16-19 July 1956, 52-61. The *Proceedings* of the recessed convention were printed in the *Proceedings* of the various district conventions which were also held that summer.

This can be seen in Tiefel's correspondence and reports before and after the summer of 1956. Already in April of 1955, Tiefel was speculating on why so many calls were being declined.

Until Synod takes some decisive action, we would not be certain of a man's doctrinal position. I think that we have been delaying action too long. I also think that the liberal ideas of Missouri have taken their toll in our circles. If the second man were not certain of his doctrinal position, it would work tragically for our mission work here in Japan. Is the Lord, by causing so many calls to be returned, perhaps indicating to us that we should make up our collective mind and take a stand publicly through action at home, before we go out into the wide world to make propaganda among others?²⁴²

In May, he wrote extensively to Pastor Wilbur Dorn, the chairman of the Japan Committee, about the challenges that the unionism of the Missouri Synod was presenting for the Wisconsin Synod's work in Japan.²⁴³ He especially pointed to the Japan Lutheran Hour, which was being supported by all Lutheran bodies working in Japan except the Wisconsin Synod, as a problem. Names received because of the Lutheran Hour radio broadcast were being referred to the other Lutheran church bodies but not to the Wisconsin Synod. Tiefel mentioned that he actually lost two members of his Bible class because of this issue.²⁴⁴

²⁴²Fred Tiefel to Wilbur F. Dorn, 8 April 1955, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collections: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁴³In the context of the historic confessional Lutheran stance of the Synodical Conference, "unionism" occurs when there are joint fellowship activities between churches or church bodies where no doctrinal unity exists. Since the early 1940s, the Missouri Synod had increasingly been engaging in such joint fellowship activities with Lutheran church bodies with whom the Missouri Synod was not as yet in doctrinal agreement. Such activities included what was going on in Japan.

²⁴⁴Fred Tiefel to Wilbur F. Dorn, 16 May 1956, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collections: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

In September, however, Tiefel wrote to the pastors of the Pacific Northwest District, highly critical of the Wisconsin Synod's decision to wait with terminating fellowship. He encouraged the district to adopt a "state of confession" over against the majority in the Wisconsin Synod and "request meetings with the majority in order to attempt to convince them that they have not upheld the honor of God's Name and His doctrine."²⁴⁵

By this time, Richard Seeger, a 1956 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, had accepted the call to Japan. In addition, the 1953 convention decision to divide the General Mission Board into two boards, one for home missions and one for foreign and heathen mission, had been implemented in 1955, with Edgar Hoenecke as the chairman of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions. In the fall of 1956, the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions was setting policies for what would now be a two-man team serving in Japan. One statement gives a clue as to how some of Tiefel's correspondence was being viewed by the board. "All missionaries are to be asked to weigh carefully any opinion on the Mission they may express in their letters."²⁴⁶

The situation very quickly deteriorated. By November 1956, Tiefel had forwarded to Dorn a letter from two of the confirmed members of the Japanese mission and his own

²⁴⁵Fred Tiefel to Pacific Northwest District, 14 September 1956, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collections: Japan, WELS Synod Archives. "State of confession" ("in statu confessionis") is a term for an official protest in a matter of doctrinal disagreement. It is usually the step that precedes dissolving of fellowship. Tiefel was writing the Pacific Northwest District because that is the district where he had been last serving before accepting the call to Japan and had retained his membership in that district as a missionary. Even today, WELS foreign missionaries can choose which district to retain membership.

²⁴⁶Minutes of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, 16 October 1956, 2, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

evaluation of their letter and of the situation in Japan. Their letter and Tiefel's evaluation pointed out problems with the Missouri Synod in the areas of Boy Scouts and the Japan Lutheran Hour. At the conclusion, the request was made not to send the second missionary at this time, even though they recognized the need for another missionary and had been praying for one for quite some time.²⁴⁷

This came as a surprise, especially to Hoenecke and President Oscar J. Naumann, who had been elected in 1953 when Brenner retired from the presidency. A meeting of the Executive Committee of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Mission was held on 17-18 January 1957. Dorn tendered his resignation for health reasons. It is clearly evident that Dorn's health problems were a cause in the situation catching others by surprise. His health had prevented him from responding to correspondence and reporting to Hoenecke and others the growing concerns Tiefel was expressing in reports to Dorn. The letter from the Japanese Christians and Tiefel's evaluation were discussed. Both appeared "to interfere with the matter of a divine call."²⁴⁸ It was decided to summon Tiefel for a face-to-face meeting as soon as possible. A cable was sent to Tiefel stating that a mandatory meeting was necessary as soon as possible. It was also decided to send Naumann, Hoenecke, and the new Japan Committee chairman, who would soon be Harry Shiley, to make an on-site visit of the Japan field after Easter in 1957.

Tiefel was able to get back to the States in time for meetings to begin on 30 January 1957. The minutes of the meetings that spanned fourteen hours over two days cover nearly

²⁴⁷Fred Tiefel to Wilbur F. Dorn, 15 November 1956.

²⁴⁸Minutes of the Executive Committee of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, 17-18 January 1957 (no pagination), box 01, The Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

eleven single-spaced pages. The meetings were clearly contentious. Aside from the doctrinal disputes, it seems that there were some problems with the spending of money by Tiefel on the mission field. But the main thrust of the meetings dealt with Tiefel's interpretation of Romans 16:17,²⁴⁹ the synod's decision to "hold in abeyance" a decision to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod, and his unwillingness to have Seeger sent to Japan at this time. According to Tiefel, once an individual or group was identified as a false teacher, one must immediately avoid them. In fact, Tiefel admitted that he had suspended altar and pulpit fellowship with the Missouri Synod already in 1952.²⁵⁰ He also continued to state that it would be confusing to the Japanese Christians if a man sent to Japan was representing the majority view of the Synod, while Tiefel sided with the minority. It was expressed to Tiefel that perhaps he spent too much time and energy instructing the Japanese on the matter of intersynodical disputes. The end result was that Tiefel tendered his resignation and then withdrew his resignation upon request of the committee. He was encouraged to speak to trusted brothers in the ministry, especially Professor Edmund Reim, the seminary president who had advocated for the synod to terminate fellowship in 1955 but was now willing to show greater patience with the Missouri Synod because of some signs of hope.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹"I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17 NIV).

²⁵⁰Minutes of the Executive Committee of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, 30-31 January 1957, 4, box 1, The Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁵¹Minutes of the Executive Committee of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, 30-31 January 1957, 9-11.

The group reconvened on 6 February. This meeting consumed over six hours and the minutes run almost seven pages, single-spaced. Nothing new was said, except that Pastor M. J. Witt, the district president for the Pacific Northwest District who had also been in attendance at the January meeting, expressed his support of Tiefel's position and spoke in his defense. The result was Tiefel tendered his resignation. He planned to return to Japan but he would no longer be serving as a Wisconsin Synod missionary nor would he be in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. The committee, acting on behalf of the entire board, held in abeyance acceptance of his resignation until the synod convention in August. They did this to "show forbearance for a man and his wife in a foreign land, show concern for them."²⁵² Seeger and his family would still be sent to Japan, but he would be initiating a new mission. The minutes read that "the assignment is difficult, but he has the Lord's promise to sustain him."²⁵³ The committee of Naumann, Hoenecke, and Shiley would still make their visit to Japan in April and attempt to sort out the issue of the property which had been purchased by Tiefel for the Japan mission. Obviously, the synod wanted the property back for use by Seeger.

While one wishes this would have been the end of the story, it was not. Tiefel was writing to other groups in the synod, spreading the news of the meetings in Milwaukee, his resignation, and the Japan mission's termination of fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod.²⁵⁴

²⁵²Minutes of the Executive Committee of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, 6 February 1957, 7, box 01, The Edgar Hoenecke Papers, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁵³Minutes of the Executive Committee of the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, 6 February 1957, 7.

²⁵⁴For example, Fred Tiefel to The Lutheran Ladies Aid, Redeemer Lutheran Church, Hettinger, North

This was causing some lay people to question the actions of the leadership.²⁵⁵ Some pastors had misinformation about what had transpired. Such misinformation needed correcting.²⁵⁶ Attempts were made by individuals to get Tiefel to reconsider.²⁵⁷ Meanwhile, preparations continued for the Japan visit and concerns were raised about how to handle the matter of the property because Tiefel was listed as the owner in accordance with Japanese law.²⁵⁸

When Naumann, Hoenecke, and Shiley arrived in Japan in late April 1957, they came having already informed Tiefel that they desired a meeting with him at 10:00 AM on April 26.²⁵⁹ They also desired to meet with the Japanese Christians on that day.²⁶⁰ Both responded with letters indicating that such meetings would be fruitless.²⁶¹ Tiefel accused the synod of

Dakota, 27 February 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁵⁵For example, Norman Gurath to Japan Mission Board, 18 March 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁵⁶Edgar Hoenecke to G. Barthels, 27 February 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁵⁷Harold Eckert to Fred Tiefel, 4 March 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives. Eckert was pastor at St. Jacobi in Milwaukee and was chairman of the Board of Trustees.

²⁵⁸Edgar Hoenecke to Harold Eckert, 13 March 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁵⁹Harry Shiley to Fred Tiefel, 4 March 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁶⁰Harry Shiley to Hirosuke Oshima and Fukuo Shigeta, 4 March 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁶¹Hirosuke Oshima to Naumann, Hoenecke, and Shiley, 8 April 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives. Fred Tiefel to Naumann, Hoenecke, and Shiley, 9 April 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

disobedience to Romans 16:17 and added a quote from 2 John 5, 6, 9-11 at the end of the letter.²⁶²

Considering these written responses, it is not entirely surprising what transpired when Shiley, Hoenecke, and Naumann arrived in Tokyo. The day before the scheduled meeting, Shiley phoned Tiefel to confirm the appointment. Tiefel said he was unavailable because he would be visiting the hospital. He then went on to say that he did not feel a meeting was necessary because he had already made his statement, and nothing had changed. When Shiley requested the opportunity to visit the property, Tiefel said he would only deal with someone from the synod's Board of Trustees, since that board had responsibility for property. Shiley informed him that President Naumann was a member of the Board of Trustees and gave him the phone. The gist of their conversation was that Tiefel refused to speak to Hoenecke, refused to allow anyone to visit the property, and hung up on Naumann.²⁶³ They drove by the property the next day, rang the bell outside the gate numerous times, but no one answered.

It is also not entirely surprising that Tiefel took the stance that he did. First of all, he had served in the Pacific Northwest District. This district, under the leadership of District President

²⁶²“And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love... Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work” (2 John 5, 6, 9-11 NIV).

²⁶³*Proceedings of the Thirty-fourth Convention of the Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 7-14 August 1957, 39-40.* It is fascinating that the details of this affair were reported on the floor of a synod convention and recorded in the official *Proceedings*. However, there appears to have been misinformation and rumors circulating throughout the synod, so the synodical leadership wanted the facts and details made public.

M. J. Witt, had taken a stance against the synod's delay in terminating fellowship with the Missouri Synod to the point that Witt left the Wisconsin Synod at the 1957 synod convention.²⁶⁴ Secondly, Tiefel saw firsthand in Japan the false teaching and unionistic practices of the Missouri Synod and felt conscience-bound to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod missionaries in Japan. Thirdly, the illness of Pastor Dorn and his failure to communicate with the larger General Mission Board about Tiefel's concerns and misgivings exacerbated the problem. Finally, Tiefel was isolated in a foreign land. To be sure, there were Missouri Synod missionaries present in Japan. But considering the disagreements between the two synods and the unionistic actions of the Missouri Synod missionaries which Tiefel had observed, he found no companionship among them. Having a team of missionaries would have allowed for brotherly discussion and encouragement. It seems that Tiefel often felt like a lone voice of truth.

When the whole situation was reported to the 1957 synod convention, a special floor committee was tasked with studying and evaluating what had happened. The committee noted the unfortunate circumstances of Dorn's illness, Tiefel's aggressive and uncharitable attitude regarding intersynodical affairs, and "the extreme discourtesy of Missionary Tiefel in not receiving the visiting committee." But the committee also noted that there was a failure on the part of the Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions to understand Tiefel's position, especially considering his isolated position, and that the reports of the Japan Mission Board and the Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions given at the convention showed "a degree of inconsideration over against Missionary Tiefel." This was, no doubt, born of frustration in trying to deal with

²⁶⁴*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 145.

him. The committee suggested (and the convention approved) that more charity continue to be shown in the situation and that efforts continue to be reconciled with Tiefel.²⁶⁵ Efforts were made over the next several months, but they proved unsuccessful. Tiefel never turned the property over to WELS but continued an independent mission. In addition, Tiefel refused to give copies of the materials he had produced and translated.²⁶⁶

Starting Over in Japan

However, all was not lost. After being rebuffed in their attempts to visit Tiefel on 26 April, Naumann, Hoenecke, and Shiley were able to meet the Seeger family as they disembarked at Yokohama on 27 April. They were on hand to assist the young missionary and his family get through customs after a stormy journey and get started on looking for a place to live. Their presence in person and their support were important for restarting the synod's work in Japan, especially since Seeger was young and he would be the lone WELS missionary in Japan for the foreseeable future. Even though he was young, he had already demonstrated mature judgment in dealing with the situation and was enthusiastic about the work.²⁶⁷ He immediately began intensive language study and Bible classes in English.

²⁶⁵*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 70-72.

²⁶⁶Becker, Freier, Henke, "Praising His Grace" (Book I), 32-33.

²⁶⁷*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 40-41.

He was not the lone missionary for long. The synod had resolved to send a second missionary as soon as possible.²⁶⁸ After the October meeting of the Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, the Japan Committee got to work calling a second missionary. Only three names were offered by the district presidents, but another name surfaced as a distinct possibility: Richard Poetter. He had grown up in the Wisconsin Synod in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, and taught for four years at St. John's Lutheran School in Fairfax, Minnesota. But then he decided to become a pastor and attended Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Springfield, Illinois. During his final year, he volunteered for special service in Japan and had been serving there as a missionary of the Missouri Synod since 1951.²⁶⁹ He was also married to a Japanese woman. But he had been growing dissatisfied with the doctrinal direction of the Missouri Synod. A face-to-face interview took place with Shiley and Professor Heinrich Vogel of the seminary who had been one of Poetter's teachers in his youth. They were able to determine that he was indeed upset with the changes in the Missouri Synod and desired to leave for conscience's sake.²⁷⁰ A call was issued to Poetter and in April he accepted the call.

He arrived in August 1958. Shortly after his arrival, Mr. Ryuichi Igarashi, a layman gifted in languages, joined the mission team. Efforts began with producing literature, organizing

²⁶⁸*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 41.

²⁶⁹Enstad, "God Opens a Door in Japan, 1951-1956," 3.

²⁷⁰Richard Poetter to Harry Shiley, 15 November 1957, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

and incorporating the mission, and determining where to focus their work. Poetter's experience and advice urged them to each work in separate areas but close enough to each other for easy consultation and encouragement.²⁷¹ This differed from Tiefel's plan to have both missionaries live in houses on the same property and focus their work more intensively. The decision made with the restart allowed the Wisconsin Synod's mission to gain solid footholds in several locations.

Conclusion

The decision of the 1945 synod convention to enter overseas mission work was a bold one considering world events, the memory of the financial challenges felt during the Depression, and the shortage of manpower. Debates over whether or not this was the right time to begin this kind of mission work, both for financial and philosophical reasons, had to be resolved. There were pressing needs in other areas of the synod's work, especially at the various ministerial education schools. Ongoing financial and manpower shortages threatened to derail the efforts in Japan and Africa before they even got started. The intersynodical tensions took their toll in energy exerted, disagreements, and even the loss of the initial work in Japan. These tensions in the church over doctrinal matters were even offered as a reason to delay beginning overseas mission work.

Yet, despite these various crosses, the Lord of the church allowed the Wisconsin Synod to begin overseas mission work and even used those crosses for the good of his kingdom work.

²⁷¹David Clark, David Nottling, and William Runke, "Praising His Grace: The History of the Wisconsin Synod in Japan, 1957-1982, Book II (1957-1971) (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1983), 3-5, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1064/Japan2ClarkNottlingRunke.pdf>.

The delays in getting started allowed the synod to debate these issues and grow in its desire to carry the gospel to the far corners of the world. The delays also provided open doors in both Japan and Northern Rhodesia which might not have been opened or even considered, if the decision to enter overseas work had been quicker and smoother.

The intersynodical tensions, while costing the Wisconsin Synod the five years of work done by Fred Tiefel, had some benefits. First, it brought back to the Wisconsin Synod Richard Poetter, who would serve in Japan until his retirement in 1991. Already in 1953 while he was a Missouri Synod missionary, Poetter had written to Karl Gurgel, the General Mission Board chairman, detailing the urgent need for missionaries in Japan and encouraging the Wisconsin Synod to send more missionaries.²⁷² Little did he know that within five years, he would be a Wisconsin Synod missionary in Japan. Not only did the Wisconsin Synod gain a missionary with experience in Japan and knowledge of the language and culture, but also a man whose doctrinal stance was unquestioned because he left the Missouri Synod for doctrinal reasons. In his letter accepting the call, he wrote, “The purity of faith, confession, and practice of the brethren in the Wisconsin Synod particularly has drawn me to serve you in Japan. A church which is in the world but not of the world is needed in Japan and everywhere. May the Holy Spirit fill our synod with Pentecostal zeal to sacrifice to bring the Gospel in ever increasing measure to the heathen in their darkness.”²⁷³

²⁷²Richard Poetter to Karl Gurgel, 25 July 1953, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

²⁷³Richard Poetter to Harry Shiley, 12 April 1958, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

This zeal was evident in fruits. By 1959, the mission in Northern Rhodesia had four missionaries serving twenty-seven preaching stations and one organized congregation in the city of Lusaka. Nearly 3,000 Africans were being reached with the gospel every week. Two men were in the beginning stages of preparing to be pastors. Plans were accelerating to begin medical work.²⁷⁴ While there were some challenges with field personnel in 1959, by 1961 this had stabilized and by 1963, work had expanded into neighboring Malawi.²⁷⁵

The work in Japan was obviously hindered by the restart. What is interesting is that, despite the deterioration of the situation with Tiefel, the work of promoting the mission in Japan continued. A six-page brochure entitled “West Meets East,” detailed the work being done by Tiefel, gave thanks for what he was doing, and encouraged support. Because it mentioned the assignment of Seeger, it had to be produced no earlier than the summer of 1956.²⁷⁶ While Tiefel’s efforts were lost to the Wisconsin Synod, they were not lost to the wider church. When the Church of the Lutheran Confession was officially founded in 1960, one of its first decisions was to support Tiefel’s Japanese mission. While Seeger had to begin his work without the help that could have been offered by Tiefel’s experience and translation projects, Poetter provided the

²⁷⁴*Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, 5-12 August 1959, 64-67. The medical work resulted in the founding of the Central Africa Medical Mission in 1961. The history of the medical mission is told well by Ernst H. Wendland and Theodore A. Sauer, “*Let Us Do God: Forty Years of Medical Missions in Central Africa, 1961-2001*” (self-published, 2001).

²⁷⁵This history is told well in Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People*, 175-221. The problem with field personnel revolved around personality conflicts, especially with Missionary Habben. When he accepted a call back to the States, the situation improved.

²⁷⁶“West Meets East: A Wisconsin Synod Service Man Reports on Our Japanese Mission,” Board for Information and Stewardship—Wisconsin Synod, box 01, The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan, WELS Synod Archives.

guidance and direction needed. By 1959, Seeger and Poetter had stationed themselves in promising areas and were hard at work gathering people to hear the Word of God.²⁷⁷

The erosion of fellowship with the Missouri Synod, while it presented a cross, also presented opportunities. After the break with the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod gained the reputation as a church body that stood on the truth. This resulted in invitations from small Lutheran groups in other nations to help them reach out with the gospel.²⁷⁸ Those invitations have continued to the present day, most notably and most recently in Vietnam.

These small and precarious beginnings have, by God's grace and the power of the gospel, produced astounding results. From the first discussions and exploration in the late 1940s, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Zambia and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Malawi today number over 32,000 communicants.²⁷⁹ Currently, eight expatriate missionaries work alongside approximately sixty national pastors. The number of expatriate missionaries in Zambia and Malawi has decreased steadily in recent years, down from a high of twenty-one in 2000. This demonstrates that the original plan of establishing self-supporting, indigenous church bodies remains the goal. It has just taken a little longer than Arthur Wacker envisioned. The number of national pastors has increased steadily because of the ministerial education program that was established in 1963. A Bible Institute in Lilongwe, Malawi, provides the first level of training

²⁷⁷ *Proceedings of the 1959 Synod Convention*, 76.

²⁷⁸ Otto, "How the Break with the Missouri Synod Moved the Wisconsin Synod Forward in Christ," 8-9.

²⁷⁹ *WELS Statistical Report 2015*, 188. *WELS Statistical Report 2017*, 184. The most recent numbers for Malawi are from 2015.

and the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka, Zambia, provides the terminal training. Continuing education for the national pastors has been a hallmark of the work in Central Africa.²⁸⁰

From the restart in 1957, the Japan mission efforts have experienced slow growth. Already in his initial survey, Tiefel had pointed to factors in Japan that made mission work challenging in terms of outward success: the difficulty of the Japanese language; the influences of multiple Eastern religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism); the pressure of family that makes it challenging outwardly to confess Christianity; and the view that Christianity is “Western” and so becoming Christian is a repudiation of Japanese values.²⁸¹ Despite these factors, the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church-Japan is an independent, self-supporting church body consisting of 260 communicant members in six congregations and one preaching station served by three national pastors, one national vicar, and one expatriate missionary.²⁸²

From these early beginnings, enduring numerous challenges along the way, WELS has truly become a church body that strives to proclaim the good news of Jesus in all the world. As of this writing, WELS has forty-five expatriate missionaries serving overseas and on the Apache reservation in Arizona. These missionaries, together with other occasional advisors, mentors, and

²⁸⁰The author had the privilege of teaching ten national pastors for two weeks at the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka in 2014 as part of a higher-level continuing education program called “GRATSI” (Greater African Theological Studies Institute).

²⁸¹These were gleaned from an extensive, multi-part report filed by Tiefel as a result of his survey work. There is no date on the report, but it presumably was prepared in 1953.

²⁸²“Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference,” <http://celc.info/index.php/membership/member-churches/lutheran-evangelical-christian-church-japan/>.

support staff, work in forty foreign nations and the Apache reservation. Mission work is being explored in fourteen additional countries.²⁸³

²⁸³Current world mission statistics were provided by WELS World Mission personnel.

CHAPTER 4

MOVING INTO THE SUNSHINE STATES: CALIFORNIA AND FLORIDA

The postwar optimism and economic boom that allowed the Wisconsin Synod to pay off its debt and drove the synod to begin overseas mission work was also influencing decisions about where to expand mission efforts in the United States. As chapter two noted, the synod's mission efforts had been limited to the Dakotas, Montana, the Pacific Northwest (primarily in Washington, with one established congregation in Portland, Oregon, and a mission in Idaho), Nebraska, Colorado, Arizona, and, of course, the Midwestern states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Iowa, and Illinois. The synod was content to leave the other states to the larger Missouri Synod. The exception was Arizona, where a "gentleman's agreement" in 1909 between Wisconsin Synod missionary Gustav Harders and a Missouri Synod representative left Arizona to the Wisconsin Synod, because of its Apache mission already established, and left California to the Missouri Synod.²⁸⁴

During the war years and immediately after, the population of America became more mobile, and people were moving to the coasts, especially the sunshine states of California and Florida. Both states had seen their population nearly double between 1930 and 1950. California went from over 5.6 million to over 10.5 million people, while Florida's population increased

²⁸⁴Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 204-205. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 101. The Missouri Synod did not begin mission work in Arizona until 1930. Arizona was the last state the Missouri Synod entered. There is a packet of letters in a box containing documents of the Arizona-California District from 1910-1915 in German, with some cover letters in English from 1925 and 1931, debating the existence of the official status of the "gentleman's agreement." Nevertheless, the two synods, especially the Wisconsin Synod, operated as though this agreement had official status until the mid-1920s, when the Missouri Synod expressed interest in opening missions in Arizona and finally established a congregation in 1930. This issue deserves further investigation and translating the letters would be a worthwhile endeavor.

from over 1.4 million to over 2.7 million people. The growth continued during the 1950s, with California increasing by almost fifty percent and Florida increasing by nearly eighty percent.²⁸⁵ The availability of cheap land and the advent of air conditioning made Florida an increasingly desirable place to live. During the war, California's shipbuilding industry and other military production brought people to the state. The mild climate, especially in the coastal areas, kept them there. These were clearly ripe harvest fields for mission work, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The "gentleman's agreement" with the Missouri Synod was a moot point because the Missouri Synod had begun mission work in Arizona in the 1930s and the doctrinal tensions with the Missouri Synod was rendering continuing cooperation a questionable endeavor in the future anyway. But would the Wisconsin Synod enter these fields? Could the synod enter these fields at this time? The answer to both questions is "yes." By 1960, the synod had four established congregations and three exploratory fields in California served by five pastors. Florida boasted four congregations served by four pastors.²⁸⁶ This move into the sunshine states did not come without crosses to bear and obstacles to overcome.

A Cross: Synod Spending Priorities

As World War II ended, even though there were clear opportunities for mission work in various places throughout the country—and especially in growing regions like California and Florida—and even though the synod debt had been repaid and a surplus of over \$350,000 was in

²⁸⁵"Population of Florida state," <https://population.us/fl/>; "Population of California state," <https://population.us/ca/>.

²⁸⁶*Statistical Report for 1960*, 4, 12.

the synod treasury, there was no guarantee that a vigorous mission program into new states could ensue. There were other priorities for synodical dollars.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the campuses in Watertown, New Ulm, Saginaw, and Mobridge all needed major building projects. The Depression, war, and synod debt had halted all thoughts of building until 1945. With the end of the war, the synod embarked on a massive building program on these campuses that would not slow down until the mid-1970s. Every campus saw multiple new buildings. Between 1950 and 1975, the campus for Northwestern College and Northwestern Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin, was almost entirely rebuilt, with a new library-classroom building, chapel-classroom building, cafeteria-administration building, three new dormitories buildings, and a gymnasium. By 1975, the only building left older than 1950 was the 1912 gymnasium which had been remodeled into an auditorium and piano practice rooms. The New Ulm campus, which was the home to Dr. Martin Luther College and Martin Luther Academy, saw the construction of three dormitories, a library, a music hall, a gymnasium-cafeteria building, and extensive remodeling and additions to existing buildings. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, the prep school in Saginaw, was basically rebuilt between 1951 and 1976 with new dormitories, cafeteria, and classroom building. In Mobridge, South Dakota, Northwestern Lutheran Academy saw a new classroom building and gymnasium constructed in the 1950s. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, newly constructed in 1929, needed a new library, additional dormitory space, and an expanded cafeteria which were all constructed during the 1960s. Special funding efforts were carried out to help pay for these projects. These efforts also served to generate more interest in the schools and in ministry. For example, the 1957 synod convention marked the end of a special building collection that

received in excess of \$1.3 million, most earmarked for the new cafeteria, chapel/classroom building, and dormitory at Watertown.²⁸⁷ The high schools and colleges on the New Ulm and Watertown campuses were reporting strong increases in enrollment, while the Mobridge and Saginaw schools were at capacity. The Northwestern College report gives credit for the growing enrollment to the new buildings and “the publicity which the college received through the building collection.”²⁸⁸ Every campus was requesting additional staffing. The convention approved as many as six new professors over the 1957-58 biennium. With each new professor came the construction or purchase of a new home for the professor.²⁸⁹

The new overseas mission effort also had an impact on synod budgetary priorities. While the synod entered overseas mission work with the understanding that it would not cost more than one new home mission, expanded work far exceeded that amount. By 1957, the work in Japan and Northern Rhodesia had a two-year budget of nearly \$70,000. This exceeded the budgets of four of the ten home mission districts and was almost equal to two others.²⁹⁰

While these were sizable synodical budgetary priorities—fiscal realities which any thoughts of aggressive home mission expansion had to contend—there was also the matter of

²⁸⁷*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 168-169.

²⁸⁸*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 74-75.

²⁸⁹*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 81-82. It was the policy that each professor would be provided a home to live in near (or even on) the campus. This has changed in recent years, although most of the professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary still live in homes constructed on the campus.

²⁹⁰*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 166-167. Each synodical district has its own home mission board. At this time, the exception was Nebraska. Because of the extensive mission work being done in Colorado, there was a separate Colorado Mission District. The congregations in Colorado were part of the Nebraska District, but the mission work in the state was overseen by a separate board.

spending on the local level. Some of the same factors which contributed to a building boom on the ministerial education campuses also led to a building boom in many local parishes, especially many of the large, well-established Midwestern congregations. Building projects had been put on hold during the Depression and war years. Now those building needs were being met. New schools were being established and larger school buildings were being constructed as the front end of the Baby Boomer generation hit the grade school years. While a thorough analysis of how many congregations engaged in building projects during this timeframe would be an almost herculean effort, anecdotal evidence points to a building boom. For example, First German in Manitowoc did major renovations to its sanctuary in 1950 and constructed a school addition with three classrooms and a gymnasium in 1957.²⁹¹ During the 1950s, North Trinity in Milwaukee added on to its church building, constructed a new parsonage, and opened a new school with a new six-classroom school building.²⁹² Atonement in Milwaukee added classrooms to their school building twice during the 1950s and built a new church building which could seat over 600 in 1959.²⁹³ Mount Lebanon in Milwaukee constructed a new sanctuary and parsonage in 1957.²⁹⁴ St. John's in Wauwatosa, a suburb of Milwaukee, constructed a new school building in

²⁹¹The author served as pastor at First German from 1996-2001. The sanctuary renovation actually involved putting in a full basement, restrooms, and kitchen beneath the 1873 sanctuary. Up until that time, there was basically a crawl space.

²⁹²North Trinity was the author's home congregation as a child. His father, Carl T. Otto, was one of the pastors from 1973-1995.

²⁹³Atonement was about 1.5 miles south of North Trinity.

²⁹⁴Mount Lebanon was about two miles southwest of North Trinity.

1958.²⁹⁵ Trinity in Watertown, Wisconsin, constructed a large new church building in 1953.²⁹⁶

St. Paul's in Saginaw, Michigan, built a large new school building and gymnasium in 1960.²⁹⁷

The list could go on.

What perhaps gives more concrete evidence about the money being spent by local congregations can be found in the statistical report category of "other charities." This figure represents contributions a congregation made to anything outside of money spent for local budgetary needs (ongoing operation of the church and school, if the church operated a school) and the synod. The synod wide figure jumps from \$148,836 in 1950²⁹⁸ to \$779,714 in 1959.²⁹⁹ To be sure, giving as a whole increased during this time period. While total communicant membership in the synod grew by over seven percent from 1950-1959, contributions for congregational use increased from \$6,012,130 in 1950 to \$11,354,737 in 1959, while contributions for the work of the synod grew from \$1,326,959 in 1950 to \$2,452,350 in 1959. Even adjusted for nearly twenty-one percent inflation over the course of the decade, these figures represent phenomenal growth in contributions to the overall work of the church.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵The author's great-uncle, Karl J. Otto, was the pastor at St. John's at the time.

²⁹⁶The author often attended this church during his college days.

²⁹⁷The author's father served as one of the pastors of St. Paul's from 1995-2018.

²⁹⁸*Statistical Report for 1949-1950*, 33.

²⁹⁹*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1959*, 69.

³⁰⁰The inflation figure was taken from the online "US Inflation Calculator," <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

While the contributions to the local congregations and the synod both increased by well over eighty percent, the contributions to “other charities” increased by over 420 percent. Undoubtedly, the general increase in giving was evidence of both improved economic conditions of the members of the synod and better stewardship education which had already begun in the 1930s during the push to pay off the synod debt. But why the overwhelming increase in giving to “other charities”?

Although there is no designation for these “other charities,” during the 1950s five area Lutheran high schools were established: Fox Valley Lutheran High School in Appleton, Wisconsin (1953), Manitowoc Lutheran High School (1956), Luther High School in the La Crosse, Wisconsin, area (1957), Lakeside Lutheran High School in Lake Mills, between Madison and Watertown (1958), and St. Croix Lutheran High School in St. Paul (1958). These were all “heartland” areas of the synod. Besides significant start-up costs and initial building projects, there was the ongoing support of these new high schools which would have fallen under the “other charities” category. In addition, the old Lutheran High School, which had been supported by Milwaukee area congregations of both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, split in 1955 to form Wisconsin Lutheran High School supported by Wisconsin Synod congregations and Milwaukee Lutheran High School supported by Missouri Synod congregations. A new large high school campus was constructed for Wisconsin Lutheran High School on the far west side of Milwaukee. In my opinion, these new area Lutheran high schools explain the sharp increase in giving to “other charities” in congregations which were directly supporting an area Lutheran

high school.³⁰¹ Clearly, it was not only the synod that was facing issues of budget priorities. Many local congregations had additional financial obligations.

A Cross: Manpower Challenges

As was noted in chapter two, there was already a manpower shortage starting in about 1945 that was hampering home mission expansion. Pastor Conrad Frey was engaged by the General Mission Board to study the manpower situation. His survey, finished in 1949, showed that the synod needed about fifteen graduates per year just for replacement purposes. This number, he pointed out, was even larger considering the number of pastors serving in non-parish calls.³⁰² Judging from enrollment figures at Northwestern College and the prep schools, he predicted that the seminary would graduate about twenty-five men a year beginning in 1952.³⁰³ He was incorrect. The number of graduates did not reach that total until 1955 when thirty-one men graduated. During the first half of the 1950s, the graduating classes averaged seventeen.

In addition, when Frey did his analysis in 1949, he could not have anticipated the synod entering world mission work in the early 1950s, the establishment of five new area Lutheran high schools which usually had at least two pastors on their faculties, the increased faculties at the

³⁰¹For example, in 1950, St. Paul's in Appleton, Wisconsin, recorded \$350 given to "other charities," *Statistical Report for 1949-1950*, 17. In 1959, St. Paul's gave \$18,624 to "other charities," *Statistical Report for 1959*, 35. Undoubtedly, this increase was a result of St. Paul's support of Fox Valley Lutheran High School in Appleton. While St. Paul's might be an extreme case, substantial increases in giving to "other charities" can be found in the congregations in the Manitowoc area, La Crosse area, the Twin Cities, and the Milwaukee area where area Lutheran high schools had been founded or reorganized.

³⁰²Frey, "Man-Power Survey," 2.

³⁰³Frey, "Man-Power Survey," 3.

ministerial education schools which also took several pastors out of parish calls, and the loss of a number of pastors because of the intersynodical clash with the Missouri Synod. All of this helps to explain why there was such a small increase from 631 pastors in established parishes or home missions in 1950 to 662 in 1959 and 637 in 1960 with thirty-one vacancies.³⁰⁴ By way of comparison, there had been 569 parish and home mission pastors in 1940, and the decade of the 1940s had seen seminary graduating classes averaging only twenty per class, while the 1950s averaged nearly twenty-three.

Frey's report was distributed to all the delegates at the 1949 synod convention. Frey offered nine suggestions for alleviating the shortage of pastors.³⁰⁵ The obvious one was to recruit more candidates for ministry from the families of the synod and ensure that the educational institutions would be ready for increased enrollments. As was mentioned above, this was already in motion. Another suggestion was to be more intentional about encouraging Wisconsin Synod men who were studying at Concordia Seminary in Springfield to accept assignments into the Wisconsin Synod. As of Frey's writing, there were thirty-two Wisconsin Synod men in attendance at Springfield. He gave several suggestions regarding home mission policies: consider consolidating fields that were small and close together; avoid planting new churches too close to another one; exercise restraint in starting too many new home missions, at least for the next few

³⁰⁴The loss of pastors in 1960 can be explained by the discontent some felt by the perceived lack of action by the Wisconsin Synod in the doctrinal controversy with the Missouri Synod. The Church of the Lutheran Confession was founded in 1960 by pastors who had left the Wisconsin Synod. Fredrich mentions that in 1965, the CLC had sixty-two pastors, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 207. Presumably, most of these pastors were from the Wisconsin Synod.

³⁰⁵Frey, "Man-Power Survey," 8-9.

years. He even suggested looking into a “mission by mail” program. The General Mission Board had been discussing this idea for several years. A report was generated while the board was meeting during the synod convention. The report acknowledged that there were excellent materials available, such as Sunday school lessons, confirmation class lessons, and sermons, and encouraged the synod to continue developing new materials. The final point of this report is interesting and shows awareness of the changing times. “We believe that today, with a radio in almost every home, television coming to the front, and the general unionistic tendencies, even in Lutheran circles, Mission by Mail should never take the place of personal mission work. It should rather be and remain the handmaid of the same.”³⁰⁶ In other words, despite the technological advances and because of the growing lack of concern for doctrinal integrity in the American church landscape, personal, face-to-face mission work still needed to be the norm.

Frey did not believe that the situation was at a critical stage yet. He thought that the shortage of pastors could be managed with “hard work, understanding, cooperation at every level and the exercise of wisdom and common sense.”³⁰⁷ In 1951, the General Mission Board heard a paper by one of its members, Pastor Arnold Mennicke, entitled, “Concerning and Extending Man Power in Our Department of Missions.” The minutes of the meeting gave this summary.

He emphasized the following points: diligence in prayer, more publicity in our church periodicals, a program of personal evangelism, more emphasis on parochial schools, a thorough course in the history of missions for those preparing for work in the church, opportunities should be given our students to gain actual experience in church

³⁰⁶Minutes of the General Mission Board, 2-7 August 1949 (no pagination), box 01, folder 004, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁰⁷Frey, “Man-Power Survey,” 9.

work, proper application of our present man-power, and the need of all the departments of Synod to work together with greater mission zeal.³⁰⁸

Several of Mennicke's suggestions were rather forward-looking. Many of today's seminary students, for example, have mission and evangelism experiences, often overseas, before arriving at the seminary or while they are studying at the seminary. The fact that both Frey and Mennicke were asked by the General Mission Board to address the issue of manpower indicates that it was a deep concern facing the Wisconsin Synod as it sought to make decisions about mission expansion to states where the population growth was exploding. Would there be pastors available to start new missions in California and Florida? Would the synod approve such expansion if it meant that established congregations had to endure lengthy vacancies?³⁰⁹

Beginnings in California

In 1950, the Missouri Synod could boast 250 congregations in California.³¹⁰ In a state with a population of 10.5 million people, this was not many. Already in 1944, requests had been received by synodical leadership from a WELS layman living in the Los Angeles area, Mr. Carl

³⁰⁸Minutes of the General Mission Board, 17-24 May 1951 (no pagination). The board intentionally met several extra days in order to hear and discuss several papers designed to help improve how the Wisconsin Synod was carrying out its mission program.

³⁰⁹WELS is currently facing a similar situation. Of the twenty-six graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 2018, one was assigned to serve on the Apache reservation. None were assigned to new home mission starts. But several were assigned to fill long vacancies at large, established congregations.

³¹⁰Charles E. Found, *The Cradle and the Crucible*, 75. See also Alex Groth, "Banding Together in Their Lord: The Effect of the LCMS-WELS Split on the Arizona-California District of the WELS," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 2010), 6-7, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1888/GrothLCMSWELSSplitAZCADistrict.pdf>.

Loeper.³¹¹ In 1945, the General Mission Board approved an exploratory team to conduct a survey in California.³¹² This “California Commission,” chaired by Pastor Frederick Knoll, the Arizona Mission Board chairman, reported a year later that “since there is so much money and man power needed in our established fields and that at least \$50,000 would be needed to do the ground work, they decided, for the time being, to defer the matter.”³¹³ The matter of California remained on the backburner until 1949. At that time, it was recommended to call two men to begin work in California and that \$9,000 be granted from General Mission Board’s Exploratory Fund for the first year.³¹⁴ Apparently, \$50,000 was not needed, at least not initially. The synod convention passed the General Mission Board’s budget and so approved the sending of two men into California.

It is remarkable how quickly the mission work developed after the synod gave approval. In October 1949, Pastor Victor Schultz, the new chairman of the Arizona Mission Board, reported that he had spent four days in California and had found ten promising fields.³¹⁵ Despite

³¹¹Frederick A. Voss, “The Mining of Souls in California: A Study of the WELS in the California Mission Field,” WLS Senior Church History Paper, 1982, 19-20, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1517/VossWELSCaliforniaMissionField.pdf>. This is an extensive treatment, numbering over one hundred pages and including pictures and maps. Mr. Loeper was a charter member of St. John’s in Tarzana and later served on the district mission board.

³¹²Minutes of the General Mission Board, 28-31 May 1945, 176.

³¹³Minutes of the General Mission Board, 16-21 May 1946, 195.

³¹⁴Minutes of the General Mission Board, 12-17 May 1949 (no pagination).

³¹⁵Minutes of the General Mission Board, 17-20 October 1949 (no pagination).

the manpower shortage, two men quickly accepted the calls to go to California: Pastor Armin Keibel, a 1944 seminary graduate who had been serving in Milwaukee, and Knoll, who had twenty-five years of experience as a missionary in Arizona and most recently had been serving in Tucson. They arrived in Los Angeles in February 1950 and quickly began survey work to determine where to establish mission congregations. By May, the General Mission Board was requesting an additional \$5,000 for the work in California and a map of Los Angeles was presented showing the locations of other Lutheran churches in the area.³¹⁶ In October, it was reported that two locations had been identified on the northwest side of Los Angeles: Tarzana and Mar Vista.³¹⁷ Tarzana was a rapidly expanding area that had grown from 800 inhabitants in 1940 to 10,000 by 1950. There were few churches operating in that area.³¹⁸ The Mar Vista area was more established and closer to the center of the Los Angeles, but it also was experiencing phenomenal growth, from about 11,000 in 1940 to 40,000 in 1950.³¹⁹ Loan requests were made

³¹⁶Minutes of the General Mission Board, 8-11 May 1950 (no pagination). Presumably, this is the map that is found in a section of the *Northwestern Lutheran Annual 1952* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1952) entitled, "Our Missions in Los Angeles," 34. The *Northwestern Lutheran Annual* was the annual "yearbook" of the Wisconsin Synod. In some of its earlier years, it included an extensive calendar of the Church Year, highlights of the synod's history, as well as a listing of every pastor and teacher of the Wisconsin Synod and all its churches. Up until 1962, it also included a list of every pastor, teacher, and congregation of the Missouri Synod. A special feature of some kind was also included in each *Annual*. The 1952 feature was this thirty-two-page section on the mission work in Los Angeles. It included background information on Los Angeles and many interesting pictures of Los Angeles and its landmarks. No author is listed, although Voss credits Keibel as the author. Since Voss had the opportunity to interview Keibel, that is probably a safe assumption.

³¹⁷By 1955, Mar Vista was annexed into Los Angeles proper.

³¹⁸"Our Missions in Los Angeles," 54.

³¹⁹"Our Missions in Los Angeles," 62.

in the amount of \$12,000 for the Tarzana group, led by Knoll, and \$15,000 for the Mar Vista congregation, led by Keibel.³²⁰

The loans were necessary because land had already been purchased for both locations. At Mar Vista, a plot of a little less than an acre was purchased for \$8,600 (a record high for the Wisconsin Synod at the time), with an adjacent half acre purchased shortly after for \$4,000. Keibel purchased another adjacent lot with his own money until the synod had the funds to purchase it. Plans for a chapel were quickly set in motion. Meanwhile, the first worship service of the Wisconsin Synod in California was held at a nearby storefront on Christmas Eve 1950 with twenty-four people in attendance. The first sanctuary for the newly established congregation, named Gethsemane, was dedicated on 24 June 1951. By the end of 1951, Gethsemane had twenty communicant members.³²¹ A year later that total was up to twenty-five with seven adult confirmations and 117 children attending the summer vacation Bible school.³²²

Knoll, working in the rapidly developing San Fernando Valley, was able to facilitate the purchase of property at an excellent location in Tarzana. The problem was finding a location to hold services until a chapel could be built. When nothing presented itself, a corrugated steel structure, which was being used as a bank, was quickly purchased, disassembled, moved to the property, and reassembled and remodeled. On 4 February 1951, the newly organized St. John's

³²⁰Minutes of the General Mission Board, 16-18 October 1950 (no pagination).

³²¹“Annual Report of the Arizona Mission District Mission Board, 1951,” 3, box 09, folder 338, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³²²*Statistical Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1951-1952*, 22.

in Tarzana dedicated this structure as its first church building. St. John's reported thirty communicant members and ninety-seven children attending Sunday school at the end of 1951.³²³ By the end of 1952, St. John's numbered forty-one communicant members.³²⁴

One factor that contributed to the rapid early developments of the Wisconsin Synod's expansion into California was the cooperation of the Missouri Synod. That was not always the case in other parts of the country. For example, in 1951 it was reported to the General Mission Board that the Missouri Synod had opened a mission in Mankato, Minnesota, a city that already had two large Wisconsin Synod congregations, a mission congregation, and a growing Norwegian Synod congregation.³²⁵ "Pressure caused our DMB [District Mission Board] and the Norwegian Synod to grant permission" for the Missouri Synod to begin a new mission in a city saturated with Synodical Conference churches.³²⁶ But in California, there was a cooperative spirit. Keibel recollected that the Missouri Synod pastors helped orient them to the Los Angeles area and even said that two missionaries would be insufficient for the field.³²⁷ Several years

³²³ "Annual Report of the Arizona Mission District Mission Board, 1951," 3.

³²⁴ *Statistical Report for 1951-1952*, 22.

³²⁵ The Norwegian Synod was a small group that, for doctrinal reasons, broke off from the 1918 merger of Scandinavian church bodies. It was part of the Synodical Conference. It was renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) in 1955. Today, the ELS is in fellowship with WELS. Mankato is the home for the ELS college and seminary, Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Theological Seminary.

³²⁶ Minutes of the General Mission Board Meeting, 8-11 May 1950 (no pagination).

³²⁷ Frederick Voss, "The Mining of Souls in California," 20-21. This cooperative spirit is also mentioned in "Our Missions in Los Angeles," 54; Groth, "Banding Together in the Lord," 7; and Found, *The Cradle and the Crucible*, 75.

later, a representative of the Arizona Mission Board wrote to a Missouri Synod mission executive about the future potential of Wisconsin Synod congregations in the San Francisco Bay area. He said that such efforts were not meant “to set up competition churches, but rather to begin missions which will complement the efforts of the sister Synods.”³²⁸ This cooperation is striking considering the growing doctrinal tensions between the two church bodies during the 1950s.

Steady growth continued in both congregations, although not without some challenges. Already in 1953, a rumor was circulating that a new planned freeway would cut through the property of St. John’s in Tarzana. This proved to be more than a rumor. The Arizona Mission Board acted quickly to authorize purchase of a new property and this was accomplished already in January 1954.³²⁹ The first property would not be sold until 1956 and a new church was dedicated on the new property in the summer of 1957. Despite the uncertainty and relocation, the congregation continued to experience growth. By the end of 1956, St. John’s numbered ninety-one communicant members with ninety-five children in Sunday school on a weekly basis.³³⁰

³²⁸R. H. Zimmermann to O. H. Reinboth, 2 December 1953, box 09, folder 336, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³²⁹R. H. Zimmermann to Karl Gurgel and H. H. Eckert, 26 January 1954, box 09, folder 336, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³³⁰*Statistical Report of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1957*, 4-5.

Gethsemane had plans from the very beginning to open a Lutheran school as part of its mission. Initially, the plan was that the school could open as early as the fall of 1952.³³¹ It took two years longer. In the fall of 1954, Gethsemane opened its school with twelve students in grades 1-4 and one teacher. Two years later, the number was up to thirty-five in grades 1-7 and the need for additional space was critical. In the spring of 1956, the General Board of Home Missions approved a loan of \$25,000 so that Gethsemane could build a new chapel and have adequate space for their growing school.³³² The new chapel was dedicated on 29 September 1957. By the end of 1957, Gethsemane numbered eighty-eight communicants. During the year, Pastor Keibel baptized twenty-one children.³³³ That would seem to indicate that young families were being attracted to Gethsemane and its growing school.

The Arizona Mission Board realized that additional manpower was needed for the growing opportunities in California. In 1953, the General Mission Board “encouraged further survey of more mission possibilities in California.”³³⁴ By the fall of 1953, a priority list was set. Another man would be called to the Los Angeles area where two locations looked promising. As funds became available, two men would be called to the San Francisco area.³³⁵ Calls for the third

³³¹“Our Missions in Los Angeles,” 64.

³³²Minutes of the General Board of Home Missions, 21-23 May 1956, 3, box 01, folder 008, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³³³*Statistical Report for 1957*, 4-5.

³³⁴Minutes of the General Mission Board Meeting, 18-20 May 1953, 7.

³³⁵Minutes of the General Mission Board, 12-14 October 1953, 7-8.

missionary in the Los Angeles began to be issued and declined. It was not until early 1956 that Pastor Gerhardt Marquardt of Schofield, Wisconsin, accepted the call. However, he was there less than a year when his previous congregation called him back. He accepted the call and returned to Schofield. By the end of 1956, Pastor Paul Heyn, who had served congregations in Michigan and Tucson, accepted the call and arrived in April 1957. As with Tarzana and Mar Vista, things proceeded quickly. A large house in Pomona was purchased in August to serve as a temporary worship and education space and housing for Heyn and his family. By November, land was procured for a future chapel which was dedicated on 30 August 1959.³³⁶ In the space of less than two-and-a-half years, a third congregation, Our Savior's, had been established in the Los Angeles area. At the end of 1959, Our Savior's had eighty-one communicant members.³³⁷

Work in Northern California was started at nearly the same time that a third missionary was added to the Los Angeles area. This work was started by the pastors who were serving in the Los Angeles area. Numerous requests for pastors and new missions were pouring in from various areas of Northern California, even as far away as Redding, a city over 200 miles north of San Francisco. Beginning in October 1957, Keibel and Heyn began making frequent visits to the San Francisco Bay area to serve Wisconsin Synod families. This was no small task. In an article for the *Northwestern Lutheran*, Heyn described the journey in terms that the Midwesterners of the Wisconsin Synod could more readily understand.

³³⁶This information was taken from the brief history of Our Savior's provided in the service folder for the dedication of its church building, 30 August 1959, California, Pomona, Our Savior's, Congregational Files, WELS Synod Archives.

³³⁷*Statistical Report for 1959*, 4.

If one of the pastors in Watertown, Wisconsin, would conduct his services on Sunday morning, then drive to Milwaukee and take a plane to St. Paul, Minnesota, where someone would meet him and take him to New Ulm for an evening service, you would say that would be fantastic, yet the same and greater distances were traveled in order to provide these people with Sunday services.³³⁸

In May 1958, the Arizona-California District Mission Board requested two men for the San Francisco area, one man for Orange County, and one man for San Diego.³³⁹ Orange County and San Diego would have to wait a few years.³⁴⁰ One man was approved in May 1958 and a second man was approved in October 1958. It would take until the summer of 1959 before Pastor Robert Hochmuth arrived after serving in Tucson for over ten years. He centered his work in Santa Clara and by the end of the year, Peace Lutheran Church in Santa Clara numbered twenty-five communicant members.³⁴¹ A second man, Robert Waldschmidt, arrived in early 1960 and began working in Belmont, closer to San Francisco. Meanwhile, a group of over 200 communicant members broke off from an American Lutheran Church congregation in Lodi, California, formed Christ Lutheran Church, and applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod.

³³⁸Paul Heyn, "Westward Ho!" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 46, no. 18 (30 August 1959): 280. Today, it takes a little over an hour to drive from Watertown to the Milwaukee airport, while it takes nearly two hours to drive from the St. Paul airport to New Ulm. One presumes that those drives would have been slightly longer in 1959.

³³⁹Minutes of the General Board of Home Missions, 19-20 May 1958, 4, box 01, folder 009, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁴⁰The Orange County area would be served by Heyn and Keibel and by 1960, a mission was established, King of Kings in Garden Grove. It would take until 1962 for services to be held in the San Diego area. Edgar Hoenecke, by this time the full-time executive secretary for world missions, flew from Phoenix to San Diego every weekend for the better part of a year to conduct services until Lowell Smith was assigned out of the seminary to serve the new congregation in San Diego, Reformation. The author served as a pastor at Reformation with Smith from 2001-2006.

³⁴¹*Statistical Report for 1959*, 4.

By the end of 1960, there were seven congregations or preaching stations numbering 632 communicant members.³⁴²

The expansion of mission work in California caused the need for some administrative changes. At the 1953 synod convention, after twenty-six years of applying for district status, approval was given for the formation of the ninth district of the Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States: the Arizona-California District. Pastor E. Arnold Sitz, long-time pastor at Grace in Tucson, was elected as the first president of the newly formed district at its founding convention in 1954. By 1960, there were enough congregations and pastors in California to warrant a separate California Conference. In 1961, approval was granted to form a separate California Mission Board because of the growing number of mission congregations in the state.³⁴³ That all of this occurred in the span of only eleven years is quite astounding. The expansion of mission work into California was used as a rallying cry of encouragement to continue mission expansion, as was evident in the closing paragraphs of “Our Missions in Los Angeles” in 1952.

California is the sixteenth state of the United States in which the Wisconsin Synod has opened missions...

The California missions represent the carrying out of practical mission considerations. In seeing this endeavor through, the Wisconsin Synod has created no risk, no incautious speculation; rather, it made the investment of a wise steward. A firm basis is being laid, and fruit has commenced to appear.

May the spiritual determination which inaugurated these two missions not burn out! May the visionary zeal of the mission boards to preach “Christ’s name among all nations” ever remain crisp! May the faithful endorsement of the congregation to “go...

³⁴²*Statistical Report for 1960*, 4.

³⁴³*Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 8-17 August 1961, 39-40.

and teach all nations” never flag! And may the prayerful, active flame of love in the soul of each of synod’s 214,000 members for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature on the face of the earth burn brightly to the end of time!³⁴⁴

A Cross: The Challenge of Going Farther Afield

California was not the only state under consideration for expanded mission work in the 1950s. With the increased mobility of American society after World War II, Wisconsin Synod members from the Midwest were relocating. This was the case in California where Wisconsin Synod members provided the “core” group for the new missions. As tensions with the Missouri Synod grew, some Wisconsin Synod members in these “saltwater” areas began requesting the Wisconsin Synod to open missions in order to serve their spiritual needs and reach out with the gospel into these growing communities.

This was especially true in Florida and Texas. Both states were destinations for Midwesterners for a variety of reasons. Midwestern companies were expanding in the south and relocating workers. Both Texas and Florida had several important military bases. In the case of Florida in particular, it was also becoming a preferred retirement destination for those wanting to escape the cold winters of the Midwest. Many of them were establishing second homes in Florida where they would live during the winter.

The General Board of Home Missions was receiving numerous requests to open missions in both Florida and Texas during the early 1950s. A request from Irving, Texas, was discussed as early as October 1952 and it was put into the hands of the Nebraska District Mission Board to

³⁴⁴“Our Missions in Los Angeles,” 64.

explore the potential for mission work in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area and report back the following May.³⁴⁵ At that May meeting, a motion was approved, in connection with the request to explore Irving, Texas, that “the General Mission Board ask Synod to clarify its policy with regard to the exploration of new fields by District Mission Boards.”³⁴⁶ That simple motion indicated a challenge facing any home mission expansion farther afield. It had been long-standing synodical policy to only establish new home missions in areas adjacent geographically to states in which the Wisconsin Synod was already established. Anything beyond that would need specific approval by the synod in convention.³⁴⁷ The question that the General Mission Board was wrestling with was this: Could a District Mission Board at least explore the possibility without synod approval? This was a pressing question because of the Irving, Texas, request, as well as requests from Florida and other states in the Deep South, well away from the geographical center of the Wisconsin Synod.

The issue was placed before a special floor committee at the 1953 synod convention. Their report sheds light on the challenge and controversy that would face the beginning of work in Florida. Perhaps what is most interesting is that the committee noted, “Just what the practice of the Wisconsin Synod in this matter has been in the past cannot be determined by this committee, because it does not have the necessary historical data, because it has happened so

³⁴⁵Minutes of the General Mission Board, 9-16 October 1952, 2, 4.

³⁴⁶Minutes of the General Mission Board, 18-20 May 1953, 10.

³⁴⁷There was no specific synod convention approval of the California missions needed because the Wisconsin Synod had been doing work in Arizona for over half a century.

infrequently in the past, and because it knows of no synodical resolution in the matter.”³⁴⁸

Therefore, the committee chose to ignore history and make some recommendations for moving forward. First, the synod in convention should specifically authorize any *establishment* of new mission work outside of the current geographical areas served by the Wisconsin Synod. The rationale given was that since initial costs of mission work in a new area were substantial, the synod in convention should have input as to the direction of its expansion, and that mission expansion into a new region of the country should be publicized and “could have a favorable psychological effect upon Synod itself.”³⁴⁹ However, the committee recommended that the General Mission Board should have a free hand in *exploring* any new areas for possible mission work. That is why the board had an “Exploration Fund.” Also, it would be difficult for the General Mission Board to request establishing new mission work without first exploring the area. The committee’s report made an important and, as it would turn out, somewhat contentious conclusion.

The practical result of this would probably be that we would continue to expand as we do now—within and along the edges of our present boundaries. At the same time, we would continue to leave out of consideration those areas of our nation that are experiencing the greater share of population growth, such as, by way of example, the San Francisco Bay area, the San Diego area, the Albuquerque area, Texas, and certain part of the deep South.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸*Proceedings of 1953 Synod Convention*, 48.

³⁴⁹*Proceedings of 1953 Convention*, 49. Perhaps the 1952 *Northwestern Lutheran Annual* with the feature, “Our Missions in Los Angeles,” was fresh in the minds of the committee members.

³⁵⁰*Proceedings of 1953 Convention*, 49. It is interesting that the resolution mentions the San Francisco and San Diego areas since the synod was already engaged in work in California. Perhaps the resolution wanted to make sure that the synod approved any large expenditures for the establishment of new missions in expensive areas.

The committee's report was approved by the convention. What it did not take into consideration is that there might be a difference of opinion and procedure between the General Board for Home Missions³⁵¹ and a district mission board.

This became clear already in 1954. Although the General Mission Board did not authorize an exploratory trip to Florida, the Michigan District Mission Board decided to carry one out on its own. Mr. Louis Ott, a member of St. Bartholomew's in Kawkawlin, Michigan, and a member of the Michigan District Mission Board, had been wintering in St. Petersburg, Florida, for several years and was one of many voices appealing to the Wisconsin Synod to do mission work in Florida.³⁵² His urging, coupled with the general mission zeal of the pastors on the Michigan District Mission Board, led to an exploratory trip carried out by Ott and the three pastors of the Michigan board: Alvin Baer of St. Stephen's in Adrian, Michigan; Kenneth Vertz of Salem in Owosso, Michigan; and Harold Zink of St. Paul's in Stevensville, Michigan. Their respective congregations raised the money for the three men to meet Ott in Florida and explore the state in Ott's car from 8-17 February 1954. Part of the Michigan District Mission Board report to the May meeting of the General Mission Board included a report of over two pages, single-spaced, detailing their 1,400-mile exploration of the state. The four-man exploratory team

³⁵¹The 1953 convention split the General Mission Board into two separate boards: the General Board of Home Missions and the General Board of Foreign and Heathen Missions.

³⁵²The story of the beginning of the Wisconsin Synod's mission work in Florida has been told by at least three different senior church history papers. Mark Gieschen, "The First Four Florida Missions of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1980), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1839/GieschenFirstFourFloridaMissions.pdf>. David Furno, "How Synod Started in Florida" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1985), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1692/FurnoFlorida.pdf>. Jason Hacker, "The Story of Louis Ott and the WELS in Florida" (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 2005), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2078/HackerOttFlorida.pdf>.

began in St. Petersburg and covered both coasts of Florida, as well as crossing through the Orlando area and checking out a couple of other regions that were hotbeds for winter residents. Based on their exploration, the Michigan District Mission Board presented three recommendations: 1) survey the congregations of the synod to find out how many families are vacationing or had relocated to Florida; 2) call two men who could begin work in St. Petersburg and Bradenton, Florida, as well as continue exploring other possibilities; 3) request the necessary funds to make this mission a reality and ask the synod to adopt this Florida venture as its own.³⁵³

This unauthorized exploration caused some tension. A series of letters between Baer and newly elected General Mission Board chairman, Karl Gurgel, illustrate this. On 22 February 1954, Baer wrote Gurgel to assure him that no commitments to do mission work were made, although he said that the synod would be “foolish... not to begin mission work in Florida.” He also asked about the possibility of requisitioning for some of the expenses of the trip since the expenses were more than was raised by the three congregations.³⁵⁴

Gurgel responded somewhat tersely. He reminded Baer of a phone conversation in which Baer assured him that the congregations would cover the expenses. He then said that standard policy was for a two-man exploratory team. Therefore, he recommended that he not requisition funds for this trip. “When we as God-called custodians spend other Christians’ money for the

³⁵³“Mission Survey of Florida,” report of Michigan District Mission Board to General Mission Board Meeting, 17-19 May 1954, 7, box 01, folder 009, The Michigan District (WELS) Mission Board Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁵⁴Alvin Baer to Karl Gurgel, 22 February 1954, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

building of the Kingdom, we must be careful to do it only with the proper authorization; otherwise our communicants might be hindered in their joyful giving to the Lord.” He concluded with the hope that the General Mission Board would place proposed mission work in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Texas, Tennessee, and Florida, high on the priority list.³⁵⁵ In a brief and rapid response, Baer expressed amazement and offense at Gurgel’s letter and the misunderstanding it demonstrated. He then suggested that written correspondence was not the best way to settle this matter. It would be better to “discuss it frankly at the meeting in May.”³⁵⁶ In his response, Gurgel said he failed to see where he caused personal offense, but a face-to-face discussion would be the best.³⁵⁷

This whole exchange illustrates the tension over policies and procedures when it came to mission work. Gurgel felt that the Michigan men had overstepped their authority in exploring a new state so far afield from the current boundaries of WELS mission work without approval of the General Mission Board. The Michigan District Mission Board could not understand why the General Mission Board and the synod as a whole would not jump at this obvious open door for mission work. Such tension is also evident from the minutes of the May meeting of the General Mission Board. After hearing the Florida survey report, any recommendation for action was given to a committee which would present funding priorities to the entire board for consideration

³⁵⁵Karl Gurgel to Alvin Baer, 23 February 1954, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁵⁶Alvin Baer to Karl Gurgel, 25 February 1954, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁵⁷Karl Gurgel to Alvin Baer, 3 March 1954, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

later in the meeting. Late in the evening on the second day of meetings, the priority list came up for discussion and \$25,000 for Florida was proposed. The minutes reveal that, in fairly rapid succession, a motion to not enter Florida carried. That motion was then rescinded. Then a motion to remove Florida from the priority list was passed. And then the meeting adjourned for the day at 10:45 PM. The next morning a motion was carried to seek the approval of the districts in their summer conventions to send a man to St. Petersburg and bring the whole matter to the attention of the General Synodical Committee which had the authority to act between conventions.³⁵⁸

While minutes of a May meeting of the General Synodical Committee are not available, evidently the calling of a man to Florida was authorized because the Michigan District Mission Board's report to the 1954 Michigan District Convention mentions that one man would be called. But the underlying tension is evident in this quote from the report.

The members of the Board resent the inferences, not all of which were in jest, that the trip was an expense-paid vacation in Florida. St. Paul explored mission fields too on expense money provided by the Church in Philippi, and no one today thinks he was on vacation. One does not relax and rest, while traveling 1400 miles in eight days and checking city after city for mission possibilities. The survey was made in all earnestness.³⁵⁹

The report also noted that no money had been allocated for land or a chapel, although Ott already, with his own money, had an option on land for the site of a church in St. Petersburg.

Tensions between Gurgel, Baer, and Harold Eckert, the chairman of the Board of Trustees, continued and even escalated after the arrival of the first pastor in Florida, William

³⁵⁸Minutes of the General Mission Board, 17-19 May 1954 (no pagination).

³⁵⁹Report of the Michigan District Michigan Board to the Michigan District Convention, 1953-54, 10, box 01, folder 009, The Michigan District (WELS) Mission Board Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

Steih. Throughout the fall of 1954, extant correspondence indicates that there was a dispute over salary and car allowance. Since the Florida mission was initially placed under the supervision of the General Mission Board, requisitions had to go from Steih directly to Gurgel, and then to Eckert. From Baer's perspective, he felt that Steih's needs were not being met, especially his need for an adequate car allowance because Steih had to do extensive travel. In a response to Baer, Eckert wrote, "If everything had been done decently and in order the resolution of the Board would have been no different. I know the expression, 'decently and in order,' will again raise your ire, but I cannot help it. You can appear to build a case for yourself on paper which appears orderly, but it is not, even if ignorance of Synod's rules and regulations becomes part of the plan."³⁶⁰ Steih did what he could to douse the flames of discord and even requested that the car allowance not be requisitioned.³⁶¹

Throughout the spring of 1955, there continued to be tensions because the St. Petersburg mission had purchased a lot with a parsonage and was already in the process of constructing a chapel, all without the approval of the General Mission Board or the Board of Trustees. This also raised concerns about disorderliness because these actions came as a surprise to Gurgel.³⁶² In an effort to get everyone on the same page, air grievances, and move forward in a God-pleasing manner, Gurgel called for a meeting on 4 May 1955 in Milwaukee with the entire Michigan

³⁶⁰Harold Eckert to Alvin Baer, 2 December 1954, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁶¹William Steih to Karl Gurgel, 24 January 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁶²Karl Gurgel to Alvin Baer and Harold Eckert, 15 April 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

District Mission Board, the executive committee of the General Mission Board, and the executive committee of the Board of Trustees. The minutes of this meeting, which was undoubtedly tense, are succinct and indicate that all parties must have come to some agreement on these matters. Three resolutions were adopted. First, the General Mission Board chairman was directed to ask the synod convention formally to receive the Florida mission. Second, the work in Florida should be placed under the supervision of the Michigan District Mission Board. Gurgel felt that the General Mission Board did not have the synodical authority to oversee directly any individual mission. Finally, the issue of the parsonage and chapel in St. Petersburg should be discussed in August after the synod convention.³⁶³ The goal was to avoid a public airing of these disputes on the convention floor. Such a public airing could “disturb the wonderful blessings which the Lord has given to our Synod.”³⁶⁴

Beginnings and Early Growth in Florida

Despite the tensions and disagreements about orderliness, procedures, and policies regarding the Florida mission effort, those blessings were being seen already in September 1954 with the calling of Pastor William Steih to serve as the missionary to Florida. Steih had been serving at St. Bartholomew’s in Kawkawlin, Michigan, the home church of Louis Ott. It only made sense that when he arrived in Florida, he would concentrate his efforts initially in St.

³⁶³Minutes of Special Meeting of Executive G.M.B. and Board of Trustees, and Plenary Board of Michigan D.M.B., 4 May 1955, box 06, folder 208, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁶⁴Karl Gurgel to Alvin Baer and Harold Eckert, 15 April 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

Petersburg because that is where Ott had his winter home and where he already had an option on land.

Steih wasted no time in gathering families, exploring new areas, and finding a suitable place for worship until a chapel could be constructed. On 9 January 1955, in a public school building, the first Wisconsin Synod worship service was held in Florida with an attendance of sixty-seven people, including two pastors who were on vacation.³⁶⁵ While vacationing and wintering Wisconsin Synod members from the Midwest helped bolster attendance in the winter months, a congregation in St. Petersburg had already been organized under the name “Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church” with twelve charter members on 22 December 1954. Several more members joined in the following weeks.³⁶⁶ The founding of Faith was formalized in April and a request was made for membership in the Wisconsin Synod.³⁶⁷

Growth was rapid. The Michigan District Mission Board could report that at the end of 1955, Faith stood at thirty-two communicant members and an average attendance in worship of fifty-two.³⁶⁸ The congregation more than doubled in size in the next year, growing to seventy-

³⁶⁵William Steih to Karl Gurgel, 24 January 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁶⁶Alvin Baer to Karl Gurgel, 11 January 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁶⁷William Steih, William Boeder, and Karl Mueller to Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 27 April 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁶⁸Michigan District Mission Report, 1 April 1956, box 01, folder 009, The Michigan District (WELS) Mission Board Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

two communicant members and an average of sixty-eight children attending Sunday school.³⁶⁹ Only one adult confirmation and one adult baptism were reported in this first year, so most of the members were already Lutherans, either Wisconsin Synod members who had relocated or Missouri Synod members who did not have a Missouri Synod congregation nearby or were dissatisfied with the doctrinal direction of the Missouri Synod. However, what enabled a congregation to be gathered so quickly was that a chapel was constructed quickly. The reason that Gurgel was surprised that a parsonage had already been purchased (although the General Mission Board minutes of 18-19 October 1954 reported this fact³⁷⁰) and that chapel construction was already beginning was that Michigan District congregations and individual members were giving gifts and providing loans for the new chapel and property. Steih reported an individual who gave a loan of \$8,500.³⁷¹ A total nearing \$15,000 was gathered from Michigan District congregations for the mission efforts in Florida, specifically the needs of Faith, in the spring and summer of 1955.³⁷² The chapel was dedicated on 24 July 1955. A two-story addition with Sunday school rooms, a kitchen, and a fellowship area was added two years later. The

³⁶⁹*Statistical Report of The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1955-56*, 10-11.

³⁷⁰Minutes of the General Mission Board, 18-19 October 1954, 4, box 01, folder 007, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁷¹William Steih to Karl Gurgel, 21 March 1955, box 10, folder 392, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁷²“Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1955-1980,” Florida, St. Petersburg, Faith, Congregational Files, WELS Synod Archives. The author of this anniversary publication is unknown and there are no page numbers. Pastor Daniel Gieschen, the chairman of the General Board for Home Missions in 1980, wrote a one-page introduction and reports the dollar amount raised by Michigan District congregations.

congregation became self-supporting in July 1958. By that time, the membership had increased to 150 communicant members. That year, there were fourteen infant baptisms, indicating that young families were part of the congregation. In addition, there were eleven adult confirmations and three adult baptisms reported.³⁷³

Steih did not limit his work to Faith in St. Petersburg. While he was establishing Faith, he was doing exploratory work in other communities in the greater Tampa Bay area. He began services in Tampa on a Sunday evening in December 1955. His efforts were showing enough promise that at the May 1956 meeting of the General Board for Home Missions, the Michigan District Mission Board requested the services of a seminary student for the summer, as well as three additional missionaries. One missionary was granted.³⁷⁴ This approval indicated that the synod had taken ownership of the Florida mission effort and saw the potential.

Not surprisingly, the second pastor called to serve the new Florida field was an experienced mission pastor from Michigan, James Vogt, who had been serving Mount Olive, a mission congregation in Bay City, Michigan, since his graduation from the seminary in 1942. Vogt had accompanied Steih on an initial weeklong exploratory trip to Florida after Steih had accepted the call, so the calling of Vogt was natural.³⁷⁵ Vogt quickly got to work serving the

³⁷³*Statistical Report for 1959*, 12.

³⁷⁴Minutes of the General Board for Home Missions, 21-23 May 1956, 2.

³⁷⁵In an unpublished essay entitled, "Bringing the Son to the Land of Sunshine," Vogt relates some interesting information about the world, national, and Florida events at the time he accepted the call, as well as some interesting personal details about the call he received to Florida and his arrival there as a missionary. Some of the details about his early mission work are gleaned from his recollections in this essay. For example, Vogt mentions that one of his members from Mount Olive, Gus Natsis, wintered in Tampa and welcomed the family by helping

group in Tampa, which would form Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in July 1957. Mount Calvary would be served as a dual parish, first by Vogt and then by Pastor Howard Kaiser, a 1952 seminary graduate who arrived in Florida in the Fall of 1958 after serving at Grace, a mission congregation in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Mount Calvary finally received its own pastor when the General Board for Home Mission approved a fourth missionary in October 1958. Pastor Edward Renz, another experienced Michigan District pastor, arrived in September 1959. The delay in getting a permanent resident pastor clearly slowed the growth and development of Mount Calvary. Yet, at the end of 1960, the congregation numbered thirty-eight communicants.³⁷⁶ However, Mount Calvary would not have its own chapel until April 1962.

While Vogt initially worked in Tampa and served the Mount Calvary group, he soon branched out to the Bradenton area, south of Tampa Bay, and relocated there in June 1958. Services began in Bradenton already in February 1957. Peace Lutheran Church in Bradenton was officially organized on 2 March 1958 with fourteen people. By the end of the year, Peace had twenty-five communicant members.³⁷⁷ In October 1958, in an effort to jumpstart the process,

them get acclimated to the Tampa area and taking them to a Greek restaurant, James Vogt, "Bringing the Son fo the Land of Sunshine," 11, folder "FLORIDA—Early History of WELS Missions and Congregations," Congregational Files, WELS Synod Archives.

³⁷⁶*Statistical Report for 1960*, 12.

³⁷⁷*Statistical Report of The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for 1958*, 10.

Louis Ott facilitated the purchase of land for Peace's first church building.³⁷⁸ A chapel was dedicated on 30 October 1960. By that time, the congregation had fifty-three communicants.³⁷⁹

The fourth Florida congregation was founded by Kaiser through his work in the Largo/Seminole area northeast of St. Petersburg. Steih conducted the first service in the area on 3 August 1958 and Kaiser took up the work a couple of months later. Bay Pines Lutheran Church was officially organized in January 1958. By the end of 1960, land had been purchased, a parsonage had been dedicated, and the congregation numbered fifty-seven communicants.³⁸⁰

Conclusion

In some respects, it is amazing that any extensive home mission expansion occurred in the Wisconsin Synod during the 1950s. The tensions between the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod were peaking. These doctrinal discussions consumed time and energy from pastors, congregations, and at conventions. Some pastors and congregations left the synod.

Building projects at the ministerial education campuses, as well as the founding of five new area Lutheran high schools and the construction of a new campus for Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, placed budgetary constraints on both the synod's budget and the budgets of local congregations. Building projects on the local level also contributed to financial challenges. In late 1958, the Board of Trustees put out a plea for congregations to meet their

³⁷⁸Vogt, "Bringing the Son to the Land of Sunshine," 15.

³⁷⁹*Statistical Report for 1960*, 12.

³⁸⁰*Statistical Report for 1960*, 12.

commitments to the synod budget because there was a deficit of \$353,251. If this deficit continued, the planned building projects at the ministerial education schools would suffer.³⁸¹

The growth of the faculties at the ministerial education schools, the founding of the new area Lutheran high schools, the new foreign missions in Japan and Africa, and the loss of pastors because of the doctrinal controversy were leading to a shortage of workers that could have hindered the start of new home missions in places like California and Florida. Building projects on the synod school campuses and more concerted efforts at recruitment were showing promise, but projected graduating classes from the seminary were still insufficient to meet the needs of the synod.

Despite these various crosses, the Wisconsin Synod continued its mission and evangelism efforts, even on the congregational level. From 1950-1960, there was an average of 2,612 adult confirmations and 818 adult baptisms per year throughout the synod.³⁸² Routinely, congregations like Salem in Owosso, Michigan, Emanuel in Lansing, Michigan, Hope in Detroit, St. Matthew's in Benton Harbor, Michigan, Pilgrim and St. John's in Minneapolis, Siloah, North Trinity, and Mount Lebanon in Milwaukee, and Friedens in Kenosha, Wisconsin, had well over twenty adult confirmations per year and sometimes over ten adult baptisms. In 1958, Emanuel in Lansing had forty adult confirmations and twenty-one adult baptisms.³⁸³ In 1959, Pilgrim in Minneapolis had

³⁸¹“A Dangerous Deficit,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 45, no. 23 (9 November 1958): 366.

³⁸²Until 1957, WELS published a statistical report only in the even numbered years, although cumulative totals for the synod were included for 1953 and 1955. The averages are taken from the available synod totals.

³⁸³*Statistical Report for 1958*, 12.

forty-five adult confirmations and eight adult baptisms.³⁸⁴ To be sure, the congregations listed above were, for the most part, large, established congregations, nevertheless, they demonstrate a concerted effort, even in places that were not considered “mission fields,” to do evangelism work. From 1950-1960, the synod grew steadily from 214,425 communicants to 235,073 communicants, an increase of well over nine percent. While the US population grew by over eighteen percent during the same decade,³⁸⁵ when one considers the turmoil that was engulfing the Wisconsin Synod during this decade, this growth rate is quite remarkable. Despite the doctrinal controversy, pastors and congregations were engaged in evangelism efforts. The gospel was being proclaimed. The Spirit was blessing those labors.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the home mission expansion to such far-flung areas as California and Florida. While the beginnings in California were non-controversial, sacrifices on the part of men like Pastor Armin Keibel, who used his own money to initially secure land for a church, were integral to the Wisconsin Synod quickly gaining a solid foothold in California within a decade. By 1960, six pastors were serving four established congregations and three exploratory efforts throughout the state, numbering 632 communicant members. St. John’s in Tarzana was blessed with twelve adult confirmations and eight adult baptisms during the year and the school operated by Gethsemane in Los Angeles was up to forty-three students.³⁸⁶ In addition, St. John’s was already a self-supporting congregation.

³⁸⁴*Statistical Report for 1959*, 26.

³⁸⁵“US Population by Year,” <http://www.multpl.com/united-states-population/table>.

³⁸⁶*Statistical Report for 1960*, 4.

While the initial beginnings in Florida were much more controversial and contentious, extraordinary sacrifices were again instrumental in gaining a strong foothold: Louis Ott, who secured property for churches with his own money on more than one occasion; the offerings gathered in Michigan District congregations for the purchase of land and the construction of parsonages and chapels in Florida; and the labors of pastors like William Steih, who were working over 1,000 miles away from the nearest WELS congregation. Only six years after the initial exploratory trip in the winter of 1954, four pastors were serving four congregations in Florida, numbering approximately 330 communicant members.³⁸⁷ Even more impressive is that Faith in St. Petersburg was already a self-supporting congregation by 1959, less than five years after its founding.

The story of the Wisconsin Synod's expansion into the sunshine states during the 1950s is not meant to minimize mission work being faithfully carried out elsewhere. At the end of 1960, 139 congregations were receiving some kind of synod support.³⁸⁸ On average, about ten new missions were started per year during the 1950s, although this rate of mission openings was slowed somewhat in the latter years of the 1950s by the manpower shortage.³⁸⁹ Despite the increased tensions in the synod and despite the manpower shortage, as the decade drew to a close, the synod demonstrated a commitment to increasing its home mission efforts. At the 1959

³⁸⁷*Statistical Report for 1960*, 12. This number is approximate because Faith, St. Petersburg, did not file a report for 1960.

³⁸⁸*Statistical Report for 1960*, 68.

³⁸⁹At the 1959 synod convention, the report of the General Board for Home Missions highlighted the manpower shortage, *Proceedings of 1959 Convention*, 42-43.

synod convention, the home mission budget for the next two years was increased from \$686,506³⁹⁰ to \$806,258,³⁹¹ an increase of over seventeen percent. In addition, the synod was continuing its sizable investment in the work on the Apache reservation (\$179,611 for the 1959-1960 biennium), as well as a Spanish mission in Tucson (\$11,436 for the 1959-1960 biennium) and the synod's contribution to the Synodical Conference efforts in Nigeria and among the African-Americans in the South (\$89,414 for the 1959-1960 biennium³⁹²). All this work was being done at the same time that the synod was entering overseas mission work on its own in Japan and Africa, as detailed in the previous chapter. In addition, the 1959 convention also authorized making the synod president a full-time position, the calling of a full-time administrator for foreign missions, and the allocation of \$137,600 for a new addition to the campus ministry center in Madison, Wisconsin, which was supported jointly by the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods.³⁹³ In total, the budget passed for the 1959-1960 biennium represented an increase of almost twenty-seven percent.

Clearly, as the 1960s approached, the Wisconsin Synod was poised for an ambitious program of expansion. Mission efforts into foreign fields and into the sunshine states during the 1950s, despite numerous crosses to bear, prepared the synod for what was to come in the next

³⁹⁰*Proceedings of 1957 Convention*, 166.

³⁹¹*Proceedings of 1959 Convention*, 235.

³⁹²In the *Proceedings*, this is categorized under "Colored Missions." No detail is given as to how this money was allocated between the Nigeria mission and the efforts in the South.

³⁹³This decision is especially remarkable considering the tenuous nature of relations between the two synods at this time.

two decades. Pastor Daniel Gieschen, chairman of the General Board for Home Missions, reflected on this when he wrote in 1980:

Opening a WELS mission in Florida was an inspiration to the Michigan District. The Lord showed the district what could be done if we follow His command “Go.” This had a “domino” effect on the home mission zeal of the Synod, and it did play a big part in preparing us for our rapid mission expansion of the “60’s” after the break-up of the Synodical Conference.³⁹⁴

³⁹⁴“Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1955-1980.” Gieschen made these comments in his preface, which is entitled, “Bringing the Sunshine of the Gospel to the Sunshine City.”

CHAPTER 5

“EVERY STATE BY ’78”: HOME MISSION EXPANSION, 1961-1983

The 1961 synod convention in Milwaukee was much anticipated. It was clear that the synod would need to make a decision on termination of fellowship with the Missouri Synod. The Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) had been founded a year earlier and there was the concern that more pastors and congregations would leave the Wisconsin Synod if fellowship was not terminated. As summer approached, it appeared that the convention would decide to break fellowship. Two popular Northwestern College professors who had strong Missouri Synod leanings, Richard Jungkuntz and Ralph Gehrke, accepted calls into the Missouri Synod. The handwriting was on the wall. After more than two days of debate on the floor of the convention, the vote passed to suspend fellowship by almost four to one.

But this was not the only item on the agenda for the 1961 convention. The expanded budget passed at the 1959 convention had been a struggle to meet causing promised funds for more church buildings for missions to be cut back.³⁹⁵ The Board of Trustees was presenting a plan to increase the funding available for land, chapels, and parsonages for missions.³⁹⁶ A Manpower Committee had been meeting for two years and hopeful results were being seen.³⁹⁷ To help alleviate the shortage of teachers, WELS had opened Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers

³⁹⁵*Reports and Memorials for the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 8-17 August 1961, 3.

³⁹⁶*Reports and Memorials for 1961 Convention*, 119-120.

³⁹⁷*Reports and Memorials for 1961 Convention*, 129-130.

College in 1960.³⁹⁸ With the obvious need for more workers, the synod commissioned an examination of its ministerial education campuses. The Planning Committee for the Educational Institutions of the Synod had met for two years and had a plan that called for a complete overhaul of the ministerial education system.³⁹⁹ A special synod convention was held in the summer of 1962 especially to discuss proposed changes to the ministerial education schools. There was even a recommendation to establish district commissions on evangelism. The rationale was given in the report from the synod's Commission on Evangelism.

Never in the history of our Synod have we faced greater mission opportunities than in our day. From every direction comes the cry, "The fields are white unto the harvest." Love for the Savior and faithfulness to His command urge us to make the most of these opportunities. What thwarts us, however, is the perennial lament, "No men! No money!"

Is it possible that in repeating this sad refrain endless times we are overlooking and, therefore, neglecting to make full use of the tremendous manpower which the Holy Spirit has placed at our disposal, and with very little cost to us—our consecrated lay people?⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers College (MLTC) was a two-year program located on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee (the synod funded a building expansion on the high school campus). After two years, most students would complete their education at Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC) in New Ulm, Minnesota. MLTC was deemed necessary because the New Ulm campus could not handle the influx of needed students at that time. MLTC was closed after the 1968-69 schools year. Building projects on the New Ulm campus allowed for a larger student population.

³⁹⁹*Reports and Memorials for 1961 Convention*, 55-64. This committee recommended merging all the synod's colleges on one campus to be built in the Milwaukee area. Preparatory high schools would continue to be operated in Saginaw, Watertown, New Ulm, and Mobridge. In addition, two new synod-supported prep schools would be opened in Nebraska and Arizona. Because this was such a monumental decision, it was recommended to engage the services of an outside educational consultant and, in the meantime, suspend any planned building projects. This plan did not come to fruition at this time. A report to the 1963 synod convention noted that an addition to the dormitories was underway at the seminary, an addition was under construction at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, plans for new dormitories on the New Ulm campus were being made, and the need for new dorms in Watertown was also noted (*Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 7-14 August 1963, 93-94). An amalgamation of the colleges would have to wait until 1995. More thorough research into discussions like these would be an interesting study.

⁴⁰⁰*Reports and Memorials for 1961 Convention*, 131.

This excerpt from the Commission on Evangelism’s report indicates a heightened sense of the need to share the gospel more broadly and more aggressively. While there was a deep concern for the purity of the Word evidenced by the decision at the 1961 convention to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod, it was also clear that the Wisconsin Synod could not sit on this pure doctrine. It had to proclaim it throughout the world with greater vigor. President Oscar Naumann’s report to the convention stressed this. Under the theme, “The Importance of Continuing in Jesus’ Word,” the second part of his introductory message was devoted to the fact that the synod had the truth of the gospel to share. “In all our mission work, at home and abroad, everything depends upon the certainty of our message... With confidence, therefore, we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not one jot or tittle of His Word shall be altered. We can believe every statement of His Holy Word and rest our hope of salvation upon it.”⁴⁰¹ Karl Gurgel’s General Board for Home Missions report tied together the importance of the purity of the Word for encouraging members in their giving and the recruitment of more workers.

If parents are to encourage their sons and daughters to dedicate their talents to work in the Lord’s kingdom, nothing will move them more than God’s Word of peace in all its truth and purity. If our members are to bring bountiful gifts of silver and gold to carry on mission work, nothing will move them more than God’s Word of peace in all its truth and purity. If our mission work is to be a success, nothing else can accomplish this but the Spirit-filled Word of the Savior. Since God’s Word moves us to do mission work and since God’s Word gives us every bit of success in our mission endeavors, may our church pray, “Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word.”⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹*Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 8-17 August 1961, 12.*

⁴⁰²*Proceedings of 1961 Convention, 26.*

Edgar Hoenecke, who had been serving as a full-time administrator for the Board for World Missions (BWM) since 1959, used his report to chide the synod that it could not just be concerned about preserving the purity of doctrine but also needed to have a passion for proclaiming the pure gospel to lost souls. In his emotionally charged report, he included an extensive quote from August Pieper's 1919 synod convention essay in which Pieper was critical of the synod's minimal mission efforts.

Our mission work to date has been a miserable, petty bungling, a botchery lacking both fire and force. At every convention we seem to be asking ourselves, do we, or do we not want to do mission work? Half a heart, half an effort, and half a result. We work as in a dream. Mary has become a pokey dreamer, sitting at the Lord's feet. She has developed the habit of only listening; but her hearing has become dull, her heart indifferent, and her hands and feet leaden and lazy. Wake up! Wake up, Mary! Rub the sleep out of your eyes, shake the lethargy from your limbs; it's time to get to work! Don't you see the vast throng of people around your house, crowding about your open door, people who would also hear of the glorious thing which the Lord has poured into your heart?⁴⁰³

After summarizing some of the mission work that the synod had begun since that time, Hoenecke expressed his impatience with the fervor he felt should be evident.

But are we indeed seriously at work in missions, at home and abroad? Much of our present "mission" work at home is still but the gathering of already Lutheran Christians into congregations. And we are still expending far more on education than on carrying the saving Gospel to those who have never heard it!

Are we so thoroughly convinced of the world's need of our witness of the Word as we are of the need to preserve for ourselves this Word pure and intact? We should do the one, but not let the other undone.⁴⁰⁴

Clearly, Hoenecke was expressing a viewpoint that the synod needed to get working more zealously in its mission endeavors. He did not appear to be seeing the number of adult

⁴⁰³*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 40-41.

⁴⁰⁴*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 41.

confirmations occurring throughout the synod as adequate. One also has to wonder what he meant when he said that more was being spent on education than on missions because the 1961 convention passed a biennial budget that called for spending almost \$500,000 more on missions than on the ministerial education schools of the synod, unless he was also referring to the dollars spent at the local level on Lutheran elementary schools and Lutheran high schools.⁴⁰⁵

Nevertheless, he felt that the synod needed to be doing more. In his opinion, in comparison with church bodies of similar size, the mission efforts of WELS were lagging.

However, the synod was poised to expand its home mission efforts within and beyond its current geographical areas. At this point, WELS had churches in sixteen states: Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Iowa, Colorado, Florida, Arizona, California, Washington, and Oregon. Earlier exploratory efforts in Texas and Idaho had been closed. A signal at the 1961 convention that the synod was ready to move farther afield can be seen in the resolution to suspend fellowship. “*Resolved*, h) that we encourage all who are of a like mind with us in this matter to identify themselves with us in supporting the Scriptural, historical position of the Synodical Conference.”⁴⁰⁶ There was evidently a desire that Lutherans who were dissatisfied with the direction of their church body might reach out to WELS. As will be seen, calls for support and help flooded into the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM), which now had a new chairman after the 1961 convention, Pastor Raymond Wiechmann. These requests, in part, accelerated home mission expansion

⁴⁰⁵*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 210.

⁴⁰⁶*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 199.

during the 1960s and 1970s. The battle cry, “Every State by ’78,” served as a goal for the home mission expansion program throughout this timeframe.⁴⁰⁷ The goal would be reached in 1983. But as these home mission expansion efforts were carried out, the synod would again have to bear some crosses and overcome some obstacles.

A Cross: Renewed Manpower Shortage

When one speaks of the church growing under the cross, this becomes evident in the struggles a church body faces as it tries to carry out its mission. It sometimes seems that when the manpower and opportunities are available, the money is lacking, as was the case in the 1930s. When the money and opportunities are available, the manpower is lacking, as was the situation in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1961, the opportunities abounded. But, at least initially, the synod was facing both manpower and financial challenges.

At the 1961 synod convention, almost every district mission board report mentioned the need for more workers. For example, the Pacific Northwest report mentioned that the mission board made an exploratory trip to Vancouver, British Columbia. It then added the comment, “Another field standing idle for want of workers.”⁴⁰⁸ The Southeastern Wisconsin report concluded, “We thank the Lord of the Church for His many blessings, and do humbly beseech Him for more workers in His kingdom!”⁴⁰⁹ The Colorado Mission District report lamented,

⁴⁰⁷Wiechmann appears to be the originator of this motto when he became executive secretary of the GBHM.

⁴⁰⁸*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 29.

⁴⁰⁹*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 30.

“Prolonged vacancies have hampered the work in two of our city missions.”⁴¹⁰ Edgar

Hoenecke’s BWM report also noted this challenge: “One of our fields has called for over two years to fill an urgent need!”⁴¹¹

The primary reason for the shortage of workers, both pastors and teachers, during the late 1950s into the mid-1960s stemmed from the doctrinal battles with the LCMS. A number of pastors left the synod, either for the Missouri Synod or to join the CLC. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of pastors who left the synod because of the doctrinal battle, although Edward Fredrich reports that in 1962, the CLC had 62 pastors.⁴¹² One can assume that most of these men were former WELS pastors. It is more challenging to ascertain how many pastors left WELS to join the LCMS. However, the statistical reports provide some indication of the losses sustained. In 1957, there were 695 pastors serving in WELS.⁴¹³ By 1964, that number had dwindled to 629 pastors, resulting in 56 vacancies.⁴¹⁴

To exacerbate the problem, the doctrinal battle with the LCMS was affecting the number of men graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Although there had been a surge in seminary graduates from 1955-1958, when the classes averaged just over thirty graduates per

⁴¹⁰*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 30.

⁴¹¹*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 27-30, 41.

⁴¹²Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 207.

⁴¹³*Statistical Report for 1957*, 56.

⁴¹⁴*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1964*, 68.

year, there was a sharp decline from 1959-1964, when the classes averaged just under twenty graduates per year. The primary reasons students were leaving Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were either to follow popular professors Gehrke and Jungkuntz into the LCMS or to join the CLC.⁴¹⁵ The result was that there simply was an insufficient number of new pastors entering the ministerium to keep up with retirements. The efforts of WELS to both admonish their erring sister church body (the LCMS) and be patient in that admonition was costly. Coupled with the needed growth of faculties at the ministerial education schools, often taking pastors out of parish calls, and the increase of area Lutheran high schools during the 1950s, the shrinking pool of pastors serving in parish calls and missions was not surprising. The frustration of those waiting for mission calls to be accepted was understandable.

A Cross: Finances

Alongside the cries for more men came cries for needed funds, especially for the purchase of land and the construction of chapels. Karl Gurgel's GBHM report to the 1961 synod convention illustrated the frustration felt at the lack of funds available.

From July 1, 1960, until March 31, 1961 (the first nine months of the present fiscal year), our Church Extension Fund received \$214,998.98. This figure is \$42,680.27 below the amount reported a year ago, and \$120,036.71 below the amount reported two years ago. Two years ago, however, we received a regular monthly payment from our budgetary treasury; this customary payment, known as the ½ of 1%, had to be discontinued in February of 1960 because of the sad condition of our regular treasury. Since these payments amounted to about \$13,000.00 per month, our Church Extension Fund has lost \$182,000.00 in the past 14 months.

⁴¹⁵This was confirmed by email correspondence with two retired pastors from the seminary class of 1962, David Valleskey (email message to author, 11 January 2019) and Edward Lindemann (email message to author, 13 January 2019). Lindemann points out some other factors, such as a heavy academic load and perceived problems with student-faculty relations, but the doctrinal dispute with the LCMS was the primary reason for the smaller seminary graduating classes during this timeframe.

The above-mentioned cutback has forced us to slow down all of our mission building programs. At the present time we need about \$330,000.00 to complete the projects which were placed on the priority lists in May of 1959 and in May of 1960. So far we have received 14 new requests for chapels. These requests will be carefully weighed in our 1961 spring meeting. It would take an additional \$560,000.00 to erect these very necessary houses of worship.⁴¹⁶

Judging from Gurgel's report, there seemed to be two issues causing the financial challenges. First, the congregations of the synod were apparently having difficulty meeting the large increase in the budget passed by the 1959 synod convention. The synod budget was largely funded by offerings from the synod's congregations. While in past decades, there were attempts to enforce a per communicant assessment from each congregation, by the 1950s, each congregation determined how much of its total offerings it sent to the synod to fund the synod's programs. Because the offerings from the synod's congregations was not meeting the budget passed at the 1959 convention, money that was to be allocated from the synod budget to the Church Extension Fund (CEF) had to be diverted to meet ongoing budgetary needs. Second, it seemed that contributions from congregations and individuals to the CEF were also lagging.⁴¹⁷ Reasons for both of these are hard to pinpoint, but one can certainly speculate. The founding of five new area Lutheran high schools in the previous eight years meant ongoing support of those educational institutions and the payment for building projects at those schools. The growth in the number of congregations starting Lutheran elementary schools could have also contributed to

⁴¹⁶*Proceedings of 1961 Convention, 27.*

⁴¹⁷The CEF was funded in several ways. Congregations and individuals sent in gifts. In addition, congregations and especially individuals invested money in the CEF. They would be repaid (with a lower-than-market interest rate) to provide capital for land purchases and building construction loans. Repayment to the investors was possible as the congregations repaid their loans. Often, individuals gifted their investment to the CEF after a length of time receiving the interest.

fewer gifts available for the CEF. The number of Lutheran elementary schools had grown from 188 in 1950⁴¹⁸ to 228 in 1961.⁴¹⁹ This growth occurred despite losing several congregations with schools to the LCMS and CLC.⁴²⁰ Another cause could certainly have been the uncertainties surrounding the intersynodical issues with the LCMS, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s. No doubt the loss of congregations and pastors contributed to a reduction in gifts for synodical work, especially gifts for something like the CEF, which operated primarily outside of the normal synod budget. Finally, the years 1957-1960 saw two periods of economic slowdown in the country which contributed to higher unemployment.⁴²¹

Another financial challenge was the rapidly rising cost of land and buildings. In his 1963 GBHM report to the synod convention, Ray Wiechmann pointed to the mobility of the population. People were moving from the rural areas to the metropolitan areas where land prices were sometimes exorbitant. He also mentioned that “building costs have skyrocketed in most areas.”⁴²²

⁴¹⁸*Statistical Report for 1949-1950*, 33.

⁴¹⁹*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1961*, 68.

⁴²⁰It would take significant research into the statistical reports and congregational files to discover an exact number. By way of example, two prominent WELS churches with large schools, St. John’s in West Bend, Wisconsin, and St. Martin’s in Winona, Minnesota, joined the LCMS.

⁴²¹Kimberly Amadeo, “History of Recessions in the United States,” *the balance*, 31 December 2018, <https://www.thebalance.com/the-history-of-recessions-in-the-united-states-3306011>.

⁴²²*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 146.

There was also the matter of budget priorities. As was evident from Hoenecke's report to the 1961 synod convention, disagreement existed among synod leaders about how synod dollars should be allocated. The leaders on the mission boards often felt that too much money was being spent on the ministerial education schools without a comparable amount being spent on mission work. For example, when the 1965 synod convention authorized what came to be called the "Missio Dei" offering with the goal of raising \$4,000,000 for buildings at the ministerial education campuses,⁴²³ the GBHM resolved to insist that "a good share be designated for missions."⁴²⁴

A Cross: Overwhelming Opportunities

Some crosses are a joy to bear. The requests for pastoral service and true Lutheran teaching came pouring into the GBHM. Even before 1961, the requests to start churches in Florida and California partially stemmed from the concern over the growing theological liberalism in the LCMS. During the 1950s, the GBHM also considered exploring Texas and Tennessee because of specific requests.

These requests exploded after the decision to break with the LCMS in 1961. In his report to the 1963 convention, Wiechmann noted, "We have requests for the Means of Grace from the

⁴²³*Proceedings of the Thirty-eighth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 4-11 August 1965, 374.

⁴²⁴Minutes of the General Board of Home Missions, 4-11 August 1965, 6, box 01, folder 012, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

states of Virginia, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, Texas, Kansas, Alaska, and from Canada.”⁴²⁵

Two years later, one could add New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma, among other states, to the list.⁴²⁶ Clearly, many of these areas were not adjacent to states where WELS was working. The 1953 resolution regarding home mission expansion meant that the synod in convention would have to give explicit approval to any new mission opening in such states. This could bog down aggressive mission expansion.

Addressing these numerous requests—requests that were coming in precisely because of the doctrinal stand WELS had taken—was an obligation which the synod was taking seriously. But there was the struggle to address these many requests because of the manpower shortage, the financial challenges, and the continued desire to expand in areas where WELS was already working, especially California, Florida, and Arizona. Wiechmann’s remarks in his report summarize the situation well.

We note that your coworkers in the Lord’s vineyard have labored under the vicissitudes of **Joy, Hope, and Disappointment**—joy in being privileged to spread the glorious Gospel of salvation to blood-bought souls—hope that the hampering lack of men and money will soon be alleviated, and the disappointment in not being able to enter the doors which the Lord of the Harvest has opened unto us.⁴²⁷

Laboring under these crosses, how would WELS be able to take advantage of the ever-increasing opportunities for mission expansion that were beckoning? During the first half of the 1960s, WELS took several steps which served to facilitate increased mission expansion.

⁴²⁵*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 144.

⁴²⁶*Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 179.

⁴²⁷*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 143. Bold type is in original.

Administrative Matters

There were four areas where the synod needed to make changes in order to move forward more aggressively to meet the home mission expansion vision which was driven by the numerous requests. First, there was a need to expand the money available for the purchase of land and the construction of church buildings. Second, in order to reach out to more isolated states, the 1953 synod resolution needed to be addressed and the district mission boards needed a more cohesive plan to reach out to those states. Third, the manpower shortage needed to be addressed in some way. Finally, additional administrative help was necessary to oversee and organize a more aggressive home mission expansion endeavor. The GBHM, together with decisions made by synod conventions and in cooperation with the Board of Trustees, addressed each of these administrative matters in the early 1960s, thus enabling WELS to more efficiently carry out home mission expansion plans.

Already in 1961, the Board of Trustees presented to the synod convention a “Church Extension Fund Expansion” proposal. The goal was to make more money available for lot purchases and construction of church facilities on a yearly basis. This goal would be achieved by having a stricter and clearer expectation on the part of the new mission congregation to pay back the loan from the CEF. The ideal of the CEF was that it would be a revolving fund. The money borrowed for new missions would be paid back in a reasonable amount of time, enabling the money to be lent out to additional new missions. The CEF would, of course, grow through gifts and investments from individual members and congregations. But it would be kept more solvent and have more money available when the mission congregations more consistently worked to repay their loans.

The 1961 proposal allowed for initial interest-free loans of \$15,000 per lot and \$25,000 per chapel. The Board of Trustees would meet with the new mission and there would be a mutually agreed-upon additional loan with interest that would then be amortized over a span of ten to thirty years, depending on the size of the congregation. This became known as the Chapel Expansion Loan (CEL). The congregation would agree to make monthly payments which would first go toward the interest loan and then be applied to the interest-free loan after the interest loan was repaid. After ten years, both loans would be refinanced into a loan not held by CEF, thus freeing up money for additional loans.⁴²⁸

The proposal worked. At the 1963 synod convention, Ray Wiechmann reported that \$400,000 had been made available from the CEF for each of the previous two fiscal years.⁴²⁹ This alleviated the problem of fluctuating dollars available which resulted in a backlog of funding for \$330,000 in projects which had already been approved in 1959 and 1960, as well as \$560,000 for requested church construction in 1961.⁴³⁰ While there were still some flaws in the system, especially with the high costs of land in some states and the skyrocketing costs of construction making the initial interest-free loan amounts unrealistically low, the plan served to allow more missions the opportunity to have a permanent, physical presence in their community

⁴²⁸*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 201-202.

⁴²⁹*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 143.

⁴³⁰*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 27.

on an improved timetable. It also allowed the synod successfully to meet its goal of opening one mission a month in the 1962-63 biennium. One financial challenge was addressed.

The second matter of how to expand into more isolated states, and then efficiently oversee that work, was addressed over the course of several years. The 1961 convention approved the formation of the California Mission District to allow for more direct oversight of the burgeoning mission expansion foreseen for California.⁴³¹ The 1961 convention also heard a report from a committee which had studied “district autonomy,” a proposal which would have allowed more localized and grassroots decision-making and support.⁴³² This would have effectively moved the home mission work of WELS to the district level. Each district would have had its own treasury and Church Extension Fund to use in carrying out mission work as it saw fit in its designated geographical area. The convention resolved to have the Conference of Presidents and Board of Trustees form a committee to study the matter further and report back to the 1963 convention.⁴³³ At the 1963 convention, the committee recommended not going through with district autonomy. It was deemed that it would actually increase inefficiencies by adding another layer of bureaucracy which would cost money.⁴³⁴

⁴³¹*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 37-39.

⁴³²*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 36-37.

⁴³³*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 39.

⁴³⁴*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 244-246.

The discussion of more direct district involvement, together with the question of which district should oversee the new mission which was being proposed for the Dallas-Fort Worth area, led the GBHM to form a committee to investigate assigning new geographical areas to the various district mission boards.⁴³⁵ The 1963 convention approved this committee's recommendations. The remaining states which did not have Wisconsin Synod congregations were assigned to the various district mission boards. Suggestions were even made for Alaska, Hawaii, and Canada. Some of the recommendations strike one as odd. For example, the Northern Wisconsin District was given New York and the New England states as an area of responsibility, while the Southeastern Wisconsin District was to oversee work in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama.⁴³⁶ While these recommendations were approved, changes occurred over time. Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, New York, and the New England states came under the jurisdiction of the Michigan District Mission Board when missions were started in those states, although in 1969, the Florida Mission District was formed⁴³⁷ and in 1975 the Colonial Mission District was approved.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵Minutes of General Board for Home Missions, 6-9 November 1962, 4, box 01, folder 011, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁴³⁶*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 150-151.

⁴³⁷*Proceedings of the Fortieth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 6-13 August 1969, 127.

⁴³⁸*Proceedings of the Forty-third Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 6-13 August 1975, 74-75.

The GBHM also needed the synod to address the 1953 resolution preventing new mission congregations in a state where there was not a congregation in an adjacent state without direct synod approval. The matter was brought up at the 1963 convention by President Naumann in his report to the convention. The key question was whether or not this 1953 resolution meshed with the 1961 invitation to people across the country who shared the Wisconsin Synod's convictions and confession. Naumann questioned "whether we can permit this resolution to limit our expansion into new areas. Would we not be inconsistent in doing so?"⁴³⁹ The report from the Michigan District Mission Board cited the 1953 resolution as hindering their efforts to begin work in the Washington D. C. area and pleaded with the convention "to update the resolutions of 1953."⁴⁴⁰ The convention, however, concurred with the floor committee's resolution that the 1953 resolution was not inconsistent with the 1961 invitation and so the 1953 resolution was not updated or overturned.⁴⁴¹

Clearly, this was not what Naumann or the GBHM desired. At the 1965 synod convention, a report was heard from the "Committee on Limitations to Mission Expansion." This committee basically recommended rescinding the 1953 resolution and allowing the GBHM "to expand in an orderly fashion... within the limitations presented by the availability of manpower and funds."⁴⁴² The convention approved the resolution. This paved the way for expansion into

⁴³⁹*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 14.

⁴⁴⁰*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 148.

⁴⁴¹*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 162.

⁴⁴²*Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 188.

isolated states with high population densities like the Washington D.C area where the Michigan District Mission Board had already started a mission and the New York City metropolitan area.

But the 1965 resolution noted a challenge: “within the limitations presented by the availability of manpower and funds.” While the funding issue was being addressed to some extent with the changes to the CEF program, the lack of manpower was still hurting the efforts to expand aggressively. Several steps were taken to ease this manpower crunch until the men from the larger classes already enrolled at Northwestern College and the seminary would be available for service.

One step was to consolidate smaller parishes under the shepherding of one pastor. In 1961, President Naumann had made the plea, “The manpower shortage in our home missions has led us to realize that we must extend ourselves, serve vacancies, serve multiple parishes. For the pure Word and the Sacraments rightly administered are the important thing, not the time of day when our services are held.”⁴⁴³ The “Manpower Committee,” which reported to the 1961 convention, urged such action and noted that several vacancies had been covered by more than one congregation agreeing to be served by one pastor.⁴⁴⁴ In his report to the 1967 convention, Ray Wiechmann noted that “we are continuing the amalgamations of smaller congregations and are asking our missionaries to travel great distances in serving vacancies and new fields.”⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 13.

⁴⁴⁴*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 266.

⁴⁴⁵*Proceedings of 1967 Convention*, 192.

These “dual parish” (or even “tri parish”) situations especially occurred in the Dakota-Montana and Nebraska Districts and the rural areas of Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Perhaps more important was an increased use of seminary students. The seminary had instituted a voluntary vicar program in 1945. After his first two years of seminary study, a student could take a vicar year in which he would serve in a congregation under the supervision of an experienced pastor. He would then complete his seminary training with one more year on campus. This program was made a requirement in 1965.⁴⁴⁶ In the initial years, the vicars often served as pastoral assistants in larger congregations. During these years of manpower shortages, some of the vicars were basically serving as vacancy pastors.⁴⁴⁷ This helped to alleviate the manpower shortage and allowed for more available pastors to accept calls into home missions.

A more direct involvement with home missions came when seminary students began serving as “summer vicars” in various home missions to allow for greater canvassing to take place. The impetus for this seems to have come from the seminary students. The minutes of the GBHM report, “Seminary students J. Henning and M. Wagenknecht were introduced to present plans to make use of student manpower during summer months. A motion prevailed to use four men as vicars this summer, and to set up a committee to consider the student plan and work out details for next year. A rising vote of thanks was given the students for their efforts.”⁴⁴⁸ A year

⁴⁴⁶Brenner and Prange, *Jars of Clay*, 168.

⁴⁴⁷For example, in the 1960-61 school year, David Valleskey served a dual parish in rural South Dakota and Minnesota.

⁴⁴⁸Minutes of General Board for Home Missions, 13-14 May 1963, 4, box 01, folder 011, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

later it was noted that nine seminary students were tentatively available for summer work in missions.⁴⁴⁹ This program of seminary students assisting a congregation during the summer continues today.

The synod was also addressing the manpower shortage on the ministerial education level. The campuses in New Ulm and Watertown were being taxed because of increased enrollments at both the prep school and college levels. More aggressive recruitment was being urged and was taking place, especially at the various area Lutheran high schools which had been founded in the 1950s. In order to accommodate increased enrollments, the campuses would need to be expanded. Both the New Ulm and Watertown campuses were especially in need of dormitories.

The building needs of the ministerial education schools and the overall ministerial education system were studied extensively during the first half of the 1960s. A detailed report of a planning committee was presented at the 1961 synod convention with the recommendation that an independent educational consultant be employed to provide an outside perspective.⁴⁵⁰ At a special 1962 convention, called primarily to react to the recommendations of the educational consultant, the GBHM and the BWM went on record in a joint statement urging to expand the facilities on the campuses “in a moderate way.” While acknowledging the pressing needs on the campuses, the joint statement urged caution that the synod not commit itself to a building expansion program that “might hinder or continue to curtail the Home and World Mission

⁴⁴⁹Minutes of General Board for Home Missions, 18-19 May 1964, 5, box 01, folder 012, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁴⁵⁰*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 84-94.

program of our Synod, but on the very contrary, the period of this program be designated as a period of expanding our mission endeavors.”⁴⁵¹ This illustrates the ongoing tension over synod expenditures between ministerial education and missions.

The synod did not go along with the proposed overhaul. However, the building needs were still pressing. By 1965, it was becoming critical for schools to move forward because increased enrollments were stretching facilities and faculties to the breaking point. The 1965 synod convention approved a sweeping building program totaling \$3.1 million. In order to meet this program, the convention also approved a special building fund offering, which came to be known as the “*Missio Dei*” offering, with a goal of \$4 million.⁴⁵² In addition, the convention approved the creation of a new administrative position: the Executive Secretary of the Board for Information and Stewardship.⁴⁵³ While this full time position would not be filled for several years, Pastor James P. Schaefer, who was serving at Atonement in Milwaukee, was given a nine-month leave of absence to serve as the fulltime executive secretary for the “*Missio Dei*” offering. The offering was a tremendous success. By the 1967 convention, commitments totaling \$5.5 million had been made by the members of the synod and nearly \$3 million had already been received.⁴⁵⁴ Considering that there were just over 262,000 communicant members in WELS at

⁴⁵¹*Proceedings of the Special Synod Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 7-9 November 1962, 14.

⁴⁵²*Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 374.

⁴⁵³*Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 395.

⁴⁵⁴*Proceedings of the Thirty-ninth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 9-16 August

the end of 1967, this was deemed an overwhelming response. Undoubtedly, the booming economy in the United States during the 1960s was an aid to this generous response.⁴⁵⁵ An additional offering drive, entitled “Called to Serve,” was started to help increase giving to the synod’s regular operating budget. The 1969 convention heard the report that the result of this program was increased giving for the synod budget of over forty-two percent for the first three months of 1969 in comparison to the previous year.⁴⁵⁶

The results of these stewardship programs positioned the ministerial education schools of the synod to handle the growing enrollments and produce an increasing number of workers. Graduates from the seminary jumped from fifteen in 1964 to thirty-two in 1965. For the next six years, the average number of graduates was just over thirty-three per year. But from 1971-1976, the average number was just over fifty and from 1977-1983, it jumped to over fifty-six. These graduating numbers served to alleviate the manpower problems which were prevalent in the early 1960s and to allow a sufficient number of pastors to meet the ever-increasing number of home mission openings.

One final administrative matter, perhaps even more than the others, had a direct impact on home mission expansion. The 1963 synod convention approved the calling of a full time Executive Secretary for Home Missions.⁴⁵⁷ With the burgeoning number of requests for mission

1967, 380.

⁴⁵⁵Chris Isidore, “Where the current economic boom ranks in American history,” <https://money.cnn.com/2018/01/30/news/economy/us-economy-boom-history/index.html>.

⁴⁵⁶*Reports and Memorials for the Fortieth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 6-13 August 1969, 129.

⁴⁵⁷*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 232.

work scattered across the nation, a full-time man was deemed necessary to plan and coordinate the mission expansion efforts. Pastor Ray Wiechmann, who was serving as the GBHM chairman, accepted the call to serve as the first WELS home mission administrator. For the next four years, until he accepted a call to serve Bay Pines Lutheran Church in Seminole, Florida, he provided important guidance and direction to the home mission expansion efforts. After a brief vacancy during which several calls to the position were returned, Pastor Norman Berg, who had been serving at St. Peter's in Plymouth, Michigan, and was the President of the Michigan District and the First Vice President of WELS, accepted the executive secretary call. Berg served in that capacity until his retirement in 1988. Hilbert Engel, Wiechmann's replacement as the chairman of the GBHM, noted how quickly the new full-time position was paying dividends in his report to the 1965 synod convention.

The office of the Executive Secretary has been a real blessing to the General Board for Home Missions and the Synod. Through our Executive Secretary we now have a liaison between the various District Mission Boards, the Praesidium of the Synod, the Conference of Presidents, the Board of Trustees, the fiscal office, the Board of Education, the Board for Information and Stewardship, the Commission on Evangelism, and the Northwestern Publishing House, as we never had it before. This has been of inestimable value. Our Executive Secretary is gaining an overview of our far-flung missions. In his advisory capacity he can advise where the General Board for Home Missions might spend its mission strength and place its mission emphasis to the best advantage... Our Executive Secretary has worked at a torrid pace these first two years in this new office of the Synod. The results are appearing and will continue to appear.⁴⁵⁸

During the first half of the 1960s, the synod and its leadership recognized the financial, policy, manpower, and administrative challenges that needed to be addressed if a more aggressive and farther-reaching home mission program could be established. By revamping the

⁴⁵⁸*Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 179.

CEF program, overturning the 1953 resolution limiting geographical expansion, taking steps to alleviate the manpower shortage, and inaugurating the position of GBHM executive secretary, the synod positioned itself for the home mission expansion boom that was already beginning and would only accelerate.

Raising a Mission Mindset

One of the tasks at which Wiechmann flourished was working with the other leaders of WELS to raise the synod's mission mindset. It's not that the synod lacked a mission mindset. Already during the days of the synod debt, Edgar Hoenecke's "Michigan Plan" had placed before the members of the synod the important mission work which they had the opportunity to support. During the 1950s, there were regular features in *The Northwestern Lutheran* highlighting both home and world mission work. Another example was the feature in the 1952 *Northwestern Annual* about the mission work in Los Angeles. However, between the various building projects on the ministerial education school campuses and the protracted doctrinal battle with the LCMS, the zeal and energy for mission work was in danger of being sapped.

Obviously, the reports of both the GBHM and the BWM emphasized the importance of mission work and attempted to energize the synod to support its mission program. But this extended beyond their reports. President Naumann's reports to the synod convention routinely emphasized the importance of the synod's mission efforts. For example, one section of his 1961 president's report, given at a convention which would make the final decision to break with the LCMS, emphasized the fact that "in His Word alone we have the answer to our neighbor's

question.”⁴⁵⁹ His 1963 report set the tone for that convention which approved the full time executive secretary position and divided up geographical responsibilities to the various district mission boards.

Our present convention, I believe, should be concerned chiefly about sharing our glorious Gospel heritage with more and more dearly ransomed souls. We should gratefully and honestly recount the blessings which the Lord has showered upon us, and then courageously resolve to support the expansion of our mission endeavors just as rapidly as the Lord places the men and the means at our disposal. For we can expand our missions only as rapidly as our members in gratitude for the Gospel place the fruits of faith in the form of mission offerings into our hands.⁴⁶⁰

Reports like this demonstrate that Naumann’s mission-mindedness was just the kind of leadership WELS needed at this time in its history, as the doors for mission expansion were flung wide open.

During the 1960s, even though there were several important anniversaries being marked at various conventions, there were convention essays with mission emphases.⁴⁶¹ Part of the agenda for every synod and district convention was the reading of one or more assigned essays, assigned by the synod praesidium and written by professors, synod leaders, or parish pastors, usually exploring the theme chosen for that convention. For example, at the 1963 convention, while two essays zeroed in on the work of the seminary, Edgar Hoenecke also presented an essay

⁴⁵⁹*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 11-12.

⁴⁶⁰*Proceedings of 1963 Convention*, 13.

⁴⁶¹In 1963, the synod celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the seminary. In 1965, the 100th anniversary of Northwestern College was celebrated. In 1967, the convention heard several essays devoted to the 450th anniversary of Martin Luther posting the “Ninety-Five Theses.”

entitled, “The Field for Which We Train Laborers for the Lord’s Harvest.”⁴⁶² The 1969 convention heard an essay by Pastor Darvin Raddatz on “Our Call to Serve,” which focused on the mission of the church to proclaim the gospel, while Pastor Joel Gerlach wrote on the Christian’s stewardship of his gifts to support the mission of the church.⁴⁶³ Gerlach put his “stewardship call” into the historical perspective of what the synod had been focused on twelve years ago.

At that convention [1957] the urgent call of the hour was for fidelity to the Word of our God and to the practical obligations of such fidelity. Standing as we were then upon the threshold of the sixties, it was an immediate crisis which called for resolution. Standing as we are now upon the threshold of the seventies, it is primarily long-range goals and programs which command our attention, our consideration, and our dedication.⁴⁶⁴

Gerlach concluded with an inspiring call to action.

This is our shining hour. This is our hour of destiny as a people of God. This is no time for us to project to the world the image of an historical debating society for the preservation of the Lutheran Confessions. This is no time for us to remain introverted so that people snidely say of us that we’ve got the pure Gospel, and we are determined to keep it—for ourselves. This is a time to rise with our actions above our worldly concerns and involvement to that with our words we can convince people of the glories of the world to come. With the help of God, we have proved we are stout on defense. Now by the grace of God it is time to show how aggressive we can be on offense.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶²*Proceedings of 1961 Convention*, 61-87.

⁴⁶³*Proceedings of 1969 Convention*, 46-76.

⁴⁶⁴*Proceedings of 1969 Convention*, 62.

⁴⁶⁵*Proceedings of 1969 Convention*, 76. Gerlach was serving as the first pastor of King of Kings in Garden Grove, California, a church which had started as a mission in 1961. By 1969, there were over 400 communicant members. From 1971-1981, he served as professor of homiletics and systematic theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In 1981, he returned as a mission counselor for the California Mission District.

Additional efforts were made to raise mission awareness throughout the synod. Beginning in 1960, the seminary started holding its annual weeklong “Mission Seminar.” The students worked with missionaries and mission leaders to put together displays and presentations about the synod’s mission work. During the first few years, the focus was exclusively on the synod’s world mission work but by 1962 the GBHM was also involved. These served to pique the interest of the seminary students in the worldwide mission work on WELS.⁴⁶⁶ Routinely, the value of the seminary’s “Mission Seminar” was mentioned in home and world mission reports to the synod.⁴⁶⁷

In order to raise a mission mindset on the local level, many congregations began conducting “Mission Weekends.” Both home and world missions were highlighted by presentations, displays, filmstrips, and publications. The executive secretaries of home and world missions were instrumental in gathering the necessary materials to send to the congregations. Wiechmann noted that even seminary students were getting involved. For the 1965 Mission Seminar, the seminary students helped prepare Mission Weekend materials.⁴⁶⁸

To reach an even broader audience with news about home missions, the GBHM worked closely with the Board of Information and Stewardship to prepare booklets that could be

⁴⁶⁶Brenner and Prange, *Jars of Clay*, 196-197. *Jars of Clay* states that home missions began to be involved in 1964. However, the GBHM report in the *Report to the Nine Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 1962*, 25, states that half of the time at the 1962 “Mission Seminar” was devoted to home mission work. This kind of seminar continues today under the name “Mission and Ministry” and has been broadened to include other facets of the synod’s work.

⁴⁶⁷For example, both Wiechmann and Hoenecke mention the “Mission Seminar” in their reports to the 1967 convention, *Proceedings of 1967 Convention*, 192, 225.

⁴⁶⁸*Proceedings of 1965 Convention*, 181.

disseminated to congregations and members of the synod. The new full-time executive secretary, Ray Wiechmann, compiled the materials and facilitated the production of “White Fields,” which was published in 1965 with 79,000 copies printed for free distribution. “White Fields” was a thirty-two-page booklet which explained the synod’s home mission work. It included a description of how a mission gets started and an anecdotal example of a mission’s building program. It highlighted the various kinds of home mission activity of the synod: rural areas, larger towns and cities, and missions in the African-American neighborhoods of Milwaukee and Detroit. The booklet also described the work being done in institutions like hospitals and prisons, ministry to military personnel, and the Lutheran elementary schools which were part of some home mission congregations. Several pages were devoted to the CEF and how it was serving to fund worship facilities for new missions. There was even a description of the how the CEF and the CEL worked together. An encouragement to consider gifts to the CEF was voiced. A page was also devoted to answering the question, “Are our missions growing?” The answer given pointed out that population growth in certain areas contributed to faster growing missions and offered missions in Arlington, Virginia, Garden Grove, California, and San Diego as examples. The booklet was very visual, with numerous pictures, a couple of charts, and three maps of the United States, one showing the current areas covered by WELS congregations, another showing how the remainder of the country was divided up among the various mission boards (as determined by the 1963 synod convention), and the third with dots for each of the 193 missions

and preaching stations.⁴⁶⁹ “White Fields” was included in the 1965 edition of the *Northwestern Lutheran Annual*. This ensured an even wider dissemination of this material.⁴⁷⁰

Descriptions of world mission work were included in the 1962 and 1964 editions of the *Northwestern Lutheran Annual*.⁴⁷¹ Again, numerous photos and sketches were included for visual effect, including a photo from the seminary’s “Mission Seminar” in 1964.⁴⁷² In a span of four years, a good portion of the synod received extensive information about the synod’s mission work.⁴⁷³

In addition, *The Northwestern Lutheran* continued to highlight the mission work of the synod and encourage support of the synod’s work. For example, in 1964-65, virtually every issue had some news about missions. These included multiple-page spreads about a specific world

⁴⁶⁹While “White Fields” was printed in 1965 and some of the printed material was up-to-date, it would seem that this last map was from a year or two earlier. It does not include a dot for the mission in Virginia.

⁴⁷⁰Raymond Wiechmann, “White Fields,” *Northwestern Lutheran Annual: The Yearbook and Directory of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1965*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1965), 9-36. The material described in this paragraph was drawn from this source. An extant, stand-alone copy could not be located. While it is twenty-eight pages in the *Northwestern Lutheran Annual*, front and back covers would bring it to thirty-two pages in the stand-alone editions.

⁴⁷¹“The Story of Our Mission in Africa,” *Northwestern Lutheran Annual: A Calendar of the Church Year and Directory of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for the Year 1962* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1962), 30-44. Theodore Sauer, “Will Mikey Stay Sad,” *Northwestern Lutheran Annual: 1964 Yearbook of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1964), 8. Edgar Hoenecke, “They Come to Thee: Progress and Prospects of the Board for World Missions,” *Northwestern Lutheran Annual: 1964 Yearbook of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1962), 9-40.

⁴⁷²Hoenecke, “They Come to Thee,” 39.

⁴⁷³These kinds of informational articles ceased being included in the annual synod yearbook in 1971.

mission with pictures, articles and pictures describing the dedication of a new church building for a home mission, and pictures of world missionaries and their families departing from the airport for their foreign fields of services. In 1965, two successive issues had one-page bullet pointed descriptions of “some recent developments” in home missions, briefly describing the mission expansion work of WELS in places like Dallas, Kansas City, New Jersey, Cleveland, San Jose, and the Edmonton, Alberta, Canada area, just to name a few.⁴⁷⁴ A similar update feature was published in August, as well as a more extensive description of new mission starts in New Jersey, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Burnsville, Minnesota, and Sacramento and Redding, California.⁴⁷⁵ With a 1965 circulation of 28,000, this continual flow of information in *The Northwestern Lutheran* could not help but raise the awareness of the expanding mission program of WELS, at least to the more dedicated households who subscribed.

One additional development to note that served to raise a mission mindset in WELS was the establishment in 1963 and the first national rally in 1964 of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society (LWMS).⁴⁷⁶ This group endeavored to raise an interest in the mission work of WELS and support that work with offerings through circuit rallies of groups of congregations

⁴⁷⁴“The Lord Permits Us to Go Forward in Home Missions: Some Recent Developments,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 6 (21 March 1965), 86. “More Victories for the Cross in Home Missions: Some Recent Developments,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 7 (4 April 1965), 105.

⁴⁷⁵“Advances on Our Home Mission Front: Answers to Our Prayers,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 16 (22 August 1965): 264. “Good Beginnings in Home Missions,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 52, no. 23 (14 November 1965): 357-358.

⁴⁷⁶The history is told well in “Forty-Year History of Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society” (self-published, 2003) and by Matthew Ewart, “The Story of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper), <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/1400/EwartLWMS.pdf>. Ewart’s mother, Marilyn, served as a president of LWMS, 2001-2003.

and an annual national rally. The national rallies featured various missionary speakers, often from world fields. Through its “mission boxes” and offerings gathered at circuit and national rallies, LWMS supported various mission projects. An early project was the production of materials in Braille for the visually impaired. The raised mission mindset in WELS can perhaps be illustrated by the growth of LWMS. There were 104 charter member congregations of LWMS in 1964 and there were 256 individuals in attendance at the first national rally held on 27 June 1964 in Winona, Minnesota.⁴⁷⁷ At the fifth national convention, held in Watertown, Wisconsin, on 29 June 1968, there were 937 in attendance and membership stood at 346 congregations. Over \$7,000 was collected for two mission projects.⁴⁷⁸

Because of the crosses the synod had to bear—financial, manpower, and general fatigue because of the doctrinal battles with the LCMS—the zeal and energy for mission work could have lagged, just as the synod was facing burgeoning opportunities for mission expansion in the early 1960s. Both the synod’s leadership and members interested in missions employed a variety of avenues to keep the mission work of the synod before WELS membership. Convention essays, articles and features in the synod’s publications, mission seminars and “Mission Weekends,” and the founding of LWMS served to raise a mission mindset in WELS by providing information and encouragement to support the mission program of WELS to both members and pastors.

Taking Advantage of the Opportunities: 1961-1965

⁴⁷⁷“Forty-Year History,” 6-7.

⁴⁷⁸“Forty-Year History,” 13-14.

As WELS struggled to deal with the financial and manpower challenges and as the synod struggled to bear the cross of a church body known for its firm adherence to strict Lutheran teaching, the GBHM endeavored to expand the synod's home mission efforts. In fact, as noted above, the cross of being firm in its doctrinal stance was providing so many pleas for mission work that the synod was trying to figure out how to meet these emotional requests for the pure gospel. Also, as noted above, the GBHM, at least until 1965, had to attempt to take advantage of the many opportunities under the restrictions set forth in 1953 that made rapid and aggressive expansion a further challenge.

Therefore, it is remarkable to note the expansion that took place from 1961-1965. Despite financial challenges and the manpower shortage, Wiechmann reported to the synod in 1962 that six new fields had been opened in the previous twelve months: Sioux Falls, South Dakota, San Diego, a new mission in Tucson, Maumee, Ohio, a suburb of Toledo, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and Brookfield, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee.⁴⁷⁹ While work was started in these fields, it was often started without a fulltime resident missionary. For example, the field in San Diego was being served by Edgar Hoenecke on a part-time basis, since he was also the Executive Secretary for World Missions.⁴⁸⁰ It would be another year before a seminary graduate, Lowell Smith, was assigned to Reformation Lutheran Church in San Diego. However, the efforts in San Diego were blessed with steady growth. By 1965, two additional fields in eastern San Diego County were

⁴⁷⁹ *Report to the Nine Districts for 1962*, 26.

⁴⁸⁰ Initially, Hoenecke was flying to San Diego from Phoenix on the weekends. Eventually, he moved to the San Diego area.

being served and by 1968, Reformation was a self-supporting congregation with one hundred communicant members.⁴⁸¹

Only six new fields in the first year after the momentous break with the LCMS was certainly deemed a disappointment. Wiechmann began his 1962 report with the words, “Too late with too little.”⁴⁸² The few mission openings were also within the geographical confines of where the WELS was currently working. Both the number of mission openings and the geographical extent of them soon increased. In his 1963 report to the synod convention, Wiechmann mentioned that the “Mission-a-Month” program was on track with twelve parcels of land purchased in the previous year for new mission churches. Texas was the one new state added where mission work was approved in Dallas which would result in the establishment of Calvary Lutheran Church in 1964. By the end of 1964, two more fields were showing promise in the Dallas area, and by the end of 1968, Calvary was a self-supporting congregation with sixty-two communicant members.⁴⁸³ Mission work in Texas had been approved by the synod in 1955, so starting a mission in Texas at this time did not violate the 1953 resolution.

In his 1964 report to the districts of WELS, Wiechmann listed twenty-four new fields which were opened during the 1963 calendar year, including five in California plus the new

⁴⁸¹*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1968*, 4.

⁴⁸²*Report to the Nine Districts for 1962*, 25.

⁴⁸³*Statistical Report for 1968*, 6. “Calvary Lutheran Church, 1964-1989” (unnumbered pages), Texas, Dallas, Calvary, Congregational Files, WELS Synod Archives.

states of Virginia, Kansas, and Missouri, and Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.⁴⁸⁴ Only Virginia was not adjacent to a state where WELS already had a church. At the GBHM meeting of 6-9 November 1962, the Michigan District Mission Board had come with the request to begin mission work in the Washington D.C. area. Earlier that year, several families in the Washington D. C. area had sent an appeal to WELS to consider starting mission work there. Hilbert Engel and Daniel Gieschen, representatives of the Michigan District Mission Board, had met with some of these families in September 1962.⁴⁸⁵ When the request was made at the GBHM meeting, the 1953 resolutions were read, “specifically that the General Board for Home Missions must obtain specific authorization from the Synod to enter an area which lies outside its limits. It may, however, make exploratory investigations so as to make possible intelligent reports to the Synod.”⁴⁸⁶ The Michigan District Mission Board had previous experience dealing with the resolution when it began work in Florida. A way around the resolution was proposed. The Spiritual Welfare Commission was intending to call a man to serve the military personnel in the Washington D. C. area. It was decided that this man could carry out the exploratory efforts and get things off the ground.⁴⁸⁷ This could take some time. Meanwhile, in order to serve the

⁴⁸⁴*Report to the Nine Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 1964, 51.*

⁴⁸⁵Duane Schmeichel, “Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Falls Church, Virginia: A Pioneer in the East” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper, 1991), 2, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2541/SchmeichelGraceFallsChurchVA.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁶Minutes of General Board for Home Missions, 6-9 November 1962, 4-5.

⁴⁸⁷Minutes of General Board for Home Missions, 6-9 November 1962, 7.

families in the Washington D. C. area and not lose initial momentum and enthusiasm, Pastor Leonard Koeniger, associate pastor at Emanuel First in Lansing, was granted a six-week leave of absence to conduct services for those families. The first service was conducted on 31 March 1963 with an attendance of twenty-eight. Over the next five months, as other Michigan District pastors and professors from Michigan Lutheran Seminary traveled to the D. C. area to serve these families, attendance grew to a high of fifty.⁴⁸⁸

At the 1963 synod convention, the Michigan District report mentioned that steps were taken to hold the promising field in the Washington D. C. area. A plea was made to overturn the 1953 resolution and ratify the actions of the Michigan District Mission Board.⁴⁸⁹ At the same time, the Spiritual Welfare Commission raised the question if a man serving the military personnel in the D. C. area could also do exploratory work for establishing a new mission or if an additional exploratory missionary should be sent.⁴⁹⁰ There is no specific resolution addressing mission work in the Washington D. C. area. However, it was approved by the action of approving the GBHM budget. The GBHM must have anticipated such approval because a call was issued for a missionary to serve the Washington D. C. area before the synod convention began. The first two calls were returned before Walter Beckman, a 1958 seminary graduate who was serving a mission in Battle Creek, Michigan, accepted the call and was installed on 22

⁴⁸⁸Schmeichel, "Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Falls Church, Virginia: A Pioneer in the East," 2-3.

⁴⁸⁹*Proceedings for 1963 Convention*, 148.

⁴⁹⁰*Proceedings for 1963 Convention*, 154.

September 1963. Grace Lutheran Church of Falls Church, Virginia, was established later in 1963. By 1968, the congregation was self-supporting and had 112 communicant members.⁴⁹¹

By the 1965 synod convention, Wiechmann reported seventeen new fields for home mission work, including another new state: New Jersey.⁴⁹² No doubt, the manpower shortage was slowing the growth down a little. There must have been some concerns about the rate of expansion but Wiechmann addressed those concerned directly.

Shall we continue to expand? Though they be few, voices have been heard to say, “We’re going too fast and too far.” Your General Board for Home Missions doesn’t agree with those sentiments. We believe that it is the Lord Himself who is calling us into new areas through urgent appeals. We agree that each appeal must be thoroughly investigated before we commit ourselves to begin work in the area. We are doing that. Each summer we use from eight to ten seminary students to assist us in the work of surveying the areas from which these appeals come. We also have a policy of placing a second man into the new field as soon as possible, so as not to isolate a man. We are asking the Synod in convention to act on a memorial calling for an orderly expansion of our mission program into the newly assigned areas of responsibility. We agree that this must be done in accordance with good stewardship of our manpower and with the gifts of love placed at our disposal. Should the Lord in His wisdom let this world stand so long, we hope eventually to establish a network of Wisconsin Synod mission congregations in the key cities of our nation from coast to coast. God give us wisdom in our zeal.⁴⁹³

During the GBHM meeting while the 1965 convention was being held, Wiechmann “pointed out that we are now working in 24 states out of the 50 and have already received calls from 15 of the other 26 states. If we can start a minimum of two missions a year in those states,

⁴⁹¹*Statistical Report for 1968*, 16.

⁴⁹²*Proceedings for 1965 Convention*, 181.

⁴⁹³*Proceedings for 1965 Convention*, 180.

we can be ‘in every state by ’78.’”⁴⁹⁴ This appears to be the first usage of what became the slogan of home mission work going forward. WELS had a clear goal in front of it. Rapidly, it was moving from a regional church body to a nationwide church body.

It is quite remarkable to see that from only six new missions opened in 1961, the numbers increased to twelve in 1962, twenty-four in 1963, seventeen in 1964, and another nineteen in 1965 (with the additional states of Alabama, Alaska, and Pennsylvania).⁴⁹⁵ Two issues continued to hold back even more aggressive growth: lack of manpower and lack of CEF funds for land and chapels. It was evident that the manpower problem would not be an issue in the next few years. There was hope that through continued encouragement more funds would be available for this aggressive plan of mission growth. Because there was a lack of CEF monies available, the usual GBHM meeting in the fall of 1965 only included the pastors and not the lay representatives. At that meeting, Wiechmann presented some interesting statistics that illustrated the great progress the Wisconsin Synod had been making in the previous few years, despite the manpower and money issues. “According to a press release, the three major Lutheran bodies opened one new mission per 43,000 souls, while the Wisconsin Synod last year started 1 mission per 14,000 souls.”⁴⁹⁶ Wiechmann also noted that in the last two years, WELS had started missions in fifteen of the twenty largest cities in America. That was indicative of a shift in

⁴⁹⁴Minutes of the General Board for Home Missions, 4-11 August 1965, 1-2, box 01, folder 012, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁴⁹⁵*Report to the Nine Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 1966, 29.*

⁴⁹⁶Minutes of the General Board for Home Missions, 4-6 October 1965, 1, box 01, folder 012, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives. The three major Lutheran church bodies at the time were the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the American Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Church of America.

mission strategy from previous generations where missions tended to be started in smaller communities and rural areas where the German immigrants had settled. The new strategy, already begun to some extent in the 1930s, was to begin missions in larger metropolitan areas with the goal of having a network of several congregations in the city within a few years. The movement of the population to urban centers and the mobility of WELS members who were moving into metropolitan areas outside of the upper Midwest was driving this new strategy.

As has been noted with the examples of Reformation in San Diego, Calvary in Dallas, and Grace in Falls Church, the Lord was blessing the mission efforts with steady growth so that within only a few years, these mission churches were no longer mission churches but self-supporting congregations. Another mission started during this timeframe deserve mention as an example of the rapid growth experienced by at least some of these new missions. Exploratory work was started in Orange County, California, in late 1960. Initially, the small group was served by Pastor Armin Keibel from Los Angeles and Pastor Paul Heyn from Pomona. It was not until 27 January 1963 that the first resident pastor, Joel Gerlach, arrived. At that time, King of Kings Lutheran Church in Garden Grove had seventeen communicants.⁴⁹⁷ By 1965, the congregation was self-supporting with a membership of 236 communicants.⁴⁹⁸ The growth was not just from the gathering of other Lutherans. There were ninety-five adult confirmations from 1963-65, including sixty-two in 1965 alone. The Lord was bringing in a harvest of souls through the proclamation of his Word.

⁴⁹⁷*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1962*, 4.

⁴⁹⁸*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1965*, 4.

The years immediately after the decision to break with the LCMS were challenging for WELS. Financial difficulties and manpower shortages left WELS handicapped in its efforts to expand its mission endeavors. The 1953 resolution was also handcuffing the district mission board, especially the Michigan District Mission Board, as it tried to respond to the many appeals for help coming to the synod from areas outside the current geographical reach of WELS. But, as evidenced from the number of missions started in the first half of the 1960s and the efforts to start churches in areas like Washington D.C., WELS had taken some important first steps in expanding its home mission work in the face of those challenges.

*Taking Advantage of the Opportunities:
Heading toward a New District*

With the 1953 resolution put to rest at the 1965 synod convention and the prospect of more manpower on the horizon, the home mission expansion of the Wisconsin Synod continued aggressively in the ensuing years, although perhaps not quite at the rate of twenty-four new missions per year. In his final report as the executive secretary at the 1967 synod convention, Wiechmann could report that twenty-two new chapels had been constructed, fourteen parcels of land for new churches had been procured, seventeen new fields were being entered, and eighteen new fields were in the “exploratory” stage.⁴⁹⁹ Five new states were slated for exploratory work: Tennessee, Oklahoma, Maryland, Alaska, and New Mexico. Four of the five demonstrate the strategy of going into larger metropolitan areas, as Oklahoma City, Baltimore, Anchorage, and Albuquerque were cities being targeted. The move into larger urban centers was also evident by

⁴⁹⁹*Proceedings for 1967 Convention*, 191-193,

the fact that land was purchased in Orlando and the Miami area. Church buildings had been constructed in San Diego, San Jose, Detroit, and two in Denver. New missions had been started in Duluth, Kansas City, and a missionary was working in both Houston and San Antonio. In addition to the cities in the new states, exploratory work was also being carried out in El Paso, Fort Worth, and Indianapolis. It is interesting to note, however, that of the seventeen new fields, five were in Wisconsin. WELS was not forgetting the “home” territory.

New GBHM leadership was in place after the 1967 convention, as Norman Berg accepted the call to serve as Executive Secretary and George Boldt, pastor at Jerusalem in Morton Grove, Illinois, was elected chairman. But the aggressive expansion plans continued. In his first report to a synod convention in 1969, the home mission statistics Berg presented bear this out. Forty-eight building projects in mission fields were under construction or in the planning stages. Thirty-seven land purchases had been facilitated or were in process. Mission status had been granted to thirty-three new fields. Exploratory work was being carried out in fourteen places. The exploratory efforts of the previous several years meant that WELS now had established congregations in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Alaska, Connecticut, Maryland, and Louisiana. And the continued addition of churches in Florida resulted in the convention approving the request that the Florida congregations form a new mission district, which would come to be named the Gulf-Atlantic Mission District.

Under Berg’s leadership, the GBHM was doing more strategic planning in how many missions should be opened in a year. There was also the desire to reduce the time it took from when a mission was started and when the construction of the first building was finished from sixty months to forty-two months. Berg noted the problem with such a long wait. “The lack of

adequate worship facilities results in a waste of pastoral manpower, in debilitating frustration, and in a dampening of mission zeal locally and synodically in mission congregations.”⁵⁰⁰ After reviewing a little history about the lack of support for the CEF, Berg offered a solution. The synod needed to allocate significant budgetary funds from the synod budget to the CEF: \$750,000 per year in 1970-71; \$850,000 per year in 1972-73; \$950,000 per year in 1974-75. This was a significant upgrade from what was being proposed, which was starting with \$465,000 in 1970-71 and incrementally increasing until it topped off at \$750,000 in 1974-75.⁵⁰¹ These allocations were possible because of the “Called to Serve” program. The convention approved the proposal that at least \$465,000 be allocated with the accompanying increases. But the convention also urged “even greater response to the ‘Called to Serve’ program so that more CEF dollars might be available.”⁵⁰²

While these fiscal challenges in the CEF were frustrating, it did not slow down the home mission expansion. The 1969-70 fiscal year saw a “record” twenty-two new missions opened with another fourteen in 1970-71.⁵⁰³ In his report, Berg offered a retrospective of the previous decade.

⁵⁰⁰*Reports and Memorials for 1969 Convention*, 52.

⁵⁰¹*Reports and Memorials for 1969 Convention*, 149.

⁵⁰²*Proceedings for 1969 Convention*, 123-124.

⁵⁰³Berg states that the record is twenty-two new mission openings in year. However, Wiechmann had reported twenty-four new openings in calendar year 1963. It is possible that Berg was referring to a fiscal year, not a calendar year.

In its effort to serve all people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Synod in 1961 had established congregations in 16 states and 54 metropolitan areas of our country. Our Synod entered the decade of the sixties amid dire predictions from within, and especially without, that a Synod which took such an uncompromising confessional position was doomed to minimal growth and ultimate failure in a program of mission outreach in the United States.

In the decade past the Lord has permitted us instead to view home mission activity which has spread to 37 states and about 120 metropolitan areas in a Synod whose growth rate in membership and stewardship far surpasses that of any of the larger Lutheran bodies. Is the Lord not giving us a special message regarding the blessings of proclaiming His Word faithfully and widely by permitting us to see them even statistically?⁵⁰⁴

WELS now had established churches in Hawaii, Massachusetts, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee, as well as exploratory efforts ongoing in Little Rock, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City. As a sign that the GBHM was trying to be fiscally responsible and as evidence that missions were maturing, forty-two missions went self-supporting in the 1969-1971 biennium.⁵⁰⁵ Fifteen land purchases had been made during the biennium, and an impressive thirty congregations were in the planning or construction phase for worship facilities.⁵⁰⁶ The continued emphasis on mission work and evangelism was evident from the two essays presented at the convention. Professor Armin Schuetze of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary presented “We Believe—The Theology of Evangelism” and Professor Daniel Malchow of Northwestern

⁵⁰⁴*Reports and Memorials for the Forty-first Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 4-11 August 1971, 54.

⁵⁰⁵*Reports and Memorials for 1971 Convention*, 56-57.

⁵⁰⁶*Reports and Memorials for 1971 Convention*, 58.

Lutheran Academy, the preparatory high school in Mobridge, South Dakota, presented

“Therefore We Speak—Evangelism in Practice.”⁵⁰⁷

However, not everything was rosy from the perspective of the GBHM. Berg noted that there would soon be a backlog of \$5,000,000 in approved buildings because of a lack of CEF funds. In addition, due to budget cuts in the previous biennium and a proposed budget for 1971-73 biennium less than was needed, especially with rising inflation, the best the GBHM could hope for was opening twelve new missions instead of the requested twenty-seven. And there would be a virtual moratorium on exploring any new areas. Berg concluded, “This cutback in the scope of the home mission program, at a time when increasing pastoral manpower and widening opportunities fortunately confront us at the same time, threatens the healthy long-range balance of the synodical work program.”⁵⁰⁸ Now the manpower was becoming available, but the money seemed to be lacking. Veiled in Berg’s comments were a continued concern that there was not a proper balance between education and mission work. However, it should be noted that the approved budget for home and world missions combined was still over \$400,000 more per year—and nearly \$500,000 more in fiscal year 1972-73—than the budget for ministerial education.⁵⁰⁹ This demonstrates the continuing tension over priorities for the synod’s overall work. The convention resolved to have the Board of Trustees and GBHM work together to

⁵⁰⁷ *Proceedings for the Forty-first Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 4-11 August 1971, 42-66.

⁵⁰⁸ *Reports and Memorials for 1971 Convention*, 55-56.

⁵⁰⁹ *Reports and Memorials for 1971 Convention*, 144.

develop a new strategy for increasing gifts to the CEF. This was in direct response to a memorial from GBHM on the subject of the CEF. It also voted to increase the borrowing limit for the CEF. This allowed more funds to be made available for land purchases and worship facility construction.⁵¹⁰

Despite Berg's dire predictions at the 1971 convention, a year later he was reporting that eighteen new missions were opened, and thirteen new areas were being explored for their potential. In addition, twenty-two new places received loans for land purchases, while fifteen congregations received loan approval to construct worship facilities. Utah and Nevada were added to the list of states where WELS had a congregation. Clearly, one of the factors that made this possible was another nineteen missions went self-supporting during the year.⁵¹¹ While still expressing concern over a lack of funds which could potentially curtail the ongoing mission expansion, Berg acknowledged, "The evidence is 'in' that the Lord has undeservedly blessed our work of finding, folding, and feeding in the recent past. Statistics reveal only a small part of His grace, because they do not display the love of Christ in the lives and souls of people."⁵¹²

The positive report continued at the 1973 synod convention. Berg was able to report, "In the past two years many blessings from our Lord have made this loving care by us possible on a scale beyond our dreams of several years ago. The Lord's blessings have solved many of the

⁵¹⁰*Proceedings for 1971 Convention*, 145-146.

⁵¹¹*Report to the Nine Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, April 1972*, 30-32.

⁵¹²*Report to the Nine Districts for 1972*, 30.

frustrations referred to in reports from home missions in the recent past.”⁵¹³ Another twenty missions were opened in the 1972-73 fiscal year, adding Rhode Island, Delaware, North Carolina, and Wyoming to the roster of states where WELS had congregations, as well as a new Hispanic mission in Corpus Christi, Texas.⁵¹⁴ The CEF had grown to the point that Berg reported that fifty percent more funds were available than in past years. This was the result of a special “Lending to the Lord” program which was encouraging individual members to invest their money in the CEF. This increased the amount of capital available.⁵¹⁵ The result was that “loan allocations were granted for 43 church sites and 31 worship and educational facilities.”⁵¹⁶ But while CEF money and manpower were available in greater abundance, a slowdown was faced because of cutbacks in the operating budget for home missions. While the budgets for world missions and ministerial education were increasing, the budget for home missions was slightly decreasing. One reason a slight decrease was possible was that another eleven missions reached self-supporting status.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-second Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 8-15 August 1973, 39.

⁵¹⁴ *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 40.

⁵¹⁵ Already at the end of October 1972, an additional \$1.75 million had been made in loans to the CEF, Minutes of the General Board for Home Missions, 6-7 November 1972, 2, box 01, folder 016, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵¹⁶ *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 39.

⁵¹⁷ *Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 39-40.

The home mission program of the synod was in the spotlight at the 1973 convention for two reasons. One reason was that the GBHM was proposing an overhaul of how the home mission program was administered and overseen. The idea was to divide the districts and mission districts of the synod into four geographical regions. The result would have been another layer of administration. The synod was not ready for this kind of change and narrowly voted down the proposal.⁵¹⁸

This perceived setback was minor. The second development was major and was approved. The new South Atlantic District was officially established by the convention, the first new district since 1954.⁵¹⁹ The newly formed district had twenty-one congregations in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, and South Carolina. The district was served by twenty pastors. Three congregations were operating Lutheran elementary schools. Ray Wiechmann, former GBHM executive secretary now serving at Bay Pines Lutheran Church in Seminole, Florida, was elected the first district president of the new district. This was a momentous occasion in the history of WELS home missions. None of the twenty-one congregations had existed prior to 1955. The establishment of the South Atlantic District in 1973 gives clear indication of the rapid expansion in WELS home missions in a relatively short period of time.

Several mission congregations are worth highlighting for how rapidly they advanced from mission starts to self-supporting, thriving congregations during these years of 1965-1973. In 1965, mission work was started in the Sacramento area. St. Mark's Lutheran Church was

⁵¹⁸*Proceedings of 1973 Convention*, 66-69.

⁵¹⁹*Proceedings of 1973 Convention*, 65.

established in Citrus Heights, a suburb of Sacramento, that same year. Pastor David Valleskey also arrived in Northern California in 1965 to begin exploratory work in San Jose. Apostles Lutheran Church was established the next year. In 1971, both congregations were self-supporting. In 1972, Apostles reported twenty-four adult confirmations and eight adult baptisms.⁵²⁰ In 1973, St. Mark's reported twenty-three adult confirmations and eight adult baptisms.⁵²¹ By 1973, St. Mark's had grown to 292 communicant members, while Apostles was at 253 communicant members. Both churches were operating thriving Lutheran elementary schools.⁵²² Meanwhile, in Texas, St. Mark's in Duncanville, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, and Christ the Lord in Houston both got their start in 1966. St. Mark's was self-supporting already by 1969, while Christ the Lord achieved that status in 1970. In New Jersey, Our Savior's Lutheran Church was established in East Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1966. It was self-supporting in 1972. That year it reported nineteen adult confirmations⁵²³ and by 1973 it had 104 communicant members.⁵²⁴ The work of WELS home missionaries in proclaiming the gospel was bearing tangible fruit, often in rather remarkable ways from a numerical standpoint.

From 1965-1973, the opportunities continued to abound. The manpower was now available as the seminary graduating classes were averaging more than thirty-eight per class from

⁵²⁰*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1972*, 6.

⁵²¹*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1973*, 6.

⁵²²*Statistical Report for 1973*, 6.

⁵²³*Statistical Report for 1972*, 14.

⁵²⁴*Statistical Report for 1973*, 14.

1965-1973. That number increased dramatically in the next decade, as the seminary classes averaged just over fifty per class from 1974-1983. Despite continuing financial challenges, WELS home missions continued expanding its reach throughout the United States. The fact that in some cases missions were advancing to self-supporting in a few years contributed to this continuing expansion in the face of the financial challenges. The establishment of the South Atlantic District was also proof that the home mission efforts of WELS were maturing.

*Taking Advantage of the Opportunities:
Every State by 1983*

By the end of 1973, only six states remained without some kind of WELS presence: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, West Virginia, Arkansas, and Mississippi. A missionary was doing exploratory work in the Louisville area, but no congregation had been officially organized yet. Wiechmann's goal of "Every State by '78," which he had voiced in 1965, was within reach. The synod fell short but only by five years. At the end of 1983, WELS had established congregations in forty-nine states with a missionary doing exploratory work in Portland, Maine, which resulted in an established congregation the next year.

There are a variety of reasons one could point to for the seeming slowdown in getting into those last few states. In general, those states did not have a history of strong Lutheranism, or at least, not a strong interest or understanding of confessional Lutheranism. In addition, not as many WELS members had been relocating to those states. For the most part, they are states with lower populations and fewer large population centers. In 1977, the GBHM iterated fourteen "principal guiding policies." The second policy listed was "to establish mission congregations

primarily in major population centers.”⁵²⁵ One way that was being carried out was to establish daughter missions in another area of a metropolitan area after the first mission had been established. For example, Reformation Lutheran Church in San Diego had been established in 1963. By 1983, there were six additional congregations in San Diego County with exploratory work ongoing for another mission. In 1966, Christ the Lord Lutheran Church in Houston had been established. By 1983, there were three established churches in the Houston area with exploratory work being done in two more locations in the metro area. With all the additional mission starts since 1961, there was the desire to plant multiple congregations in these larger metropolitan areas. That left less manpower and resources for the remaining states.

There were other developments in the synod that diverted some attention away from the growing home mission program. First, the growing enrollments at the ministerial education schools throughout the 1970s was once again taxing the campuses, especially at the New Ulm campus where Martin Luther Academy, one of the synod’s prep schools, and Dr. Martin Luther College were experiencing record enrollments forcing Martin Luther Academy to turn away students.⁵²⁶ The challenge was not as acute at the Watertown campus, but the administration of Northwestern College and Northwestern Prep had to be creative to provide housing for the increasing number of prep school students. In addition, Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota, desperately needed updated facilities. This led to an extensive report by the synod’s Commission on Higher Education at the 1977 convention with analysis of

⁵²⁵*Reports and Memorials for the Forty-fourth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3-10 August 1977, 50-51.

⁵²⁶*Reports and Memorials for 1977 Convention*, 23.

enrollment projections and some far-reaching recommendations that included amalgamating Martin Luther Academy and Northwestern Prep and moving Northwestern Lutheran Academy to a totally different state, preferably to the Southwest or the West Coast, as well as an extensive building project at Michigan Lutheran Seminary.⁵²⁷ A special convention was held in 1978 to make a decision. Martin Luther Academy was relocated to a newly purchased school in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and renamed Martin Luther Preparatory School.⁵²⁸ The 1979 convention voted to close Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, South Dakota, after fifty-one years of existence.⁵²⁹

Second, there was another wave of openings of area Lutheran high schools throughout the nation. In 1971, Shoreland Lutheran High School began operations in Kenosha, Wisconsin. In 1972, Michigan Lutheran High School was opened in St. Joseph, Michigan. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School was established in 1974 in Jackson, Wisconsin, about twenty miles northwest of Milwaukee. Suburban Detroit was the location for Huron Valley Lutheran High School which opened in 1975. High schools were opened in western districts during 1977-1978: California Lutheran High School in Garden Grove, California; Arizona Lutheran Academy in Phoenix; and Evergreen Lutheran High School in Kent, Washington. 1979 saw the opening of four more high schools. Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School was opened in New Ulm,

⁵²⁷*Proceedings of the Forty-fourth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3-10 August 1977, 49-60.

⁵²⁸*Proceedings of the Special Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 11-12 July 1978, 32-39.

⁵²⁹*Proceedings of the Forty-fifth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1-8 August 1979, 77.

Minnesota. When Martin Luther Academy relocated to Prairie du Chien, the people of the churches in the New Ulm area wanted secondary Christian education for their high school students. Northland Lutheran High School was opened in Merrill, Wisconsin, and would soon relocate to Wausau. After decades of discussing the possibility of opening a prep school in the Nebraska District, a federation of Nebraska District congregations opened Nebraska Lutheran High School in the small town of Waco, Nebraska.⁵³⁰ Finally, West Lutheran High School began operations in the northwest suburbs of Minneapolis.⁵³¹ All of these new high schools, together with the continued establishment and growth of Lutheran elementary schools throughout the synod, required time, energy, resources, and manpower to open, build, and operate these schools. In fact, in his report to the 1977 synod convention, President Naumann, after citing the need for some budget cutbacks, sounded this concern.

We rejoice to see how many more Christian day schools are being opened and staffed every year. We appreciate the desire of our members to give their children an area Lutheran high school to attend in which they can receive also their secondary schooling from faithful confessing Lutheran teachers. This determination and the willingness to support such a program financially must certainly be God-pleasing.

But is there a danger that these new programs are being at least in part supported at the expense of existing programs? Are we unable to support more men in our World Mission fields, because the new schools close to home are dearer to our hearts?

By this I am not implying that this is being done consciously. I can't believe that our members want to deny their fellowman, for whom Christ also died and rose again, the very means of grace by which they were brought to faith and are being kept in faith. Yet

⁵³⁰The establishment of Nebraska Lutheran Academy had actually been approved by the synod in 1953 and land had been purchased in Grand Island, Nebraska, for the new prep school. However, synod budgetary concerns and other synodical needs prevented the approved academy from being constructed and opened. The Nebraska Lutheran Academy Board of Control reported to synod conventions from 1955-1967 when it was disbanded.

⁵³¹Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 246-248.

the danger exists that we could slip into such a program without being aware of what is happening.⁵³²

A “Committee on Kingdom Work Balance” presented a report at the 1977 convention urging consideration of the bigger synodical picture when planning new ministry programs.⁵³³

During the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the synod was also devoting time to studying the need for a different Bible translation to use in synod publications. The language of the King James Version was sounding more and more antiquated, especially for a church body which was trying to reach more non-Christians. The 1977 convention essays were both on Bible translation: “Preparing a New Bible Translation in Luther’s Day,” by Professor Arnold Koelpin of Dr. Martin Luther College, and “Preparing a New Bible Translation Today,” by Professor John Jeske of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.⁵³⁴ Closely connected to the Bible translation issue was an updating of Luther’s *Small Catechism*. Several conventions in the late 1970s discussed updated wording to the enchiridion of the *Small Catechism*. A new exposition of the catechism was published in 1982.⁵³⁵

⁵³²*Proceedings of 1977 Convention*, 20-21.

⁵³³*Proceedings of 1977 Convention*, 27-28.

⁵³⁴*Proceedings of the 1977 Convention*, 1-15 (these pages are an “appendix” at the back of the *Proceedings*). The 1977 convention commended the New International Version (NIV) to members as a modern translation and the 1979 convention recommended that it be the preferred translation for publications. Several WELS scholars participated in the NIV translation project, including Professor Jeske.

⁵³⁵The enchiridion is what Martin Luther wrote as his *Small Catechism* in 1529. An exposition of the catechism usually consists of questions and answers with supporting Bible passages and other explanatory notes which expands and explains the doctrines taught in Luther’s *Small Catechism*. The enchiridion is typically memorized by children preparing for confirmation. The exposition usually serves as the “textbook” for confirmation instruction. The 1982 exposition of Luther’s *Small Catechism* was written by Professor David Kuske of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and replaced the “Gausewitz” catechism.

And if all of this wasn't enough, there was change in leadership. At the 1973 convention, Pastor Daniel Gieschen, pastor at St. Stephen's in Adrian, Michigan, and Michigan District Mission Board chairman, was elected as the new GBHM chairman. Even more traumatic to the synod, six weeks before the 1979 synod convention President Naumann suddenly passed away and was replaced by Carl Mischke, the First Vice President and President of the Western Wisconsin District. Mischke was elected as the new synod president in 1979.

Despite these crosses which could have slowed down expansion into the remaining states, that is not what happened. As the synod celebrated the 125th anniversary of its founding in 1975 under the theme, "Grace 125," the GBHM recounted the blessings of God's grace in home missions. One hundred forty seminary graduates were assigned to home mission congregations in the previous six years. Another forty-one missions were opened in the previous two years. While no new states were added, a congregation was established in Louisville and exploratory work was being carried out in New Hampshire. Loans had been approved for thirty-seven congregations to purchase land, while forty-three mission congregations received loan approval for construction of worship facilities. In addition, \$750,000 from the special anniversary offering was earmarked for the CEF to help deal with the growing backlog of land purchases and building needs.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁶*Reports and Memorials for the Forty-third Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 6-13 August 1975, 46-50. Beginning with Gieschen's tenure as GBHM chairman, there were no longer separate reports from the chairman and executive secretary.

The 1975 convention also approved the support of the WELS first “foreign” home mission, St. John’s Lutheran Church and School on the West Indies island of Antigua.⁵³⁷ Mission work in Antigua had been started in 1973 by the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL), a group of churches which had broken off from the Missouri Synod. Most of these churches were in the process of joining WELS at this time, so it only made sense that their mission would be supported by WELS. It was decided to place the Antigua mission under the oversight of the GBHM instead of the BWM because of the Western culture and English language of the island. When the mission joined WELS, it had fifty-eight communicant members and its school had an enrollment of forty-four students.⁵³⁸ By 1983, it had grown to 132 communicants served by two missionaries and blessed with nineteen adult confirmations during that year. The school stood at sixty-six students served by three teachers.⁵³⁹ St. John’s remains a WELS mission today.

The next biennium saw an increase in this momentum. Fifty-one missions were started in the 1975-77 biennium, including an established mission in New Hampshire and exploratory work in West Virginia and Little Rock, Arkansas. The extra funds available from CEF were producing results. Forty-nine missions had approval to search for land, while fifty-four

⁵³⁷*Proceedings of 1975 Convention*, 64-67, 69-70.

⁵³⁸*Proceedings of 1975 Convention*, 64.

⁵³⁹*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for 1983*, 58-59.

congregations received loans to construct or purchase worship facilities.⁵⁴⁰ Because of the rapid growth of WELS home missions, the synod also approved the calling of another full-time administrator to assist Executive Secretary Berg.⁵⁴¹ The first several calls were declined. But on 29 April 1979, Pastor Larry Zwiig was installed as the Associate Executive Secretary of the GBHM. Zwiig came with mission experience in Wisconsin and Florida and had been serving as the South Atlantic District Mission Board chairman.

Additional administrative assistance was addressed with the calling of Zwiig. But there was another challenge faced because of the rapid growth of home missions. High inflation and high interest rates during the 1970s were making the CEF extremely important to fledgling mission congregations. But the growing number of such mission congregations was threatening the future viability of the CEF. The “Building His House” program which had been encouraged at the 1977 convention was bearing fruit in more money available. This was a program aimed at encouraging WELS members and congregations to invest in CEF. In exchange for lower interest on their investment, their money provided capital to be loaned to mission congregations. But the ever-increasing number of mission congregations seeking loans and the problem of inflation causing land prices and construction costs to skyrocket, there was the need to stretch the CEF dollars in some way. At a special GBHM and CEF seminar held in January 1978, a presentation was given by Duane Anderson, an architect who had formerly served as the architect for home missions. He urged the synod to consider a first building for a mission which would be more

⁵⁴⁰*Reports and Memorials for 1977 Convention*, 54-56.

⁵⁴¹*Proceedings of 1977 Convention*, 79-80.

modest than previous mission chapels, have multiple uses, and allow for easy building additions when the mission grew.⁵⁴²

The result of Anderson's presentation coupled with a report received by the GBHM that indicated that in some instances mission chapels had been constructed which proved to be larger than needed⁵⁴³ led the GBHM in 1979 to adopt the concept of the Worship/Education/Fellowship (WEF) facility as the first building for a mission.⁵⁴⁴ The WEF unit was about 2,000 square feet. A portion of it would have seating for about eighty-five to one hundred people in worship. Another section of the building could handle about sixty to seventy people around tables for fellowship and education. These two sections were partitioned by a portable wall so that the space could be maximized. The education/fellowship section could be subdivided by partitions to become four separate Sunday school teaching areas. Kitchen facilities were usually recessed behind an accordion door. The building would also have a small office space for the pastor.⁵⁴⁵ The advantages of these WEF units were that they were cost-effective, allowing more mission congregations to get a permanent facility in a shorter timeframe under the terms of a more affordable loan. Experience had demonstrated that the viability of a new mission

⁵⁴²Minutes of CEF Administration Seminar, 30-31 January 1978, 1, box 01, folder 019, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵⁴³Minutes of GBHM Meeting, 23-25 April 1978, 12, box 01, folder 019, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵⁴⁴Minutes of GBHM Meeting, 12-13 February 1979, 6, box 01, folder 019, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵⁴⁵*Reports and Memorials for the Forty-fifth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1-8 August 1979, 75-76.

was greatly helped by the presence of a permanent building, rather than rented facilities. It was also envisioned that the open rectangular space would allow for multiple, flexible uses. The WEF unit became the standard first building for missions for the next decade or so.

It is certainly understandable, given the circumstances of the late 1970s economy and the mushrooming of home mission openings, why the GBHM opted for the WEF units. Hindsight, however, allows one to see that these units were not the most helpful for several reasons. First, the architectural design did not look like a church from the exterior. The WEF unit had a low roof line and was easily mistaken for a bank or dentist's office. Second, the small size tended to stifle the growth of a mission. When you build for a capacity of eighty-five people, that often becomes the goal for growth. Finally, while the building was designed to become an education/fellowship wing when a larger, second phase chapel was constructed, it did not serve that purpose very well. It was still often too small.⁵⁴⁶

The use of cheaper initial buildings allowed the mission expansion to continue at a rapid pace in the ensuing years, despite a growing synod deficit. During the 1978-79 biennium, another thirty-four mission congregations were established, including two congregations in two new states: Arkansas and West Virginia. In addition, exploratory work of varying kinds was

⁵⁴⁶This author saw firsthand the problems of the small size of these WEF units on several choir tours to the South Atlantic District in 1985, 1988, and 1992. Often, the choir of thirty to thirty-five singers took up a third of the space. On one occasion, because the Seminary Chorus numbered about fifty, the concert was moved to the Presbyterian church building next door to the WELS mission. In addition, the author spent his vicar year at Sola Fide Lutheran Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, a congregation which had started in 1977 and had constructed a WEF unit in 1980. By the author's vicar year in 1993-94, the WEF unit was serving as the fellowship hall and Bible class room. A second phase chapel had been constructed. But the WEF unit was proving to be too small for fellowship and education. In fact, Sola Fide had constructed an education building with office space because the original WEF unit was inadequate for educational uses beyond adult Bible class. The newly constructed education building was able to serve as Sunday school classrooms and also had new church offices. Eventually, it was used when Sola Fide opened a Lutheran elementary school in the mid-1990s.

being supported in thirty different locations. To assist the growing number of home missionaries the Michigan District and the South Atlantic District began a pilot program of calling a full-time mission counselor.⁵⁴⁷ The mission counselor, who would be a pastor with experience in home mission work, was to provide guidance, counsel, training, resources, and encouragement to the home missionaries of the district. This was especially important because many of these new home missionaries were recent seminary graduates. Early reports indicated that the mission counselors were proving helpful. The California Mission District was intending to call a mission counselor to aid the many home missionaries in California.⁵⁴⁸ The CEF continued to be well-used as thirty-five congregations had received loan approval for land purchase and thirty-one missions received loans for varying stages of building.⁵⁴⁹ The GBHM had good reason to begin its report on a positive note.

Surely, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit have been with us as we went about our Lord's kingdom work in the area of home missions. God has been over us, guiding us; His Son, Jesus Christ, has been with us; and God has been in us with His Holy Spirit. This is evident by the blessings He has put upon our efforts. The statistics in our report give evidence of God's abundant blessings.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷*Reports and Memorials for 1979 Convention*, 69. The idea for this program had been first mentioned at the 1977 convention.

⁵⁴⁸Minutes of the General Board for Home Missions, 21-24 September 1980, 1, 13, box 01, folder 020, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵⁴⁹*Reports and Memorials for 1979 Convention*, 79-82.

⁵⁵⁰*Reports and Memorials for 1979 Convention*, 69.

This optimism was not as evident in the following two years. For example, already in February 1980, there was the encouragement “to under-expend wherever possible,” even though there was an expected sixteen percent increase in revenue from the congregations.⁵⁵¹ At its May meeting, Berg had reported to the GBHM that the synod was facing a \$1.9 million budget deficit and “urged extreme caution in the consideration of expansion.”⁵⁵² In its report to the 1981 synod convention, the GBHM had to present pessimistic news. Because of the increasing budget deficit, a “managed slow-down” was in place.⁵⁵³ Only eighteen new missions were opened in the 1979-1981 biennium. And none of those were in the remaining states of Vermont, Maine, and Mississippi, although manpower was granted for exploratory work in Barre, Vermont.⁵⁵⁴ Because of the budget cutback for the next biennium, only ten new missions were planned, although the report listed sixty locations where the various district mission boards were recommending new missions be started, if only the money was available.⁵⁵⁵

The growing budget deficit came from efforts to amortize as part of the synod budget the many capital building projects on the ministerial education campuses, including the purchase of

⁵⁵¹Minutes of General Board for Home Missions, 11-13 February 1980, 1.

⁵⁵²Minutes of the General Board for Home Missions, 4-5 May 1981, 1-2, box 01, folder 020, The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection, WELS Synod Archives.

⁵⁵³*Reports and Memorials for the Forty-sixth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3-8 August 1981, 61.

⁵⁵⁴*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 68-69.

⁵⁵⁵*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 63.

the Prairie du Chien campus for Martin Luther Preparatory School. The high interest rates of the late 1970s made the situation even worse. In addition, budgetary contributions to the CEF and the World Mission Building Fund were also placing stress on the synod's operating budget.⁵⁵⁶ At the conclusion of his president's report to the convention, President Carl Mischke noted that this could have been a "convention of gloom."⁵⁵⁷ But efforts had been made leading up to the convention to deal with the budget deficit through some targeted cuts. More significantly, the pessimistic mood turned optimistic with the convention's approval of a \$10 million capital fund offering, the "Reaching Out" offering, to be divided between buildings on the ministerial education campuses (50%), the CEF (40%), and the World Mission Building Fund (10%).⁵⁵⁸ This was the first synod-wide offering appeal that would be shared equally between ministerial education needs and mission needs.

Although some concerns were raised about the methodology, the Reaching Out offering was a resounding success.⁵⁵⁹ Already at the 1983 convention, commitments were reported in excess of \$18 million and the convention addressed resolutions determining how to allocate the

⁵⁵⁶*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 127-128.

⁵⁵⁷*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 25.

⁵⁵⁸*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 138.

⁵⁵⁹Three printed memorials and one unpublished memorial came before the 1983 convention regarding especially the use of an outside fundraising company, *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-seventh Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1-6 August 1983, 235-238. Fredrich also noted this in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 262-263.

added blessings.⁵⁶⁰ By the end of the offering in 1985, over \$23 million had been given. Mischke could report to the 1983 convention that the budget deficit was eliminated. While this came about by some budgetary pruning, it was also made possible by the removal of capital expenditures from the budget as a result of the Reaching Out offering.⁵⁶¹ The GBHM report drew a connection between the synod's mission spirit and its response to the Reaching Out offering. "In all candor the faith-life response of the members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to the Reaching Out appeal will reshape and revitalize the program of the GBHM in its attempt to coordinate the efforts of our members to reach people of our domestic mission fields with Christ's saving gospel."⁵⁶² The improved financial outlook allowed the synod to open twenty-four new missions in the 1981-83 biennium, including new mission congregations in Barre, Vermont, and Columbus, Mississippi. In addition, manpower for exploratory work had been approved for Portland, Maine.⁵⁶³ Paul Janke, a 1982 seminary graduate, was the man whose labor led to the last state in which a WELS congregation was established in early 1984, Beautiful Savior in Portland. The ambitious mantra of "Every State by '78" was missed by only five years.

⁵⁶⁰*Reports and Memorials for 1983 Convention*, 211-212.

⁵⁶¹*Proceedings of the Forty-seventh Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1-5 August 1983, 24-25. Apparently, the convention was planned for 1-6 August, but all business was wrapped up a day early. Or there is a misprint.

⁵⁶²*Proceedings of 1983 Convention*, 45.

⁵⁶³*Reports and Memorials for 1983 Convention*, 50-51.

The 1983 convention significantly also approved the formation of two more districts. The Texas Conference of the Arizona-California District (with the exception of the El Paso congregations which remained in the Arizona-California District because of geographical considerations), as well as congregations in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana west of the Mississippi excluding the Baton Rouge/New Orleans area, formed the South Central District. It had twenty-nine congregations and eight exploratory missions served by thirty-four pastors. The Colonial Conference of the Michigan District, which included the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, the eastern part of Pennsylvania, as well as Ontario and Quebec, Canada, formed the North Atlantic District, which consisted of thirty congregations and four exploratory missions served by twenty-nine pastors.⁵⁶⁴ All the congregations in both new districts were the result of WELS home mission efforts since 1964. In the twenty-two years since the break with the Missouri Synod, the home mission efforts of WELS resulted in a truly nationwide church body.⁵⁶⁵

Growth of WELS

Overall, the synod continued its growth trend that had been enjoyed in previous decades. However, the years 1961-1983 saw an increased growth rate in communicant membership from the previous decades. From 1961-1971, the synod grew from 233,627

⁵⁶⁴*Proceedings of 1983 Convention*, 45-46.

⁵⁶⁵As of this writing, WELS has congregations in 48 states. The congregations in West Virginia have closed. The congregation in Rhode Island, Good Shepherd, relocated to South Attleboro, Massachusetts. Very small congregations remain in Portland, Maine, and Columbus, Mississippi.

communicant members to 275,500, an increase of nearly eighteen percent, almost double the rate of increase from 1950-1960. The next dozen years saw the rate decrease but still at a rate higher than in previous decades. By 1983, the communicant membership of the synod totaled 314,792, an increase of over fourteen percent from 1971. What is interesting about these figures is that from 1961-1971, the synod averaged 2,480 adult confirmations per year, while from 1972-1983, the synod averaged 3,134 adult confirmations per year. There was especially a jump between 1979 and 1980, when the numbers went from 3,081 to 3,510 adult confirmations in those years.

A question is how to account for the discrepancy in the higher rate of growth in membership in the 1960s with the lower adult confirmation totals during that same decade. One answer is that the number of youth confirmations was higher from 1961-1971 (7,303 per year) than it was from 1972-1983 (7,097 per year).⁵⁶⁶ There was a significant drop from 1978 to 1979 (7,424 to 6,602), almost the same time that the adult confirmation totals saw a more significant increase. The sharp decline in youth confirmations can be attributed to the end of the larger Baby Boomer generation growing into their high school years.

Another possible answer is that as the synod started new home missions, displaced WELS members and disaffected members from other Lutheran church bodies, especially the Missouri Synod, were joining WELS congregations. Beginning in 1974, a new category entitled “Profession of Faith” was added to the statistical reports to account for new communicant members who came from other Lutheran church bodies and joined WELS congregations,

⁵⁶⁶In WELS practice, children of the congregation usually go through a multiple year program of instruction (usually two or three years) with the pastor using Luther’s *Small Catechism* which leads to their confirmation, usually after eighth grade. After their confirmation, these young people are considered communicant members because in WELS practice confirmation, and especially the catechetical instruction that goes along with it, is the indicator that a young Christian is ready to receive Holy Communion.

presumably after a shorter instruction course than would be given to someone who did not already have a Lutheran background. From 1974-1983, the number of people who became communicant members by profession of faith averaged 4,239 per year. One can safely assume that this number was similar or even higher in the 1960s and early 1970s as the turmoil over the break with the LCMS settled down and WELS was opening new missions in new places. A few examples from home missions started during the early 1960s can demonstrate this. Grace in Falls Church, Virginia, grew from forty-one communicant members in 1965 to sixty-two in 1966, yet only had two adult confirmations and zero youth confirmations.⁵⁶⁷ How to account for the nineteen additional new members? They either had to be WELS members who had moved to the area and now joined Grace, or they were former members of other Lutheran church bodies. Another example is Redeemer, a mission started in Merritt Island, Florida, in 1964. In 1965, Redeemer had thirty-five communicant members, while a year later it had grown to fifty-nine communicant members. During that year, it had seven adult confirmations and two youth confirmations.⁵⁶⁸ The remaining fifteen new members must have been WELS or other Lutheran. To aid mission congregations in their gathering of WELS members, an aggressive “soul conservation” program had been in place since the early 1960s as a clearinghouse for pastors to send the names and addresses of WELS members who moved to a location where there was not yet any WELS members. Routinely, the *Northwestern Lutheran* contained notices urging pastors

⁵⁶⁷ *Statistical Report for 1965*, 14. *Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for 1966*, 14.

⁵⁶⁸ *Statistical Report for 1965*, 12. *Statistical Report for 1966*, 10.

and members to send in names and addresses, especially when a new mission was opening in a new location.

That's not to say that WELS home mission expansion during this timeframe was primarily the gathering of displaced WELS members and disgruntled Missouri Synod members. But those were important sources of new members for the growth of fledgling missions. However, evangelism was being carried out throughout the synod, both in the home mission starts and established congregations and was resulting in sizable increases in the number of adult confirmations and adult baptisms. From a human perspective, the sharper increase in the 1970s and early 1980s was probably due to two factors. One was the increasing number of pastors, especially those who had experience in mission settings because of the growth of home mission openings during these decades. Many of them were assigned to home mission settings. While many also took calls to established congregations during their careers, their experiences no doubt served them well in carrying out evangelism in their new calls.⁵⁶⁹ By 1983, the number of pastors serving in WELS had grown from a low of 629 in 1964 to 1,044 in 1983.

The second factor was an increased awareness, encouragement, and synod-wide emphasis on evangelism. Already in 1973, the GBHM's Commission on Evangelism had requested a full-time executive secretary for evangelism.⁵⁷⁰ While this was approved by the synod in 1979, the

⁵⁶⁹The author's father, Carl Otto, was an example of this. After spending his vicar year serving in a mission setting under Pastor Paul Heyn, the chairman of the California Mission District, in the San Diego area, he was assigned in 1969 to Redeemer in Council Bluffs, Iowa, a small mission congregation. After four years, he accepted a call to serve at North Trinity in Milwaukee which, at the time, boasted the largest communicant membership in the Milwaukee area.

⁵⁷⁰*Reports and Memorials for 1973 Convention*, 56-57.

calling of a man was deferred until at least 1981 because of financial considerations.⁵⁷¹ The 1981 convention again approved the new position but budget stringencies kept the position vacant.⁵⁷² It was not until 1984 that an executive secretary for evangelism was finally in place. Evangelism encouragement and education was taking place, however, throughout the synod. In 1978, a synod-wide convocation on evangelism had been held and this led to some districts conducting smaller convocations in the ensuing years.⁵⁷³ Since 1977, the Commission on Evangelism also published a newsletter three times a year, “The Evangelism Lifeline.” In 1981, 10,000 copies of each issue were distributed to congregations throughout the synod.⁵⁷⁴ As seen from the increasing numbers of adult confirmations in congregations throughout the synod, these efforts at evangelism encouragement and education, coupled with the increased home mission starts, contributed to the continued growth of WELS.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹*Proceedings for 1979 Convention*, 106-107.

⁵⁷²*Proceedings of the Forty-sixth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 3-8 August 1981, 77-78. *Reports and Memorials for 1983 Convention*, 75.

⁵⁷³*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 85.

⁵⁷⁴*Reports and Memorials for 1981 Convention*, 85.

⁵⁷⁵The adult confirmations for 1981 make an interesting study. That year, there were 3,745 adult confirmations throughout the synod, the highest total in this timeframe. Ninety-seven congregations counted double digit totals in adult confirmations in 1981. Of those ninety-seven congregations, fourteen were receiving some kind of support from the synod (*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for 1981*). In total, the home mission congregations of the synod accounted for 578 adult confirmations during 1981 (*Report to the Ten Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 1982*, 51). This is an almost identical ratio (15.4%) as twenty years earlier in 1961 (15%), *Statistical Report for 1961*, 68; *Report to the Nine Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 1962*, 29.

Conclusion

While the home mission expansion from 1961-1983 is remarkable, it is only part of the story of mission expansion in this time period. World missions expanded into Indonesia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Columbia, as well as extended its work in Japan, Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia), and Malawi.⁵⁷⁶ The number of WELS foreign missionaries grew from eight in 1961 to forty in 1983. In 1963, President Naumann issued a call for a focus on what he called “inner mission work.” He urged the synod to devote some attention and resources to serving the blind, the deaf, the poor, the imprisoned, and the aged with the gospel.⁵⁷⁷ The focus on this work fell to the GBHM and resulted in several committees under the auspices of the GBHM to oversee work in these areas. In 1971, the synod convention approved the calling of a full-time man to serve as the administrator for Special Ministries, as it came to be called.⁵⁷⁸ Alfons Woldt, a WELS teacher who had served at Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers’ College, accepted the call and was still serving in that capacity in 1983. He oversaw and organized wide-ranging efforts to serve the visually and hearing impaired, children with special

⁵⁷⁶The story of the world mission expansion at this time is told well in Sauer, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, And People*.

⁵⁷⁷*Proceedings for 1963 Convention*, 13.

⁵⁷⁸*Proceedings for 1971 Convention*, 92.

educational needs, the imprisoned, the aged in nursing homes, and WELS members serving in the military.⁵⁷⁹

Home missions was just one part of WELS mission activity, but it was the most far-reaching and comprehensive. Despite the cross of being a church body striving to remain faithful to all the teachings of the Bible during the era of the 1960s and 1970s when many mainline church bodies were abandoning their historic teachings and the nation was embracing immorality in a more outward fashion and skepticism toward religion, the Wisconsin Synod expanded in aggressive fashion throughout the United States. Despite the challenges of manpower shortages in the 1960s and financial challenges in the 1970s, WELS found a way to carry out and support a program of home mission expansion that nearly met the goal of “Every State by ’78.” Writing on the history of WELS home mission work for the 125th anniversary of the synod in 1975, Norman Berg reflected on the importance of the previous decades for the rapid expansion that took place since 1961.

It perhaps also could be that the very necessary and intense concentration during the late 40’s and 50’s on the intersynodical doctrinal struggles with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod engaged our primary efforts and strength. From this struggle, however, arose a very strong sense of confessional identity which is essential both to a sound, but also a vigorously lay-supported mission program.⁵⁸⁰

Berg pointed out the blessing that came from bearing the cross during the intersynodical struggles with the Missouri Synod. While those struggles were intense, emotional, and costly,

⁵⁷⁹*Reports and Memorials for 1983 Convention*, 61-73. While WELS had been engaged in these kinds of ministries in a variety of ways, often on the local level, this marked an effort to do this work in a more organized, efficient, and comprehensive way.

⁵⁸⁰Norman Berg, “Home Mission Modes and Moods—125 Years in WELS,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (October 1976), 262.

and while it was often a challenge to present a confessional Lutheran message in a world that was becoming increasingly materialistic, hedonistic, and irreligious, the painful break-up with the Missouri Synod served as a catalyst for WELS mission expansion, both in home missions and world missions. The numerous requests for pastors to start confessional Lutheran churches which came flooding in to WELS energized the synod for the mission expansion that resulted in the synod almost reaching “every state by ’78.” WELS found its identity as a confessional church which had the mission and purpose of proclaiming the pure gospel across the nation, not just in the Midwest or smaller towns, and around the world. All this took place as more area Lutheran high schools and Lutheran elementary schools were opened and expanding and as sizable building projects were occurring on the ministerial education campuses in order to provide the necessary manpower for this expansion in both missions and education.

It is difficult to put an exact number of home mission openings and exploratory endeavors which WELS undertook during this time period, but the numbers given in this chapter indicate the scope of home mission work carried out, especially the geographical spread of the synod. To be sure, not every mission congregation and every exploratory endeavor was successful from a human perspective. The home mission statistics included places where missions were closed, or exploratory efforts were discontinued. For example, the GBHM report for the 1979 synod convention listed five missions closed in the biennium and ten fields where exploratory work was discontinued.⁵⁸¹ Just as it would be difficult to ascertain the number of missions opened during this time period, it would also take extensive research to determine the

⁵⁸¹*Reports and Memorials for 1979 Convention*, 80-81.

number of missions which were closed. One reason is that some missions relocated. Another reason is that, in a number of cases, while a mission might have been closed or an exploratory effort was discontinued, another effort was made a few years later. For example, exploratory work was started in Topeka, Kansas, in 1964. This resulted in the formation of King of Kings Lutheran Church. Due to a lack of growth, the mission was closed in 1970. However, exploratory work was resumed in Topeka in 1978 and resulted in the establishment of Beautiful Savior in 1980, a congregation which still exists today.⁵⁸²

The growth of a church is not always measured in numbers, whether number of missions started or numbers of adults confirmed, nor can numbers always measure the mission work which a church does. However, statistics are certainly a measure of a church's efforts. A church cannot grow if it is doing nothing. And statistics are evidence of the Holy Spirit's work through the gospel proclamation of a church. From 1961-1983, WELS experienced a growth of nearly thirty-five percent in its communicant membership. By way of comparison, the LCMS experienced growth of almost twenty-six percent in communicant membership during the same time period.⁵⁸³ Putting this in the wider context, WELS experienced this numerical growth as the

⁵⁸²A brief history of Beautiful Savior can be found in the worship folder for the dedication of its church, 1 May 1983, Congregational Files, Kansas, Topeka, Beautiful Savior, WELS Synod Archives. Determining the number of mission closures is also exacerbated by the tendency of the GBHM reports to indicate that an exploratory had been discontinued in an area only to have a preaching station approved. It raises the question of what "discontinues" actually means. A worthwhile research project would be to explore the reports in order to determine how many and which missions have closed, relocated, or restarted.

⁵⁸³*1961 Statistical Yearbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, 174. *1983 Statistical Yearbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, 195.

United States grew in population by just over twenty-seven percent from 1961-1983.⁵⁸⁴ This growth occurred in WELS during the cultural turmoil and increasing secularism of the 1960s and 1970s, as the synod was striving to be faithful to the Word of God and proclaim that Word of God in places where it had not carried out mission work in the past. WELS went from having congregations in sixteen states to doing mission work in every state in the span of twenty-two years. Considering the crosses the synod had to bear and the challenges it had to overcome, this was a watershed period in the history of WELS mission expansion.

⁵⁸⁴“US Population by Year,” <http://www.multpl.com/united-states-population/table>.

CONCLUSION

BLESSED WITH GROWTH UNDER THE CROSS

In the WELS Synod Archives, there is a large map of the United States with pins marking the locations of WELS congregations in 2010.⁵⁸⁵ Some of the pins are color coded because, in some instances, one pin marks several congregations. This is necessitated by the high density of WELS churches in some areas of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. Every major metropolitan area has at least one pin. Other metropolitan areas like Phoenix, Denver, Atlanta, Houston, the general Southern California region, the San Francisco Bay area, Seattle, Dallas/Fort Worth, and the Washington D.C. area have numerous pins. Such a map in 1929 would have still had the density of congregations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. There would have been a couple of pins in metro areas outside the Midwest like Phoenix and Seattle. By 1961, there would have been some scattered pins in Colorado, Florida and California and a few more in the Phoenix and Seattle areas. But the vast majority of the United States was devoid of WELS congregations. By 1983, however, there would have been a pin in every state.

On the WELS website, one can download a world map showing by color where WELS has mission partners (nations where there is some presence of WELS expatriate missionaries or where there is some level of financial support given to an indigenous church body) and nations where there is exploratory work going on by WELS.⁵⁸⁶ Forty nations fall under the “mission

⁵⁸⁵The year is the best guess of the WELS Archivist, Susan Willems.

⁵⁸⁶Missions—WELS,” <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/>. The Apache reservation is still counted among the world missions.

partners” label and fourteen are in the area of exploratory work. Forty-one WELS missionaries are on the ground in about a dozen of those mission fields.⁵⁸⁷ Such a map would not have existed in 1929 because the only place where WELS was carrying out “foreign” mission work was on the Apache reservation in Arizona. Even twenty years later the only additions were support given to the Synodical Conference mission in Nigeria and support for some Lutheran congregations in Poland. By 1961, mission work in two nations in Africa and in Japan was being carried out solely by WELS. By 1983, WELS had forty missionaries working in ten nations and was providing some level of support to congregations in seven additional nations.⁵⁸⁸

This remarkable mission expansion during these decades was unprecedented in WELS history and did not come without its crosses. By 1929, the Wisconsin Synod had shed its identity as a church only for German-speaking immigrants. But then came the seemingly overwhelming debt of the 1930s. Even after the debt was paid off, its effects lingered as some synod leaders were hesitant to embark on aggressive mission expansion out of an understandable fear that a crippling debt would reemerge. Manpower shortages plagued WELS from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s raising questions in the minds of some about how far and how fast mission expansion should take place. The need for building projects on the ministerial education campuses put a strain on the synod budget and, at times, caused tensions about synod priorities. The proliferation of new area Lutheran high schools and numerous building projects at local congregations and schools across the synod vied for offering dollars from the early 1950s

⁵⁸⁷“Missions—WELS,” <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/>.

⁵⁸⁸*Reports and Memorials for 1983 Convention*, 88-103.

through the early 1980s. The doctrinal discussions and debates with the Missouri Synod consumed time and energy in the synod from 1939-1961 and resulted in losses of pastors, members, and congregations. Well-meaning synod policies at times hampered aggressive growth plans.

When one considers the crosses under which WELS labored, it is remarkable that this small, conservative Lutheran church body, with its roots in the German immigrant communities of the Upper Midwest, grew from a mostly regional church body to a truly nationwide and worldwide church body in just over half a century. Its mission expansion program transformed from a focus on establishing congregations where there was a German immigrant presence to focusing on establishing congregations in the population centers of America and carrying the gospel to the world. During the 1930s and 1940s, home mission expansion was done as well as could be expected considering the Depression, the synod debt, and the war. Work was begun in Colorado and expanded in Arizona and several Midwestern urban centers under the cross of financial strain. During the 1950s, despite the many building projects both on the synodical and local levels throughout the synod and in the midst of the heated doctrinal battle with the Missouri Synod, WELS started world mission work in Japan and Africa and planted new home missions in California and Florida. The world mission endeavors and the work in Florida also had to overcome tensions within the synod leadership, tensions usually stemming from the crosses of financial concerns and manpower shortages which led some synod leaders to desire a more measured expansion. While the break with the Missouri Synod was painful and traumatic, it served as a catalyst for home mission expansion throughout the United States, and WELS went from congregations in sixteen states in 1961 to a presence in every state by 1983. Such

expansion came under the crosses of manpower shortages, financial challenges, and the administrative challenges that went along with this rapid expansion.

WELS was blessed and continues to be blessed by such growth, even as this mission expansion demonstrates that whenever the church grows, it is growing under the cross. For WELS, these years saw the synod grow from a church body of 153,506 communicant members in 488 congregations and 259 preaching stations served by 494 pastors across twelve states in 1927 to a church body of 314,792 communicant members in 1,172 congregations, thirty exploratory missions, and six preaching stations served by 1,044 pastors across all fifty states and three Canadian provinces in 1983.⁵⁸⁹ The growth rate is impressive: 105% in communicant membership; 60% in the number of congregations; 111% in the number of pastors serving in the synod.⁵⁹⁰ What is perhaps more impressive is the geographical spread of this missions expansion, from twelve states in 1927 to all fifty states and ten foreign nations by 1983. And maybe even more impressive than that statistic is that the geographical spread was especially rapid in the twenty-two years after the break with the Missouri Synod, from sixteen states in 1961 to all fifty in 1983. The voices from within and without that predicted the demise of WELS or, at the very least, the “cocooning” of WELS, were proven incorrect.

The result is that today one can find a WELS congregation within driving distance of almost every major metropolitan region. To be sure, the New England states and some Mid-

⁵⁸⁹*Parochialbericht für das Jahr 1927*, 64. *Statistical Report for 1983*, 2.

⁵⁹⁰The reason for the larger number of preaching stations in 1927 appears to be that new missions were not considered established congregations until they had manpower and a building. In addition, there were more congregations in remotely populated areas in 1927 which would have only occasionally been served by a pastor who would have traveled there. Such groups were more organized and often part of dual parishes as the years went on.

Atlantic states have sparse WELS presence. But the Sunbelt states have seen a growth in WELS congregations in the past few decades. An interesting study would be plotting and researching more precisely the growth pattern of WELS in the districts outside of the Upper Midwest and discovering what happened to missions which were closed.

The mission expansion of WELS under the cross from 1929-1983 can be a source of inspiration as WELS (and other church bodies) endeavor to be faithful to the Great Commission in the twenty-first century. The thoughts of James Schaefer in 1976 are still applicable.

If a church is going to reach out with the Gospel—assuming it is faithfully held—there are, according to the rules of the game, a number of elements which must be present. First, that church must have a strong sense of *identity*. Secondly, that church must have the *manpower* to carry out its mission. Thirdly, that church must have the *resources* available to fund that mission. Fourthly, that church must have the *opportunity*.⁵⁹¹

At various points in this time period (1929-1983), WELS lacked one or more of these elements. While it is true that the church of every age labors under various crosses and has to overcome various challenges, the Wisconsin Synod labored under numerous crosses, any one of which could have led the synod to remain a small, regional church body. Instead, WELS grew under numerous heavy crosses.

The debt of the 1930s could have been debilitating and the failure to assign many seminary graduates each year could have increased the pessimism of the Wisconsin Synod. But the synod labored to pay down the debt and open enough missions that by the end of the 1940s the problem was a shortage of pastors.

⁵⁹¹James Schaefer, “Stewards of the Mysteries of God in Today’s World,” 7. Emphasis in the original.

The 1950s saw intensive building programs on the ministerial education campuses, the establishment of a number of area Lutheran high schools, and countless building projects at local congregations. Infrastructure needed to catch up after the Depression and World War II. A manpower shortage continued. The doctrinal struggles with the Missouri Synod were intensifying and causing division within the ranks of the synod. Yet, despite a desire on the part of some leaders to be more cautious in starting new missions which could lead the synod into debt again and despite concerns over manpower issues, the synod entered overseas mission work for the first time and expanded home mission efforts into California and Florida.

At the time Schaefer wrote these words in 1976, the doctrinal battle with the Missouri Synod was fifteen years in the past. Instead of the split causing the Wisconsin Synod to retreat into a corner as some predicted, a sense of identity had been given by the doctrinal battle with the LCMS. WELS saw itself no longer as the little “cousin” to the much larger Missouri Synod but a church body which could expand across the country and carry out mission work around the world. Manpower was readily available by the mid-1970s. Opportunities abounded, especially because of the break with the Missouri Synod. Resources were often lacking, usually for the purchase of land and the construction of chapels for new missions. Yet, the synod persevered and carried out an extensive home mission expansion program from 1961-1983. This expansion program was carried out even as ongoing construction projects on the ministerial education campuses were necessitated because the synod was trying to accommodate the growing enrollments and as more area Lutheran high schools and Lutheran elementary schools were established. The synod was concerned and concentrating on both education and evangelism. Some of the financial challenges were overcome by the promotion of missions and intentional

attempts to instill a mission mindset throughout the synod, encouragement to give and invest in the CEF, improved stewardship education, and the Reaching Out offering in the early 1980s.⁵⁹²

In 2019, WELS retains its identity as a confessional Lutheran church body. The message of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone revealed in the Scriptures alone is at the center of why WELS exists and strives to have a presence in the world. The opportunities still abound, maybe even more so in our increasingly secularized and de-churched culture. A lack of manpower is a current cross which WELS is bearing. The number of pastoral vacancies has steadily climbed since 2013 and has remained over one hundred for the past several years. Seminary graduating classes have averaged just under twenty-eight per year since 2014 and the next three classes will keep that average the same. However, the number of students currently studying in the pastor track at Martin Luther College gives hope that soon there will be some relief for the manpower shortage in the coming years.⁵⁹³ Resources for the synod budget also continue to be a challenge. Schaefer pointed out in 1976 that the percentage of total congregational offerings being sent to the synod had declined from just under nineteen percent in 1970 to under sixteen percent in 1976.⁵⁹⁴ Currently, about six-and-a-half percent of

⁵⁹²Another helpful and interesting study would be giving patterns in WELS, especially in the context of the national economy and the stewardship education in the synod.

⁵⁹³Beginning with the seminary graduating class of 2023, the projections are that the classes will number at least forty per year. On the other hand, the large seminary classes of the 1970s and 1980s have not all reached retirement age. So, it remains to be seen how acute the manpower shortage will continue to be.

⁵⁹⁴James Schaefer, "Stewards of the Mysteries of God in Today's World," 13. Schaefer does not mention it, but undoubtedly this was partly because of the growth in the number of area Lutheran high schools. Another interesting study would be to examine the shift in percentage of offerings given to the synod and how this corresponds with the growth of other ministries in WELS.

total congregational offerings are sent to WELS.⁵⁹⁵ Numerous factors have contributed to this decline, including the high cost of health insurance, continuing building projects on the local level, the growth of area Lutheran high schools, and the proliferation of other ministries which are in fellowship with WELS but not supported by the synodical budget.⁵⁹⁶

However, a study of history can provide encouragement. From 1929-1983, despite facing many challenges and laboring under numerous crosses, WELS was blessed with extensive mission expansion in home and world missions. Some of the crosses are similar: manpower shortages, financial challenges, and the cross of striving to remain faithful to biblical teaching in the face of a relativistic culture. Some challenges are different: an aging and declining WELS membership in the twenty-first century and a more secularized and anti-Christian culture, especially in America. But the promises of the Lord Jesus remain the same. The gates of hell will not overcome his church.⁵⁹⁷ His Word will not return to him empty.⁵⁹⁸ His Spirit works powerfully through the gospel when his church proclaims it.⁵⁹⁹ He has promised to always be with his church as it carries out his mission.⁶⁰⁰ These promises sustained the leaders, pastors,

⁵⁹⁵“WELS Ministry of Christian Giving Report to the Synodical Council,” February 2019, 1.

⁵⁹⁶These other ministries, often called “para-synodical organizations,” include groups like Christian Life Resources, Kingdom Workers, Friends of China, Christian Family Solutions, The Lutheran Home Association, and a variety of locally organized and supported Christian camps, among others.

⁵⁹⁷Matthew 16:18.

⁵⁹⁸Isaiah 55:10-11.

⁵⁹⁹Romans 1:16; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

⁶⁰⁰Matthew 28:20.

missionaries, and members of WELS throughout the exciting and challenging expansion years of 1929-1983 as WELS was blessed with unprecedented growth, even as it labored under numerous crosses. These promises can sustain and encourage the leaders, pastors, missionaries, and members of WELS into the future as this small, confessional Lutheran church body strives to carry out the mission of proclaiming the gospel in all the world now and in the future.

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Manuscript and Archival Materials

WELS Synod Archives

Biographical Files

Congregational Files

The Edgar Hoenecke Papers
Box 01

The John W. O. Brenner Papers
Folders 003, 005, 006, 145, 147a

The Michigan District (WELS) Mission Board Collection
Folder 009

The Oscar J. Naumann Papers
Folder 004

The WELS Board for Home Missions Collection
Folders 001, 004, 005, 006, 007, 008, 009, 011, 012, 016, 019, 020, 171,
338, 361, 370, 383, 434, 445, 475

The WELS World Missions Collection: Japan
Box 01

