A HISTORY OF
GOOD SHEPHERD EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH,
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

by

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On November 17, 1985, Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church of Downers Grove, Illinois, celebrated its tenth anniversary. For congregations having existed for 100 years or more, a ten year anniversary may seem rather insignificant. But for those, who had fought and struggled to make this church a reality, it was an especially joyous occasion and a wonderous testimony to the wisdom and grace of God. I say "wisdom of God" because Good Shepherd came into being neither as the result of synodical mission planning, nor as the primary vision of its founding fathers. In fact, Good Shepherd's existence came about inspite of contrary plans on the part of both groups. The early history of this congregation is a living example of the Lord's proclamation recorded by the Prophet Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (55:8).

The following is the story of Good Shepherd's conception and birth. More exactly, it is the story of the people, principally laymen, who, being powered by the Word of Truth, valiantly marched forward through storms of disappointment, ridicule, and rejection until their dream of a solidly confessional Lutheran church affiliated with a solidly confessional Lutheran church body became a reality. But above all, this is a tribute to that Word of Truth by which, and for which, these people so earnestly strove.

THE EARLY DAYS

The very first seeds of Good Shepherd were planted in 1967. They were planted in the fertile ground of Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church, a Missouri Synod congregation in Westmont, Illinois. This ground had

been tilled by the growing liberalism within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Many members of Bethel were alarmed by the reports of false teachings and denials of certain biblical accounts by professors at Concordia Teacher's College in River Forest and at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Due to these reports the Board of Elders and Trustees (hereafter referred to simply as Board of Elders) and the pastor, Rev. E.F. Kavasch, invited Rev. Walter Otten, pastor of St. Paul's in Brookfield, Illinois, and brother of the famous (infamous?) Herman Otten, to meet with them. Over the course of a number of meetings, Otten presented evidence that these reports were true, and that in fact, the LCMS was no longer the stalwart of orthodoxy she had once been.

Not long after these meetings with Otten, two elders from Bethel, Del Schoenbeck and Bud Hitchcock, met with a number of other concerned laymen from various LCMS churches in the Chicago area. Their purpose was to inform individual congregations of the problems facing the synod, and to voice their protests to synodical officials, especially to the synod president, Dr. Oliver Harms. This assembly became the Concerned Lutheran Laymen's Group. From this original body, similar groups splintered off around the country. These formed the basis for the founding of the Federation of Authentic Lutheranism (FAL).

In spite of these protests, nothing apparent was being done by synod officials. Therefore, by 1970, the men of Bethel decided it was time to take futher action. By unanimous vote of the Board of Elders, the congregation lodged a formal protest against the unresisted decline of confessional purity within the LCMS. In the official letter of protest to President Harms the items of specific concern mentioned were

the false teachings at River Forest and St. Louis. Bethel substantiated this state of protest by withholding funds from the synod. In order not to impose upon the conscience of any individual, each member in the congregation was given the option of supporting this protest or of continuing to personally support synod with their offerings. This was implemented by the use of pledge cards. The offerings of those who wished to continue to support synod were submitted to synod. The offerings of those who joined in the protest were allocated by the Board of Elders to various charitable institutions, such as Bethesda and the School for the Blind in Detroit. These funds were sent directly to the institutions.

The election of J.A.O. Preus to the presidency of LCMS gave the people at Bethel a momentary ray of hope. Reportedly being a staunch conservative, he seemed to be the man for the job of cleaning up Missouri. At the 1973 LCMS Convention in New Orleans, it appeared that something was finally going to be done. The Convention condemned the liberal teachings and practices of the majority of the St. Louis professors. It was resolved that the faculty's theological position was contrary to the Bible and not to be tolerated in LCMS. Following the Convention, John Tietjen, President of the St. Louis seminary, was suspended. This resulted in the walkout of all but five professors and the great majority of students. The walkout precipitated the formation of Seminex. Unfortunately, Preus did not finish the job. For even though Seminex was established as a reaction to the "old Missouri" conservatism, and openly espoused anti-scriptural teaching, many of its graduates were accepted as LCMS pastors.

Another development directly related to the actions of the 1973

Convention was the formation of ELIM (Evangelical Lutherans in Mission). ELIM was a group of LCMS liberals who began to actively and openly promote liberal theology in the Missouri Synod. Although Preus and other synod leaders officially denounced ELIM as "devisive and schismatic," no formal action was taken against them.

During this time Preus spoke to the members at Bethel. Those who were present characterized him as a "pacifier" who "would tell you anything you wanted to hear." This, coupled with his lack of definitive action, convinced the men at Bethel that the LCMS was doomed as a strong, conservative, evangelical Lutheran church body. It became clear that officially, Missouri had opted for a superficial serenity, rather than for the truth.

Accordingly, in the early months of 1974, the Board of Elders decided the time had come to make a clean break from Missouri. Their decision was obviously influenced by the great unity existing in the congregation. At this time about 95% of the members were not supporting synod with their mission offerings. The elders felt that this was absolutely the best time to take the whole congregation out without a split. Therefore, the elders implored Pastor Kavasch to lead Bethel out of Missouri and into the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. There was some discussion about joining FAL, but that option was rejected. The majority felt that FAL lacked the power to be an effective and lasting church body. In addition, over the years, Kavasch had continually spoken highly of the WELS. He had even encouraged young people interested in the ministry to enter the WELS program rather than the LCMS system. But the elders were greatly disappointed by Kavasch's reply. Instead of accepting their request,

he announced his retirement. He was 74 years old, and in poor health. Understandably, he felt that the stress and strain of such an undertaking would be more than he could handle. He suggested, though, that the congregation call a younger pastor who was of like mind with them and have him lead them out. The elders resigned themselves to this course of action. Yet at their request, Kavasch agreed not to retire until the new man arrived.

Due to these circumstances, this golden opportunity was lost. Never again would this congregation be so united in its protest against Missouri, and its desire for pure confessional affiliation. As it turned out, the prospect of Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church becoming a WELS church, ended with Pastor Kavasch's retirement.

A CONFLICT ARISES

Almost immediately, the elders began the monumental task of finding a new Missouri Synod pastor who shared their sentiments. Because of the current situation, they disregarded the normal procedure of submitting a request for candidates to the synodical board. Instead, the Board of Elders appointed a call committee to seek out individual, conservative pastors who might be considered for a call. This committee, under the direction of the Board of Elders, and the counsel of Pastors Kavasch and Otten, consulted with various LCMS officials who were believed to be conservative and sympathetic to their situation. Such men as Dr. N. Tjernagle, then professor at River Forest, and Dr. Zimmermann, who later became president of the same, proved to be very helpful, and supplied the committee with names.

Members of the committee then began checking out the men recommended to them. To do this, they travelled around the country listening to these men preach and talking with them, trying to determine their theological stance. Yet their purpose was more than just investigative. They also apprised these pastors of the state of affairs at Bethel and alerted them to the nature and the difficulty of the task for which they were being considered. The names of these pastors, along with the call committee's evaluation of each, were submitted to the Board of Elders for consideration. The elders, then, chose one, and issued a call to him.

Admittedly, this procedure seems out of place, deviating from traditional and orderly practice. And under normal circumstances it would not have been followed. But Bethel's circumstances were far from normal. Knowing Missouri's desire for peace rather than doctrinal purity, these men distrusted synod officials. They believed these officials would have undermined their effort to find a pastor true to their own convictions. Therefore, this rather unorthodox method was followed.

Nevertheless, even this careful search for a like-minded pastor eventually culminated in failure. Four men were called until one, Rev. Charles Gierke, finally accepted. He was installed on September 29, 1974, and shortly thereafter it became clear that this man was not at all what they had hoped for. In him their worst fears were realized. He became the catalyst for division. The first intimation of this was his disregard for tradition and the use of his "position" to make changes without consideration for the feelings of many in the congregation. Immediately after his installation on September 29,

1974, he initiated "radical" changes in the liturgy and congregational traditions. The most noticable, and that which caused the greatest stir, was his abandoning the use of the King James Version in the worship service. The KJV was used almost exclusively at Bethel throughout its 53 year history. Though there were many in the congregation who absolutely opposed the use of anything other than the KJV, the real problem centered around the manner in which the use of other translations was begun. Apparently it was done without the approval of the Board of Elders and without overwhelming support of the congregation. A letter (dated April 25, 1975) written by a member to the Board of Elders, clearly relates the ensuing problem:

> At the last congregational meeting, we devoted most of the time to discussing and voting on the question, "Shall the King James Version of the Bible be the only version of the Bible to be used in our church?" This question was defeated by one vote. What did it solve? It raised more questions, but resolved nothing.
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> As stated in the church bulletin, dated October 6, 1974, this question of using different versions of the Bible was discussed and agreed upon by the Elders and Pastor Gierke. However, the reaction of some of the Elders at the last meeting would indicate some misunderstanding as to what the agreement involved. Also the reaction of some of the members indicated that there is some difference of opinion as to what version should be used in our church.

Also in this letter the statement was made, "To my knowledge this question of changing the Bible version has never been discussed by this body (Board of Elders) before." The apparent contradiction of this with the first sentence of the second paragraph quoted above, is easily explained. The Board of Elders consisted of six men plus the pastor. For a motion to carry a simple majority was needed. Furthermore, there was nothing in the constitution requiring that a meeting be announced a certain number of times in order to be valid. In addition, those

present at a given meeting constituted a quorum. Therefore, it was possible that a constitutionally valid meeting was called and this issue decided without the knowledge of certain elders.

The explosive nature of this issue is attested to by the final paragraph of the letter:

> This question seems to have caused a serious problem within our church, which if not resolved quickly could result in a division and possibly the destruction of our church. I am quite sure that none of us would like to see this happen. It would be a loss for all and a gain for none.

For many, Gierke's treatment of the situation was the "straw that broke the camel's back." Certain men approached him about this problem, but found it impossible to reason with him. They felt he had his mind made up and there was no changing it.

In all fairness to Rev. Gierke it should be said that he was in a very unenviable position. Prior to his arrival, Bethel had had only one resident pastor, Rev. Kavasch. Bethel, in a sense, was "Kavasch's church." Accordingly, anything Gierke would have done would have been met with some disapproval simply because it wasn't Pastor Kavasch doing it. In other words, if Kavasch would have made some of the changes Gierke did, there likely would have been no opposition whatsoever. In addition, knowing that he would be living in Pastor Kavasch's shadow, he likely felt the need to establish his own identity as Pastor. Be that as it may, he failed to go about it in a tactful and evangelical way. He stepped into a highly charged situation and made it explode.

Throughout the time that the above problem unfolded, Gierke also made it clear that he was absolutely unwilling to leave the Missouri Synod. This was devastating to those men who had worked so hard to get a pastor who shared their feelings. Looking with hindsight it is not

difficult to see where their plan broke down. Before a call was extended to a man the members of the calling committee explained to him their desire to leave the LCMS and enter the WELS if there was no "clear-cut" change in Missouri. The calling committee required an agreement with this before recommending him to the elders. But the actual statement included in the letter accompanying the written call was worded in a more ambiguous way: "We are in a state of protest at the present time and would expect the new pastor to bring this to a conclusion at the proper time." Such a plain statement is open to subjective interpretation. Obviously, Gierke did not at all feel bound to lead Bethel out of the LCMS. He believed that the Seminex walk-out and Preus' anti-liberal rhetoric constituted a "clear-cut change."

A CHANGE OF PLANS

It was becoming increasingly clear that if these conerned people were to realize their goal of affiliation with a pure Lutheran church body, the time had come to pursue other avenues. Thus, Gierke's disregard for both the traditions of the congregation and the implications of his call can be cited as immediate causes for the vision of a new WELS church. On May 28, 1975, Del Schoenbeck, with the encouragement of a number of other Bethel members, addressed a letter to the WELS president, Rev. O.J. Naumann. His purpose was to find out how the WELS felt about starting a congregation in the Westmont area. President Naumann and Rev. Reinhart Pope, Chairman of the SE Wisconsin District Mission Board answered immediately. But their responses were not very encouraging. Pope informed Schoenbeck that this particular

area of Chicagoland was not under consideration. However, a neighboring town, Downers Grove, was under consideration for the distant future. But the synod's immediate plans were to begin exploratory work in Bolingbrook (an area south of Westmont), but even this was not expected to happen until later that year.

At this Schoenbeck became discouraged and resigned himself to joining one of the few existing WELS congregations in the greater Chicago area. But again a number of Bethel members encouraged him to keep trying to win the WELS' support for a new mission in that area. These people believed that there were already 30 to 40 others who were willing to join a new WELS mission. With all this support, Schoenbeck wrote to Rev. Pope. In this letter, dated June 24, he expressed his feelings that there were enough families interested in affiliating with the WELS to justify opening a mission immediately. Accordingly, he asked to meet either with Pope or with a representative to discuss this possibility. Again, Pope's reply was cordial, but discouraging. Citing budget realities, he conveyed his feeling that it would serve no purpose to even meet before September or October. Out of frustration Schoenbeck contacted Pope by phone. Still Pope offered no real encouragement of starting a mission in the Westmont area in the near future. But he did give Schoenbeck the name of two WELS pastors in the area with whom he could talk. These men were Rev. Terry Deters of Resurrection, Aurora and Rev. Elmer Mahnke of Hope, West Chicago. Schoenbeck did contact these men and they agreed to meet with him and the others who had similar feelings.

This meeting took place on August 19, 1975 and can be considered the conception of what was to become Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church.

17 people from Bethel met with both Deters and Mahnke at the Schoenbeck home. These two pastors told them about the Wisconsin Synod's stance and purpose. Rev. Mahnke's warmth and positive attitude toward starting a mission made this meeting "the most inspiring event of our life in the past year," as those present termed it. He was the first WELS person to make such a committment. From this point on he took the lead in this endeavor.

The next day, August 20,1975, Rev. Mahnke submitted the names of these 17 people to the WELS General Board for Home Missions along with an official request that exploratory services be held in the Westmont-Downers Grove area.

While these 17 people awaited action from the Board for Home Missions, a development at Bethel affirmed for them, that they were pursuing the right course. (It should be pointed out that these 17 were still officially members of Bethel at this time.) At the September 8, 1975 voter's meeting, Del Schoenbeck put forth this motion: "To remove Bethel Lutheran Church from Missouri Synod and all synodical affiliations, immediately. To immdediately affiliate Bethel Lutheran Church with the Wisconsin Synod, Milwaukee, WI. That all employees (including called men) be interviewed by the Board of Elders and Trustees to determine if they are willing to also affiliate with the Wisconsin Synod. If not, to immediately notify the Missouri Synod of their availability." Admittedly this motion was rather drastic and sudden. Yet it was in line with the position Bethel, as a congregation, held prior to Gierke's arrival. It was a last ditch attempt to determine if there was still any chance that Bethel, as a whole congregation, might leave Missouri and join Wisconsin. The way

this motion was received by the Voter's Assembly made it clear that there was no such chance. It was greeted by jeers and taunts. Schoenbeck, and those who supported him, were accused of trying to "steal the buildings and equipment," of "holding unauthorized meetings," and even "inviting him to leave." Because of the divisive reaction, Geirke requested that the motion be held open and voted on at a later time. The Voter's Assembly, then, tabled the matter until the January meeting and asked the Board of Elders to study the issue and make recommendations.

On October 6, 1975, a Board of Elders meeting was called to discuss this motion. But, according to the Minority Statement, very little discussion was given to it. Instead, Gierke had drafted his own resolution with the heading, "To recognize positive action in dealing with doctrinal liberalism in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and renew wholehearted support of synod." This document received a great deal of discussion, and objections were raised against several of its statements. These statements read as follows:

> WHEREAS at the Sept. 8, 1975, Voter's Assembly a member of Bethel who had a) previously publicly stated his disillusionment with Pastor Gierke's ministry at Bethel; b) consequently absented himself from worship at Bethel in favor of another church for several months; c) withdrawn his daughter from Bethel School in favor of another parochial school; d) withheld his support from Bethel; e) actively engaged in the promotion of a new Wisconsin Synod Mission in this area, even before the Anaheim Convention was held, presented a motion which requested that Bethel immediately withdraw from the Missouri Synod and join the Wisconsin Synod and
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> WHEREAS, in spite of a unanimous congregational endorsement of Pastor Gierke's ministry at the previous Voter' Assembly, the adoption of this motion would have in effect removed Pastor Gierke from the office of pastor at Bethel because of his known committment to the premise that the Missouri Synod is effectively and successfully dealing with its doctrinal problems...

With the elimination of these articles and further direct references to Schoenbeck, the resolution passed by one vote - Gierke himself casting the deciding vote. Also, a special open meeting for all members of Bethel was scheduled for October 22, and a special voters meeting was called for the following week to decide the matter.

The three elders voting against the resolution issued a Minority Statement to the assembly at the October 22 open meeting. The following excerpts from this Statement clearly sum up their evaluation of Gierke's resolution:

> [At the Oct. 6 Board of Elders meeting] There was very little discussion of this motion (Schoenbeck's motion), but rather we were given copies of a resolution written by Pastor Gierke. After reading this resolution, the rest of the meeting was spent in discussing certain statements in it that we objected to. Some of these statements are as follows:
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> Statements about actions taken by the member of Bethel who made the subject motion. These statements indicated a personal conflict between this member and Pastor Gierke. Since Pastor Gierke had not applied the divine rule, as laid down in the Bible, Matt. 18:15, "Go and tell him his faults between thee and him alone," and since this member was not present to defend himself, we objected. Also these statements indicated an effort was made to discredit this member and thus discredit the motion.
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> Statements were made implying that the members of Bethel that are not willing to financially support Missouri Synod at this time are engaging in devisisve activities.
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> Pastor Gierke has publicly stated his commitment to end our state of protest by taking Bethel back into financial support of the Missouri Synod, therefore we feel that this resolution is slanted in that direction.
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> We believe that the first responsibility of your board of elders is the Bethel congregation, therefore we could not accept this resolution at this time, considering the conditions that still exist in the Missouri Synod.

On October 29, the Voters' Assembly voted to end the state of protest and return to full support of the Missouri Synod. With this

any lingering hopes of Bethel Lutheran Church becoming a WELS congregation were dashed. And it became clear that those who were concerned about true confessional purity could no longer remain affiliated with their beloved Bethel.

A NEW BEGINNING

But the bitterness of this disappointment was sweetened somewhat by the long-sought authorization of the WELS Board for Home Missions to begin exploratory work. Though having lost the battle at Bethel, these concerned individuals were now free to expend all their energy in building a new congregation. The rapidity and extensiveness to which this new mission came into being is a testimony to the power which God's Word has to instill tireless determination in His people.

The WELS synodical officials had advised all those who were interested in ~~in~~ becoming involved in this new mission to join an existing WELS church first, then, after the mission becomes a legal church, to transfer their membership to the mission. Thus all those involved would be free to participate in the Lord's Supper. Following this advice, the original 17 plus another 30 individuals from Bethel and other LCMS congregations applied for membership at Palos Lutheran Church, Palos Heights, Illinois.

On November 7, 1975, an unofficial organization was formed, taking the name, "WELS Mission - Southern DuPage Co." At this meeting Rev. Mahnke agreed to conduct the services, which were to begin the following week. Yet, at this point, absolutely no arrangements had been made for holding a church service. So officers were elected, and

jobs were assigned to all those present at the meeting. Immediately, a frantic search for a suitable place for worship was begun. Soon such a place was found in the Franklin II room of the Holiday Inn, Willowbrook. With that first objective fulfilled, arrangements were made to obtain the necessary materials for a service. On Saturday, November 15, the day before the first service, a trip was made to Northwestern Publishing House to acquire the needed supplies. Among the items purchased were: 25 hymnals, The Liturgy, The Lectionary, a hymnboard, communion wafers, offering baskets, and even Sunday School materials. The quantity and type of materials secured are witnesses to the optimism of this group in succeeding as a church. The money needed to make this initial purchase came from individual donations.

To advertise the first service, an ad was placed in the "Suburban Life," a local newspaper. In addition newsletters were sent to all those who were known to have expressed interest. It is significant that Rev. Kavasch had since joined this group, discontinuing his membership in his former parish. Yet because he still maintained close ties with many of the people at Bethel, he acted as a "recruiter." This is not to say that he engaged in sheep-stealing from his former flock. He simply informed the group about people he knew were unhappy with Bethel and the Missouri Synod, so that they could be informed about the new WELS mission.

A DREAM REALIZED

For eight years members of this group had actively fought and struggled against liberalism, apathy and disinterest in their endeavor

to have a church grounded solely on God's Word of truth. Finally their prayers were answered, and their hopes and dreams were realized. At 8:00 a.m., November 16, 1975 this new congregation held its first worship service. Although the setting was less than churchly, a majestic cathedral could not have lifted the worshippers' spirits any higher. A folding table served as the altar, a portable podium was the pulpit and music was provided by a slightly out-of-tune piano. Nevertheless, it was evident that all hearts were in tune with joy and thanksgiving. And, as if this alone was not blessing enough, the Lord provided an additional surprise. 85 souls gathered together to participate in this blessed event! The attendance at this first service greatly exceeded everyone's expectations. And it provided added encouragement to this new congregation.

Yet these people were not content to rest on the laurals of this "success." They realized that as marvelous as this beginning was, it was indeed just the beginning. As a church, they needed to grow, not just numerically, but also spiritually. Accordingly, the following Sunday marked the initiation of the Sunday School and the Adult Bible Class.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated for the first time on November 30. The reason behind this date is rather significant. Recall that those who were interested in joining this mission were advised to join an existing WELS church first. This they did, applying for membership at Palos. But they had to wait until the next regularly scheduled voters' meeting before being accepted as members. Until then, they were not WELS members and could not take communion in a WELS church, including their own mission. It was not until November 23 that they

were finally received into membership. Wasting no time, they arranged to celebrate the Lord's Supper at the mission the following week. For this occassion, a member created a unique, portable communion rail and kneeler, which gave the banquet room a little more of a consecrated air. On that day, 58 people partook of Christ's body and blood, receiving the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins.

The Lord continued to bless the efforts of these dedicated souls. He certainly proved that His promise that His Word will not return to Him empty is true. By the end of 1975, the average attendance at worship services was 93, with a Sunday School attendance of 15. The total contributions for the months of November and December was in excess of $10,000. Also by this time, for all practical purposes, this mission was a fully functioning congregation. In addition to Sunday services, Sunday School and Adult Bible Class, there had been established Adult Information Classes, Catechism instruction, a choir, and mid-week Advent services.

Yet, as smoothly as everything seemed to be going, all was not sunshine and roses. An unfortunate circumstance developed which caused a certain amount of heartbreak and bitterness on the part of these people. This problem arose around a misunderstanding about Rev. Kavasch's role in the new mission. Since Rev. Mahnke, being pastor of two congregations, had limited time to devote to this rapidly growing mission, and since Kavasch had been the faithful and orthodox pastor of the majority of the members, he was asked by them to assist with some of the pastoral duties. So, at their request, he conducted the Bible Class, visited shut-ins, assisted with communion, and occasionally preached. Rev. Mahnke assented to this because there were plans for a

colloquy. But due to Kavasch's age and the extensive nature of the colloquy, these plans never materialized. His performance of these functions, particularly his preaching, drew criticism from the Synod. Eventually, he was told that he could no longer preach. At first, this was not well received by many in the congregation. And this is understandable, considering Kavasch's vital role in the congregation's formation, his long-time support of WELS, and especially the fact that he was their former pastor. This incident spawned an ominous feeling of synodical dictatorship. Fortunately, it was short-lived, dissipating when the reasons for the Synod's action were understood. Still, it was not accepted without sympathy for Pastor Kavasch.

Thankfully, this unhappy experience did not dampen the spirit of this young church. It continued to develope into a flourishing congregation. The year 1976 proved to be one filled with significant events. Early in March, recognizing that the Good Shepherd had been the constant companion, leader and provider of this flock, the congregation fittingly selected as its name, Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church. Though still considered exploratory, it was evident that the Good Shepherd had more perminant plans for this congregation. And on May 5, the WELS General Board for Home Missions concurred with this and granted mission status. With this the plans for exploratory work in Bolingbrook were dropped. The location of Good Shepherd made it unnecessary. Two weeks later the men of the congregation assembled and formally organized. July 4 also marked a significant occasion. Not only was it the day our nation celebrated its 200th birthday, but it was also the day the members of Good Shepherd voted to incorporate. One final important event took place that year. On August 20, exactly

one year after their request to begin exploratory services, three acres of land were purchased in Downers Grove.

1976 also proved to be a year of firsts in the spiritual lives of the members. The first confirmand became a communicant member. The first marriage took place. The first baby born in the congregation was received into God's kingdom through baptism. And the first adult member entered her eternal rest. The Lord continued to shower His blessings on the labors of this group of Christians. By the end of 1976, slightly more than one year since its birth, the membership had grown from 17 to 160 souls, including 125 communicants with an average weekly attendance of 107. The Sunday School also was flourishing with 28 children enrolled.

Two key events took place the following year. On January 10, 1977, Rev. David Rutschow of Peoria, Illinois, was called to be the first pastor. He accepted and was installed on March 6. In him, the Lord again blessed Good Shepherd with an able and dedicated servant. Also, that January, members of the Building Committee, officials of the WELS and an architect began plans for a church building. By August 5, 1979 the cornerstone was laid and two weeks later the sanctuary and educational unit were dedicated.

Even after their long-desired church had become a reality, these people did not rest. Filled with the concern that their children receive a sound Christian education, a Christian Day School was opened in the fall of 1979. Mr. Ronald Zahn, previously of Owosso, Michigan, was called as the principle and teacher. 18 students were enrolled that first year. Two years later a second full-time teacher was needed. Miss Margaret Ungemach was called to fill this position.

Because of increasing enrollment, a larger facility became necessary. In February of 1983 plans were begun to expand the present facility. This project was funded exclusively by donations and loans from members. No synodical or commercial assistance was needed. To keep costs down, much of the work was also completed by members. The addition was dedicated September 15, 1985.

Besides the growth of the physical plant, the Lord accomplished a greater miracle in the growth of the membership. From its humble beginnings with 17 people, Good Shepherd enjoyed a steady growth. By 1985 the congregation numbered 362 souls and 249 communicants. 32 were enrolled in the Day School and 89 in the Sunday School.

EPILOGUE

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church is a living example of the loftiness of God's thoughts and ways, as stated in the introduction. It was the original desire of the founding fathers of Good Shepherd to lead their established LCMS congregation into the WELS. There it was hoped that they could get back to the business of proclaiming the gospel, rather than being consumed by the battle against theological indifference. And when it was realized that this was not going to happen, the immediate reaction was one of despair. But as time has borne out, God had better plans. And looking back it is easy to see how much higher the Lord's thoughts and ways are above ours.

Bethel's unity back in the late '60s and early '70s can be attributed to Rev. Kavasch. He wielded much influence and he was greatly respected by most members. There were many in the

congregation, though, who simply went along with the flow. The unity of that church was not fully bred out of unified convictions. This was borne out by the great division that occurred when Rev. Gierke arrived. His coming really acted as a sifting process. It separated those who were truly concerned about Biblical confessionalism and Missouri's fence-sitting stance from those who were loyal to Missouri and also those who really didn't care. Had Bethel, as a whole, joined the WELS, there undoubtedly would have been some disunity in the future.

But by being sifted out, that small group of concerned Lutherans were entering a testing and purifying fire. And the results of that trial have molded and shaped Good Shepherd into something Bethel likely never would have been. A bond of closeness and mutual concern and support engendered by God's Word of Truth was formed among the members. This Christ-centered unity could do nothing but cause this group to grow together in their faith and love for their Lord, as God says it will. Yet this close bond did not become exclusive, jealously guarding what they had. Instead it prompted them to become very open and inviting, to which the growth statistics bear witness.

Indeed Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church is a flock tended by the Good Shepherd. Being fed by His Word, and protected by His mighty arm, her sheep and lambs have prospered. May He continue to be her Shepherd. May He always receive the glory.

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