

PREACHING THE GOSPEL ON THE DAKOTA-MONTANA PRAIRIES
OR
A HISTORY OF THE DAKOTA-MONTANA DISTRICT
OF THE
WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

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What is history? What is meant by the term history in our assigned topic? Consulting Webster's dictionaries for a definition of the word does not satisfy our need for such a definition. Several approaches approach my conception of the meaning of this word, but they do not fully meet it. Let me quote several of these definitions. "History is a narrative of events connected with a real or imaginary object, person, or career; a tale; story; now especially such a narrative devoted to the exposition of the natural unfolding and interdependence of the events treated." Another definition reads like this: "A systematic written account of events, particularly of those affecting a nation, institution, science or art, and usually connected with a philosophical explanation of their causes." To quote one more definition: "The branch of knowledge that records and explains past events as steps in human progress; the study of the character and significance of events. It is usually divided into ancient history, medieval history, and modern history."

These definitions are well taken in their proper scope. But none of them are sufficient for a Christian, especially for one who wishes to write church history, the history of a church body such as a synod or its districts.

Such a writer must recognize that history is not merely the recording of human accomplishment or human failure. To the Christian historian the basic thought for his work is the governance of God in the affairs of men. He will be guided by the God-inspired words of the great Apostle Paul which he proclaimed on the Areopagus in Athens. I quote: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelling not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands as though he needeth any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if happy they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being." (1) And to the Colossians the same Apostle writes: "All things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (2)

In view of my urgent request for the histories of our congregations, one might ask: what is the scope of

this assignment? Its purpose is not the compiling or recording of the history of the individual congregations of the district. That might be an interesting and extensive task for some future compiler; and perhaps this work ought to be undertaken, as it was done in the sister-district of Minnesota.

My assignment is the writing and presentation of the history of this, the Dakota-Montana District. This shall involve a study of its chronological development, of the economical, social, and political forces which affected and still affect the life of the district. It also involves reference to certain policies of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and their effects on the church life within the district. Thus we shall try to show that to be true which Professor J. P. Koehler wrote in his History of the Wisconsin Synod. He wrote: "Nur so kann eine solche Darstellung das werden, was alle Geschichtsdarstellung sein soll, eine Predigt des Evangeliums von der Gnade Gottes." Freely translated this means: Only in this way (by drawing into the presentation of church history the great thoughts of the Gospel) can the presentation of history become that which all presentation of history must be, namely, a preaching of the Gospel, of the grace of God. (3)

Permit me also to quote the thoughts which I used as an introduction to the history of Zion Lutheran Church of Mobridge, South Dakota: "History is the record of God's dealing with sinful man. It records the grace and mercy of God as it is revealed to man in the building of His church. And it is intimately bound up in the preaching of Law and Gospel, of sin and grace. By the preaching of God's Word the Christian Church was founded. By it the Lord still builds and edifies His Church, the communion of saints, in all places and times." So also the Lord of the Church has built it and continues to edify it in the geographical confines of our district. It is the purpose of this essay to trace the working of God's grace in the district's midst during the past fifty years as well as to recall the more than forty years of mission labor which led to the establishment of this district. May this labor of love for the Una Sancta redound unto the glory of this Lord of the Church, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Surely, the words of the Psalmist apply: "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy Works." (4) And again: "This shall be

written for the generations to come, and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord." (5)

It is my intention to trace the chronological and geographical development of the district first of all.

In the Synodical Reports of the former Minnesota Synod, whose off-spring our district is, this mission area is defined as the Dakota Territory. (6) This is the area now roughly covered by major portions of the states of North Dakota and South Dakota, and a short overlap into Montana. If one realizes how small a church body the former Minnesota Synod was, one can understand a statement, made more than once in those same reports, which deplores the lack of manpower and money, which might have enabled that Synod to possess this great territory churchwise. Then too one would not have needed to read how the fathers deplored "that they would have to yield some of this great territory to the Missouri Synod." (7)

But let us look at this land. Some years ago I described this land in this way. "This is the great western prairie, rolling and almost treeless. Here the larger cities of the East disappear; instead, many small towns strike the eye of the traveler, towns which are grouped around their chief building, the grain elevator. Nearby is the stockyard, for agriculture is the industry of this vast area. And its products are of major importance to the economy of the nation." (8) As these towns were founded and the economy of their surrounding agricultural lands developed, the congregations which were to become this district developed with them.

The first great effort of the Fathers in this great territory were undertaken near the western border of Minnesota and in a general way in the valley of the Sioux River. This fertile land had been opened to the homesteader at a very early date. And by 1880 a large number of families of German descent had found their way into the area to the west of Marshall, Minnesota, into the region now served by our congregations at Elkton and Ward, South Dakota.

One wonders what decided the early missionaries to turn northward from there, because Sioux Falls was already a major city of the state, and Mitchell, Huron, and other larger towns were already in the making. No doubt it was concern for, and contact with, other people of German descent who were settling farther to the North. The names of the present congregations from Ward northward to Mazeppa Township spell out the names of the first mission and preaching stations in that area, which covered approximately 3,200 square miles. And even though many of those early mission congregations have disappeared or merged with others,

the work of the fathers in this area was indeed welcome. For one thing was sadly lacking in those early years. These pioneer settlers either forgot their church, or they were cut off from their church by great distances, or they were falling prey to false preachers.

The next major development was a westward movement from Rauville and Watertown to Redfield. It is interesting to hear how this westward movement began. Quoting freely from the history of Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Hague Township, South Dakota, (this area was once known as Carlton Township, and services were held in the Ballard school), one reads the following. A young Lutheran man had been courting a young Lutheran lady. He finally proposed marriage to her and she consented to the marriage provided the young man could find a Lutheran pastor to perform the ceremony. So the young swain set out for Watertown and Rauville, some fifty miles away. He found Pastor Johl, who came to perform the ceremony. On the same occasion he also baptized a little girl there. Thus he began a mission congregation among a group of German settlers who had come into this area after spending a few years in Chicago, Illinois. They had been drawn westward by the promise of free land under the Homestead Act of 1863.

At about the same time other families had moved into the Henry and Grover areas, drawn westward by the offer of free land, which a grateful government offered to veterans of the War between the States. This offer was also open to others who were willing to settle these western prairies. Still others had been forced westward, because economic depression with its resulting bankruptcies had impoverished them in states farther east. Here was a chance to recoup their fortunes.

And so one notes from various mission reports of those days that, by the year 1887, missionary R. Volkert was living in Redfield, South Dakota. Meanwhile congregations and preaching stations had been established in or near every town between Watertown and Redfield. Most of these have disappeared or have merged with other churches. Still others died out completely when economic conditions caused many a settler to again leave the area.

Meanwhile immigrants of another somewhat different kind had moved into mid South Dakota. These people called themselves Russlaender, German Russians in English. An article in the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, printed sometime this spring, sheds some light on this group, many of whom had first settled at Freeman, South Dakota. While many of them stayed there, others and their friends, who had come later, then

moved northward settling in the Bowdle, Roscoe, and Hein areas (Hein is now known as Zeeland, North Dakota).

Ethnically these people were German. Their forefathers had been lured to leave their fatherland by the promises made them by Catherine the Great of Russia. In appreciation of what these people might mean to her Russia, her manifesto promised anyone who would come to Russia free land, and this land free of taxes. She also promised these people religious freedom and freedom from all military service.

These promises attracted many German peasants, especially those from South Germany. By horse and buggy, or wagon, they made their way eastward to the Black Sea region. The Crimean Peninsula and the area about Odessa were most attractive to them.

In these areas, these immigrants from Germany lived peacefully, until later tsars repealed the manifesto of Catherine. These Germans were now repressed and persecuted. As a result, they began to emigrate in ever greater numbers to North and South America. Many became successful farmers and business men in their new homes. Their offspring, by the way, were among the first to settle in the West-river territory, when this was opened for settlement.

From a religious viewpoint, these people were sincere; but often, as in the case of the Hutterite and Mennonite groups, they were people who had embraced a somewhat mystical religious philosophy. No doubt some of this characteristic was due to the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian folk character. Even those immigrants who remained Lutheran were somewhat pietistic. And revivalism appealed to many. Therefore the work among these people was not easy. A former pastor, who served in the Mobridge area, wrote me some years ago how he was ordered out of a prayer meeting of his own members, who were revivalistic in character.

This was the kind of people missionaries R. Volkert and G. Lahme found in the Roscoe, Bowdle, and Hein areas in 1887. The Roscoe people had already been served by a pastor from Aberdeen, named Prey. Then the Missouri Synod served them from Mansfield. Finally by the turn of the century they were served by Pastor J. Gehm of Bowdle and entered the Minnesota Synod. Bowdle members became the major congregation and the center of a large number of preaching stations in the area. All have now disappeared or merged. Many early settlers later were forced to leave the area when droughts and depressions hit them during the 1890's. Others, like Trinity congregation of Theodore Township and St. James of Cloyd Valley

Township, have since merged with the congregations at Bowdle and Roscoe. This entire area was said to cover about 2,000 square miles.

It was also in the decade of the 1880's and the early 1890's that the land west of Bowdle and on to the Missouri River was settled, at first largely by German Russians. The reports of the time state that there were a number of flourishing congregations in this area, but droughts and depressions drove their members out and the congregations died. Akaska, Glenham, and Tolstoy are the congregations still left in the area.

It was at this time that a certain pastor Mundt of the Missouri Synod, who lived at Ellendale, North Dakota, visited the Mound City area and, after serving the settlers there for a time, he organized congregations at Mound City and in Gale Township. But when St. John's of Bowdle received its first resident pastor in 1889, the Mound City people were referred to Pastor Volkert and later to Pastor Malchow for services. These pastors lived so much closer to Mound City than the pastor at Ellendale, and therefore, they could serve that area much better than the men from Ellendale.

It was just a few years later that missionaries, who lived at Mound City by then, took over the work at Hein and soon expanded their work to Linton, North Dakota and a few years later into the Hazelton area. In fact, what was once known as the tri-county area, comprised of Campbell in South Dakota and Emmons and McIntosh Counties in North Dakota, was once served by men from the Minnesota Synod. Losses in these areas were apparently due to lack of manpower which might have possessed this area, if supplied in greater numbers.

One might mention the names of many men who labored in this vast territory. Some stayed a few months, others remained two to four years. But such a list would be too long. Four names stand out from that long list. But they served in the later formative years of the district, during the first decades of this century. These men are Pastors William Sauer, O. Keller, William Albrecht, and A. Fuerstenau.

Somewhat later, about 1908, another major thrust carried faithful missionaries into what is known as the West-river country. Parts of the Sioux Indian Reservation were opened to settlement and soon many localities were settled. Again it was agriculture which drew men into these areas. But cattle was the main agricultural product.

Early records show that two major thrusts were made into this area. The first was made

from the Hazelton field westward across the Missouri River toward Flasher, Carson, and from there southward to McIntosh, South Dakota. Pastor F. Wittfaut, who would later spearhead the move into Montana, was the pioneer in this area also. The second thrust crossed the "Big Muddy" from Mobridge. The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad, as it was then known, had built its great bridge across the Missouri in the first decade of this century. And settlers moved west with the railroad. And missionaries followed the settlers.

Nor were the early missionaries inactive in other directions. The Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad had planned to cross the Missouri at Evarts, some ten miles south of Mobridge. The missionary from Mound City had begun services in this old cattle town quite early. But when the Mobridge bridge was built, Evarts was moved to Mobridge, where services were begun quite early in the city's history.

This mission work of the early years was not easily done. The available men were far too few, the territory to be covered too large, and the settlers were scattered far and wide. Nevertheless, as another now sainted brother wrote me some years ago, "We were trying to hold an umbrella over that area for our Synod, both on the North as well as on the South line." Here too the names of preaching stations named after the school houses in which services were held, have long disappeared. In this trans-Missouri territory, Lemmon, South Dakota became an outpost for a few years, especially during the pastorate of Pastor William Pankow. Pastor E. Gamm and Pastor M. Cowalsky also were very active in those early years.

Another almost casual advance westward resulted in 1912 from the visit of a certain Pastor Hopp to Montana. He did some preaching and baptizing there and then reported that Montana might offer fine mission opportunities to the Synod. The real pioneer in Montana was the same Pastor F. Wittfaut who had been active at Flasher and Carson some years before.

Pastor Wittfaut's work was certainly different from mission work as it is known today. He carried out his work on a personal basis. The economy of eastern Montana at that early date was dominated by the cattle industry. This spread out the settlers over large areas. And those first settlers were not exactly friendly to the grain farmers who tried to settle there. They were called hunyakers, a word usually used in a derogatory way.

Permit me to cite freely from a letter of Pastor Wittfaut to the mission board of that day. The particular trip of which he wrote carried him over a route of about 600 miles in one month. Though completely impractical where automobiles were involved, he drove his Model T touring car from

ranch to farm to ranch to farm. His luggage in the back seat, in addition to his personal belongings for the trip, consisted of flour, sugar, and other staple supplies, which he distributed from place to place as needed. Those able to do so paid, and often charity moved the missionary to leave the goods as a gift. At the same time, however, Pastor Wittfaut baptized the newborn, instructed the youth, and conducted services for the families according to need. The finest church he ever had was a country schoolhouse. During his entire ministry there he had no modern chapel at his disposal. The first church in Montana was built after his death. This was in 1933 at Circle, Montana. Only after many years, the district has begun work in the larger cities of Montana and the Dakotas. And it is doing it with buildings furnished early in the history of each mission field. This is, of course, in keeping with the changed mission policy of the General Synod.

It might cast more light on the work of those early years, if we heard a description of one of the pioneer settlers, picturing the work of the missionary in her area. When I was pastor at Emmanuel's of Grover, I often discussed those early years with a grand old lady of the congregation. Her account gave every credit to those missionaries or shall we say circuit riders. Pastor C. Boettcher, for instance, would start from the Marshall, Minnesota area - he lived in various places near there - by horse and buggy. These had been purchased for him and other missionaries by the so-called secretary for the purchase of horses. Pastor Boettcher traveled throughout the entire area of eastern South Dakota. A round trip took approximately six weeks. One might add that even trips which other missionaries made from Rauville to Redfield often required three weeks for the round trip.

When the missionary came into the Grover area, he often found accommodations in Grandmother Fritz's sod hut. Her boys would ride through the countryside with the message: Der Pastor ist hier. And on the morrow they came from east and west, and north and south, on lumber wagon, buckboard, or what have you. The motive power was furnished by teams of oxen, teams of ox and horse, and in a few instances by horses. Services were conducted, children baptized, the youth instructed, and any other religious services were given as needed. Soon a young man of the congregation was available to instruct the young while the pastor was absent. These services were gladly performed and highly appreciated by the people. Services were conducted on any day of the week when the missionary got into the area. And the only complaint the missionary made to Synod officers was this one: Das Roesslein hat wehe Fuesse. Poor health finally forced this faithful missionary

to resign.

Even after the turn of the century, particularly during the first decade, pastors were often absent from home over fifty percent of the time, teaching confirmation classes and even school at distant places in their charge. And one must admire the wives of those men who were forced to live under such arrangements in very modest houses - the first ones were often sod houses - and these homes lacked all modern conveniences.

In this connection I should like to quote from another history of a congregation. Pastor Sprengeler wrote in this way: "Let us not forget that these days were pioneer days. Pioneer days were days of hardship peculiar to themselves. These early pastors and our fathers stood ready to weather these hardships, for they appreciated, above all else, the Gospel of Jesus and His love."(9)

Nor was the work of those pioneers made easier by the efforts of sectarian preachers, who often functioned as land agents on the side. They often tried and sometimes succeeded in stealing away members and here and there a congregation. Even other Lutheran bodies were a thorn in the side of more than one missionary, especially in the western areas. In fact, one brother wrote me that a horse trade had been made with the former Iowa Synod, in which they promised to stay out of Selby (though we had started Selby), if Iowa would stay out of Mobridge.

One might ascribe the ease with which congregations sought religious services from any source whatsoever to the ecumenical spirit of the frontier, fostered, as it was, by sectarian circuit riders. Lack of men to serve these congregations and the fact that pastors left their congregations after comparatively short periods could only strengthen that spirit.

In retrospect, one might say that the inability of the early pastors to preach in the English language and the opposition and apathy of congregations where the English language was concerned also were a major hindrance in the mission work of the early days. I think, for instance, of the experience which our missionaries encountered again and again with people of Scandanavian descent. Nationalism was even stronger in many of them than among our Germans. An interesting episode which happened many years ago will demonstrate. A young pastor of our Synod - so the story has it - was courting a fine young lady of a nearby Norwegian Lutheran church. An elder of each congregation formed a self-appointed committee, which decided that this courtship would not do. So they broke up the affair in the interest of the ethnic nationalism of their respective churches. You ask, could this be true? I have the story on the word

of one of those elders.

One could go on at length, writing about the early days of the District. But this must suffice. The development of the Dakota-Montana mission fields had extended into such great areas that the missionaries as well as other members of the Minnesota Synod respectively requested and advised the formation of a new district.

This was not the result of a spontaneous action in 1920, the year the district was organized. As early as 1912, a newly formed conference of the Minnesota Synod had been organized at Lemmon, South Dakota, under the leadership of Pastor William Pankow. And even then the thought of forming a new district was noticeable, if the minutes of the conference in those early years may be believed. And when, in 1915, the first constitution for the Northwestern Lutheran Synod (that was the first name proposed) was drawn up, the creation of a district in the Dakotas was projected. In the constitution of 1917 the division of the Minnesota District was proposed. The fruition of these plans came in 1920. I quote briefly from Professor E. C. Fredrich's History of the Minnesota District, written in 1968.

"The decade of the Twenties produced another beginning and founding which involved the Minnesota District much more directly and which occurred much nearer home. This was the official organization of its sister and daughter, the Dakota-Montana District. The date was June 25, 1920. On that day twenty-three pastors and six lay delegates, all of them Minnesota District members attending its regular convention, held a meeting of their own and voted the Dakota-Montana District into being." (10)

The General Synod, in session at Watertown, Wisconsin from July 14 - 20, 1920, approved and ratified the division of the Minnesota District, thus creating the Dakota-Montana District. (11)

The immediate reasons for the organization of the new district were well-taken, even though future developments did not completely fulfill early anticipations and fond hopes. Among the reasons for establishing the new district, the following were offered in the resolution requesting division. I quote Professor Fredrich again:

1. Much travel time and money would be saved when it came to attending conferences and larger meetings;
2. The area would have officials of its own, living in the field of labor;
3. A more stable ministry would ensue, on the grounds that pastors tend to stay in their

own district.” (12)

A fourth reason also heard at the time of organization stated that the members of the new district would take a livelier interest in the affairs of the General Synod. And this would lead to a greater participation in the Synod’s work. All this, because of a closer contact with the General Synod.

The division which formed the new district was not harmful to the mother-district. A review of the minutes of the Dakota-Montana District reveals a continued live interest in the affairs of the mother-district; as, for instance, the interest of this district in the various expansion programs at Doctor Martin Luther College shows.

And it is just as true that this District has always been keenly interested in the work of the General Synod. Permit me to mention a few phases of this work. I think of the Polish Mission, now continuing to exist as the Bekenntnis-Kirche in Germany. The District has generally been in the forefront, where the finances of the Synod were concerned.

Of particular interest to many of the early members of the District was the effort toward solving the intersynodical problem, then existing. The first President of the District was an active participant in this “unity endeavor culminating in the Chicago Theses.” While the unity movement failed in the end, nevertheless it had brought about a lively study of the Scriptures as related to the doctrines in controversy.

The first meeting of the District, as stated above, was held at Mankato, Minnesota, in connection with the second session of the Minnesota District, meeting from June 24 to July 1, 1920. To repeat again, there were present at the meeting twenty-three pastors, but only six laymen; the latter a substantiation of the request for forming a district which would meet closer to home.

In order to document the beginnings of the District’s history in more detail, permit me to quote from the President’s Report to the first regular convention of the District, held in the midst of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Oxford Township, better known as Grover, South Dakota. After recounting the depressing conditions of the work of the district missionaries, President William Sauer comforted them with these words:

“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without the law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (13)

Then the report presents these statistics: Our district numbers about 7000 souls as its members, about half of these, or 3500 being communicant members. Voting members in all congregations number about 1200. The District is comprised of over 55 congregations, 27 being members of the District and 28 not. In addition there are 25 preaching stations. The number of pastors is 32 plus 2 vicars. During the past year six candidates have been assigned to the District by the assignment committee of the Synod. One female teacher is active in the District.

Four years later, President Sauer reported 8000 souls, 4270 communicants, and 1454 voting members in the District. The number of congregations had grown to 32 members, 43 non-members, and 17 preaching stations. The number of pastors in the District was 35 and two new candidates had been assigned. It would seem, on the basis of these early statistics, that the formation of the new district had been justified. And the continued interest in, and support of the General Synod’s entire program over the fifty years of its existence fully confirms such justification. Quoting specific financial figures, for instance, would be boring to the listener as well as to your essayist. These figures are in large part revealed in the Statistical Reports of the General Synod, as published over the years.

The following section of this essay will be developed by decades, followed by a short presentation of several topics of importance to the life of the District.

THE FIRST DECADE: 1920-1930

This era is certainly dominated by the person of one man, by the person of the first President of the District, the now sainted Pastor William F. Sauer, who was pastor at St. Martin’s Lutheran Church of Watertown, South Dakota. He was a most active man and competent theologian. The welfare of the District was ever his chief concern. And he exercised a major, wholesome influence on the many young pastors who were coming into the District. His zeal is attested to by the statistics, quoted above. The membership grew numerically and, even more so, spiritually under his leadership. Whether in conferences or in private, his contact with the young pastors could only benefit them. He took a friendly, yes, fatherly interest in their work. His active work as a former missionary and within St. Martin’s also were a living example of his zeal for the Kingdom of His Lord and Savior.

Of particular importance to many younger men was the staunch Scriptural stance to which he brought the District in the matter of the Pro-

testants. Pastor Sauer was a member of the Committee of Three which was to adjudge the entire Protestant affair for the General Synod. His intimate knowledge of the situation could only benefit the District. There was little disturbance over the Protestants at that time or later. In fact, when, several decades later, one man and a little later another, raised the same question as the early Protestants, there was little sympathy found by them.

One might note here that it was in this decade that the following could be found in a District Report: It is encouraging that "so many houses of God could be dedicated, and so many parsonages could be acquired." (14)

This decade also is most important in the history of the District because in this decade Northwestern Lutheran Academy became a reality, though the thought of it and the wish for it had been conceived much earlier. But more of this later.

THE SECOND DECADE: 1930-1940

Two major developments make up the history of this decade. The first is the transition from German to English as the medium for preaching the Gospel to our congregations. The other is the Great Depression of the Thirties.

The transition from German to English had begun in the previous decade but gained its major impetus in this decade. The driving force in the transition might first of all be found in the events of the First World War. German was almost everywhere the sole medium of Gospel-preaching prior to the war. But the war engendered a tremendous hatred for people of German descent. This also affected our congregations. I well recall how Pastor Sauer and Pastor Carl Schweppe visited every county in which we had churches to seek some relief for these congregations from the oppression of the Safety Directors of these counties. And once the congregations conducted at least some English services, it became hard to drop them again.

Another major factor that influenced the transition, developed out of a natural situation. The youth of the congregations were no longer familiar with the German language. Many could not speak the mother-tongue any longer, and even less did they understand the language. And when these young people began to mix with English Americans in the military service, and I might add, began to marry men and women who spoke that language, the drive toward English became irresistible.

This did not come about, except against the strong and often stubborn resistance of the German fathers. I was told by one of my elders: "Luther hat die Kirche Deutsch gegruendet, und Deutsch muss sie bleiben." But the transition

came about in an ever greater measure and with ever greater speed. Think of this that in 1924 there was only one congregation in the District which was all English. A few had some English services and communion services now and then. At that time there were over 300 Gemeindeblatt readers but only 71 readers of the Northwestern Lutheran. But by 1938 the District Report had become all English, though the several secretaries of that era still had the ability to write in the German idiom.

I shall once again quote from Professor Fredrich's History of the Minnesota District. Speaking of the German problem, he writes:

"It is difficult for us to appreciate this task and problem, for we have buried it. Even St. Paul's in New Ulm is ending German church services before the summer is over. We read Luther and preach German in translation. While we breathe a sigh of relief at the non-fulfillment of dire predictions that true Lutheranism could not survive beyond a generation if the German Luther and the Gospel in German were lost, let us not pass this point by without paying a humble and sincere tribute to our pastors in the Twenties (and I would add before the Twenties) who almost without realizing that they were providing a very special and quite rare service, supplied what was required by the times, a bilingual ministry. If only all of us would in our day become as adept in either a classical or modern language as they were in their extra language, a strong resource for the theological and mission growth would be made available to the church."

These words are as true for our District as for that of Professor Fredrich.

While the transition from German to English was of major importance to our congregations, it was not harmful in the end. German had certainly served its purpose in the governance of God on behalf of His church. Through it the souls of many were converted to the great Bishop of their souls, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In many ways the Great Depression of the Thirties was of much greater consequence for our congregations. The era might well be characterized by a casual signature to a letter which I received in those days. The brother signed off with the words, "Your's in the Federal Service". He had reference to the sad fact that practically all of his members were being supported by the Federal Government through one or the other of the various programs that had been created for the very purpose of helping the poor. These were the days when the carloads of cattle being shipped out of the West would bawl all night long as they were unloaded for watering in Mo-bridge. The smell of the Missouri water would start them on their chorus. Then too we often turned on the lights at noon, while eating our

meal. And the lady of the house would spend all day dusting off the furniture. And the top soil of our land was moving southward.

At the same time 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. This was true even of our Academy students of those years. 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 those 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 the economic conditions of the land to cut salaries severely, and then it was often late in coming.

THE THIRD DECADE: 1940-1950

This decade was a quiet period in the life of the District. Our nation was involved in the Second World War. As was the case with all young men of the nation, our young men also were called into the armed services of our country. Meanwhile technology practically erased the effects of the draft on the farmer. Technology had made possible such great changes in the methods of farming that manpower could easily be spared there. And because farms became larger and larger and because machinery became larger and larger, the youth of the area emigrated into the large urban centers, where they were able to find well-paying jobs. And they hoped that there they would find a better life. The result for our congregations was a gradual loss in membership.

THE FOURTH DECADE: 1950-1960

The continued growth of farms and the development of ever better machines to cut down on the use of manpower continued to keep the District static numberwise, or even to lose members. This is also true because many grain farms gradually were converted to farms devoted to the cattle industry. Another serious factor which prevented major growth in our congregations was due to the decrease in the number of children born in our congregations. A study of the statistical reports of this decade reveals this drastically. And in keeping with modern trends, this decrease in births has

continued in an accelerated way to our own day.

Of far greater impact on our District was the disturbance brought about by what I like to call the "Missouri Compromise". A controversy there was; a controversy so great that at one time the danger existed that the District would be torn apart. The spirit at conferences and district meetings bore out the depressing feeling of gloom which had been inflicted on the District.

The matter of fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was basic to the problems of the District. The Synod's relationship with that church had been deteriorating since about 1938. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was carrying on a courtship with the American Lutheran Church, which, it was hoped by Missouri's leaders, would result in a declaration of fellowship with that body. As early as 1953 it seemed obvious to some that the Synod ought to break with Missouri. One pastor of our District did just that.

Then, in 1956, the General Synod in the special session of the Synod, which met in Watertown, Wisconsin, continued to hold the so-called Saginaw Resolutions in abeyance. The reason for this action was briefly stated: there had been some success in the discussions between the various Synods of the Synodical Conference. (16) The troubled waters in the District dated from that year. It seemed then, and I still think, that our District felt the brunt of this controversy, felt it much more than others. The officers of this District were involved on a personal basis in the opposition to the stand of the General Synod. This was not the case in the same degree in most of the other districts of the Synod.

It was in this same year of 1956 that this District urged the General Synod to adopt the Saginaw Resolution and thus to break with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. This was urged in the interest of restoring the unity of the spirit within the District. (17)

The climax of the internal struggle in the District followed in the year 1957. In disagreement with the General Synod's decision, not to break with Missouri just yet, but "to continue in our vigorously protesting fellowship over against the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod", (18) the Eastern Conference memorialized the Synod to "declare the termination of fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." (19)

This termination did not materialize in 1957. And the then President of the District made the following declaration to the convention of the General Synod in 1957.

"I cannot follow the course which the Synod has now chosen; for the Synod was wrong when it rejected the Report of Committee No. 11. This decision I shall oppose with all my might because it is the rejection of a clear Word of God.

"Under these circumstances, I will, of course, not be able to serve the Synod on its Union Committee, nor in any other way which would mean support of the Synod's decision to reject the Report of Committee No. 11, and its (i.e., the committee's) use of Romans 16: 17,18.

"While I do not refuse the hand of fellowship to all members of the Synod, I cannot fellowship with those who have advocated the position which the Synod made its own last night. II Thess.: 3:6; 14,15. (It is self-evident that fellowship with those who now or in the future support and advocate the Synod's present position is impossible.)

"I am fully aware of the implications of this statement as far as my District is concerned." (20)

The last sentence soon became operative on the part of the President and a number of his followers. They refused to fellowship with certain members of the District. However, the President did not carry out his declaration to its logical end. And this in the face of the action of the District, called into special session on October 22, 1957, in Aberdeen. At this session, the District voted its support of the action of the General Synod. One might have expected the President to resign. But in the end, he chose to serve out his term of office "according to the dictates of his own conscience." (21) Nor did the results of a special pastoral conference at Bowdle, South Dakota, in the early months of 1958 resolve the difficulties.

Certain members of the District, meanwhile, were meeting in semi-secrecy, apparently to formulate plans for action in this serious matter. And they began to deny fellowship to certain other members of the District who upheld the District's and the General Synod's actions. And when, in 1958, the District elected a new President, the end of the dissension was at hand.

True, the convention of 1958 elected a so-called Committee of Three and Three to seek ways to restore the unity of the District. But this committee reported to the reconvened convention of the District (on January 26-27, 1959) that it had failed. Instead, its report only served to polarize the membership of the District so that no unity could be achieved. And in 1960, the President's Report to the District stated that "in impatient action" five congregations, seven pastors, and more than five hundred communicants had left the District. Actually the number of communicants was close to eight hundred. (1958 Statistical Report: 8040; 1959 Report: 7256) Now the air was cleared and a new spirit took over in the life of the Dis-

trict.

One might ask, why all the haste of the dissidents, especially in the light of the Synod's later actions? Permit me to quote an outside source, which analyzed the same situation for his synod. In the light of this essay, delivered by Professor G. O. Lillegard to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the course of our Synod was fully justified. I quote:

"There is a great difference between entering a unionistic body and being forced to leave it. The first is not permissible under any circumstances; in the latter case it may be necessary to remain for a shorter or longer period of time for the purpose of testifying against error. (S.C. Proceedings, 1875, p. 24f.)" (22)

Was it perhaps the spirit of legalism, a legalistic interpretation of the historical development of the controversy and the Scriptures involved?

THE FIFTH DECADE: 1960 - 1970

This decade is well described in the words of President W. Schumann who characterized the era well in his President's Report to the District in 1964. And I quote:

"Once again we are happy to report that the work of our District has progressed in the last biennium under the blessing and guidance of the Lord. After the unsettling events of recent years our pastors and congregations are zealously dedicating themselves to the task which the Lord of the harvest has set before them. In the biennium considerably fewer pastors than usual have accepted calls into other districts of the Synod. This has had a salutary effect on our congregations and district life. Our mission growth is again proving the truthfulness of the Lord's promise that His Word shall not return unto Him void. Our people are evidencing a growth in sanctification particularly evident in the realm of stewardship. Our Academy continues to serve us and our Synod well. It was a good biennium and one for which we are truly grateful to the Lord." (23)

In the light of the President's Report to later conventions of the District, the above quotation describes the life of the District throughout this decade. The District pursued and supported the business of the church quietly, but actively.

That this conclusion is not wrong is demonstrated by the fact that the District made a major thrust in its missionwork. The Canadian field was opened in this decade and in spite of the difficulties involved in operating a mission at such great distances, the work is nevertheless progressing under God's blessing.

It is very interesting to know that our Synod had done work in Canada in the particular area in which we are now active as long ago as the 1890's. At that time the Wisconsin Synod had sent a certain Pastor F. Bredlow into Alberta to do mission work. He was a graduate of our college at Watertown, Wisconsin and of our Seminary. Probably his work then was not too successful, because the Synod ordered him to discontinue the work there. Instead he joined the Manitoba Synod, which is now a member of the Lutheran Church of America. He continued to work there until ill health forced him to retire.

Our new call into Canada resulted from the immigration of Germans, some of whom we had served in the Polish Mission. Through a seminary student by the name of Dieter Mueller, whose father had been active in the Polish Mission, our Synod came in contact with these immigrants. And by 1963, we were active in this field. And the work is continuing to grow. The German language is still the chief medium of communication there, although some work is done in English.

This finishes the chronological presentation of the history of the District. However, there are certain topics to which I should like to address myself.

The first of these deals with the mission work of the District over the past fifty years. We know that the development of the District was slow. We cannot speak of great growth as far as numbers are concerned. In 1960 we numbered 7245 communicant members. In 1968 the number was 7477. Nevertheless the spiritual life of the District has always resulted in great activity: the District supported the financial needs as well as the various other activities of the Synod wholeheartedly. And these are the fruits of faith one may expect from a live church body.

One might point to the various reasons for the slow growth of years ago. Lack of manpower, long vacancies, short terms of service in the District by its pastors, the effect of "seminary sermons" (as one man once said to me) all had their deterring effects. Then, too, the dissipation of manpower by ill-advised organization of congregations in many rural areas was another cause for slow growth. Too many such congregations have long since disappeared. Such organizations in country school-houses are understandable in the days of horse and buggy. But when the automobile became popular, our missions should have been concentrated in the towns and cities. The language barrier of years ago also had its grim effects here and there. And no doubt the social needs of many settlers which found satisfaction in the lodges caused many a one to turn away from a staunchly Lutheran congregation.

The slow growth in our own day may be traced to economic reasons, first of all. Already in 1935 there appeared an article called The Social Problems of the Church. This article warned that rural church work was rapidly declining. From 1926 to 1935, ten to fifteen percent of the churches in the state had either become vacant, inactive, or abandoned. Their Sunday School work was becoming lifeless, and youth work was weak. (24)

Another major factor is the decline of the rural population. Farms are becoming larger, and the youth of the land are moving into the cities where they hope to find work and a better life. The late census, for instance, shows a decline of about 22,000 people in South Dakota during the last decade. Most of this loss took place in the rural area. There was about the same decline in North Dakota. The smaller towns are dying, and churches will die with them.

The decrease in the size of families, the rampant spirit of ecumenism, and the religious laxness of our day - these are all contributing factors to the slow growth of the District. Many people seem to think that any religion is good enough for them and their offspring. And the more lax the church becomes, the better they like it.

Nevertheless, have we been as active as we could have been, we who are to be witnesses for Christ? Have we explored new fields, as we might have? Have we, both pastors and congregation members, been as active about the Lord's business as we could have been? Have we used the talents with which God has blessed us to possess the land?

One should ask another question regarding mission work in our area. This question has often caused me to wonder in past years. In connection with this study I have tried to find the answer to this question but found none in the available records of the past. My question is this: Why has our District never shown any active interest in the Indian? He is our geographical neighbor. He is a sinner who needs the Gospel of Christ, the Savior. Therefore the question: WHY?

Another topic of great interest is the matter of Christian education. When the District came into existence - so reports tell us - eleven pastors were conducting twelve schools; and one lady teacher was active at Elgin, North Dakota for two years. One wonders about these schools. I know that some were little more than confirmation schools or even German schools. Only St. Martin's of Watertown had started a parochial school in the decade from 1910 to 1920. But the

school was dropped again, since the congregation became discouraged at the fact that their teacher was being called away all too often. Somewhat later several congregations opened parochial schools, as for instance at Bowdle, Akaska, and Morrystown. But these schools also were short-lived. It is only of late that two schools - the one at St. Martin's of Watertown, another at Zion of Mobridge, have existed for a longer number of years. Two new schools have come into existence during the last year; one at Billings, Montana, a year ago, and another at Rapid City this year.

Nevertheless, a live interest in Christian education has always existed in the District. For instance, in the first third of the life of the District, several major essays on this topic were heard at the conventions of the District. And more than one congregation conducted summer school lasting from one to two months. Such summer schools accomplished by far more by way of Christian training of the young in the Gospel way of life than do the one-week vacation Bible schools of our day. Of late a few congregations have replaced their Sunday School with a Saturday School. This has worked a marked improvement in the instruction of the youth of these churches and is to be recommended to the congregations of the District.

Perhaps the greatest forward thrust in the field of Christian education within the District was the founding of Northwestern Lutheran Academy. This is not the place for a detailed history of the Academy. But I shall briefly sketch its beginnings in order to complete the educational picture of the District.

The Christian education of the youth of the District had become an acute problem ever since World War I. Stringent school laws, particularly in South Dakota, placed almost unconquerable barriers into the past ways of educating the youth of the church. Pastors could no longer teach for lack of state certification. Gaining such certification involved much red tape, though a few men actually got their certificates. The Synod also did not subsidize teachers and therefore the cost of a parochial school prevented the smaller congregations from establishing Christian schools. And the geographical areas, covered by most congregations - often as great as 500 square miles or more - made the operation of parish schools impossible.

These conditions forced the members of the District to search for other means for educating the young people. The following thought became the topic for discussion both at official meetings and also in private conversation. I quote: "We Christians must more and more take the thought to heart that we establish Christian high schools for our

Christian youth." (25)

The so-called Moussa Report (26) helped to bring about the fruition of the hopes of the District. This report strongly advocated that "the Synod should authorize and subsidize the establishment of preparatory schools, or academies, in many different parts of its territory, preferably according to conferences." And in answer to the memorials of the Dakota-Montana District and its conferences, the Synod adopted the following resolution. And I quote: "The Academy to be established in the Dakota-Montana District is to be a synodical Institution supported and supervised by Synod in every respect." (27) One might point out that President W. F. Sauer and Pastor K. G. Sievert were most active in urging that Synod convention to establish the Academy. In addition, the Synod provided a budget of \$5000.00 to implement this resolution.

The Dakota-Montana District also chose the site for the new school. It did this in a special session, held at Watertown, South Dakota on January 11-12, 1928. A number of towns had submitted offers of land and money to induce the District to choose their town as the site for the new school. In order not to interfere with the sphere of Doctor Martin Luther College, and in order to serve particularly the Western area of the District, Mobridge was chosen.

The actual opening of the school now fell on the shoulders of Pastor E. R. Gamm who largely provided for the organization of the physical plant, and of Professor K. G. Sievert as far as the academic organization was concerned. And so the new school opened its doors on September 5, 1928.

The life of the school had its ups and downs. The depression of the early thirties almost led to its closing. The small enrollment became a long-standing argument for closing the school. But by God's grace it survived and became a source of great blessing not only to this District but also to other outlying districts of Synod as well. Its graduates have fulfilled the hopes of many that they would return home and become staunch members and workers for Christ in their home congregations. Others, both boys and girls, have continued their studies at other Synodical schools to serve the Lord in the parish ministry. And the school itself has become the center for the church life of the District. May the Lord of the Church ever preserve Northwestern Lutheran Academy as a nursery of knowledge for the youth of the District and a source for faithful servants of the Lord as church workers. And may its

influence as a religious center for the District never decline.

One does regret, however, that the members of our congregations do not make as full a use of the Academy as they might. In this day of permissive living, of a rebellious attitude in the youth of our land, of a godless materialistic educational policy in our secular schools, and of the devilish influence of the entertainment world, I say, in this day no sacrifice should be too great to give our youth a Christian high school education.

You will permit me a look into the future, as I come to a close. Something I read some months ago - I do not know where anymore - should keep us alert as we pursue the Lord's business. We ought carefully to watch the wide-range rural rehabilitation programs in the making. Irrigation will bring with it smaller farms, and thus larger populations in our areas. The government's planners purpose to create a self-supporting economic environment in the American countryside. Decentralization of industry from the metropolitan areas into the rural areas could open doors for the Gospel which do not now even exist. May we be alert when opportunities to enter new fields present themselves and may we possess the land.

And now to the Triune God, the Lord who created us, redeemed us, and sanctified us unto His eternal glory, be praise and glory forevermore. Soli Deo Gloria!

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