

The Successes and Challenges of a Missionary in the Bible
Belt: An Oral History of the Home Mission Work of
Pastor Kevin Cortez.

Brian Koschnitzke
Church History 3031 Senior Modern Christianity
Professor James F. Korthals
December 10, 2007

Pastor Kevin Cortez graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1994. He contributed to Lutheranism in America by serving his first assignment as a home missionary in Midland and San Angelo, Texas. These two churches were not brand new startups for Pastor Cortez. The congregation in Midland was basically made up of transplanted people from places like Michigan and the northern east coast. The reason for this was because these were people who worked for the big oil companies. Midland was a part of what is called the Permian Basin. In this basin there is a lot of natural gas. So, naturally, there were a lot of job opportunities that opened up for people. It was because of this that the WELS decided to open up Midland as a mission station. When Pastor Cortez got there in 1994 the congregation had 45 souls with 35 communicants. In the interview, however, Pastor Cortez misspoke and inverted these numbers. Pastor Cortez described Midland as a very white collar town.

The second church that Pastor Cortez served was in San Angelo. San Angelo was about 120 miles south east of Midland. Pastor Cortez described San Angelo as a blue collar town. It was the typical way that a person might think of Texas. It was a ranching town with oil wells, and the like. In San Angelo were many Lutherans. Much of the congregation was made up of disgruntled ex-Missourians, as Pastor Cortez described them. They were looking for a confessional Lutheran church body to call home after becoming disgusted with the liberalism that was creeping into their Missouri Synod churches. One such church, as Pastor Cortez describes it, became very loose in its practice of closed communion. It began giving the Lord's Supper to everybody, even Muslims, in an attempt to keep its finances intact. When Pastor Cortez get to San Angelo

there was 25 souls and 19 communicants in the congregation. In the interview, however, Pastor Cortez misspoke and inverted these numbers.

When Pastor Cortez got to his congregations, he realized that there were some things he needed to do first. The first thing he felt was necessary was to get to know the membership. He accomplished this by having home visits. It was in these visits that he not only got to know them, but they also got to know him. The second thing that he did was develop a strong pulpit. Pastor Cortez believes that it is in this way, by preaching the Word of God faithfully, that one gains respect and integrity from the people. Thirdly, he determined what the level of involvement among the laity was as far as their evangelism efforts were concerned. He came up with the Triple E system: the Easy Evangelism Experience. This was a very neat and interesting program that Pastor Cortez described in the video interview.

Things were not all fun and games, however. Pastor Cortez had his fair share of setbacks and challenges. He found that being young and inexperienced, while not the worst thing in the world, posed a great challenge to him; especially as he looks back upon things now. He also found that the canvassing type evangelism didn't work the greatest for him. In one summer he canvassed 2000 to 3000 homes from which very little visible success came. The most effective type of evangelism that worked for him was friendship evangelism. He also faced challenges geographically. The two churches, being 120 miles apart, made family life a challenge.

One of the most helpful things for Pastor Cortez was church history. Particularly helpful to him was the Epistles of the New Testament. The accounts of the Apostle Paul

as both pastor and missionary really hit home when he began to go through some of the same types of situations. Learning from the past is very important to Pastor Cortez.

This interview with Pastor Cortez is packed full of great information about the congregations that he served in Texas. It was a privilege to have been enlightened by his insights and wisdom. May God continue to bless the work of all the workers in his vineyard.