

A HISTORY OF:

**ABIDING WORD EV.
LUTHERAN
CHURCH**

**HOUSTON, TEXAS
(1969-1984)**

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Church History
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In the early sixties, the tensions which had plagued relations between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod came to a head. Wisconsin withdrew from fellowship with Missouri and labeled her among the heterodox because of changed doctrinal position and practice. While the issues that contributed to this break and the subsequent break up of the Synodical Conference were keenly sensed by the clergy involved, concerned laymen also re-examined their doctrinal positions. Such was the case in the formation of *Abiding Word Lutheran* of Houston, Texas. One family, after years spent in hopeful prayer, could no longer with good conscience remain in their Missouri Synod congregation. Leaving behind old Trinity Lutheran was a very difficult decision. Many relatives and friends belonged to that church. It was the only church that these native Texans had ever called home. Yet, convinced that Missouri had abandoned sound doctrine and practice, they left.

On the distant west-side of Houston, they turned to a WELS congregation (Christ the Lord) for their spiritual care. Many miles were traveled to attend church services and functions. It was also at this time that the Wisconsin Synod, no longer involved with Missouri, was starting to find its own strength in mission outreach. One area that had been slated as particularly promising by the Mission Board was the northwest side of Houston. Houston was just on the verge of tremendous growth which would continue into the 1980's. The oil industry had

relocated much of their corporate headquarters to the city. Many other businesses connected with oil had followed suit. Houston was experiencing the growing pains of changing from a 'cow town' into a major metropolis. The expanding city was beginning to claim much property to the north. Pastures and fields were being transformed almost overnight into subdivisions and shopping centers. This growth had excited the Mission Board as far as the opportunity which the northwest area presented.

It was agreed in 1969 that exploratory work should begin. Pastor Glaeske of Christ the Lord would now serve a new group meeting on Houston's northwest side in addition to his own church. On September 7, 1969, at Christ the Lord, the original members completed planning for the initial church service of *Abiding Word*. They had found a suitable place to meet. The church would begin in the band hall of Bammel Elementary School. That meeting was filled with a sense of tremendous joy, but at the same time also a sense of awesome responsibility concerning what was soon to begin.

On September 14, 1969, the first actual service was held. Many friends and relatives were invited so that the number in attendance would not seem so small. All of the members brought various items to transform the band hall into a church. When time came for the offering to be collected no offering plate could be found. The people collected the first offering in a genuine 10-gallon Texas cowboy hat.

Often services would find 15 gathered to worship, as Mrs. Glaeske would attend with her two children. The band hall was adequate for the needs of the congregation and the school had

also allowed the people to use two small rooms for the Sunday school program. Several times the janitor forgot to open the school for the worshippers, so Pastor Glaeske had to become proficient at picking the lock in time for church to begin.

Those initial months at *Abiding Word* were filled with much hard work and prayer. The people were busy knocking on neighborhood doors and sharing the Gospel with all whom they met. Whenever a new family would come on Sunday morning, they would never leave feeling unwelcomed, only perhaps a bit smothered. The congregation to this day retains that same type of care in greeting newcomers, even though it has grown.

In 1970 the administrators of the Bammel School informed the congregation that it could no longer use the band hall and would be allowed (with increased rent) to meet within the school proper. This new arrangement allowed much more room for the church. However, since no pianos were kept within the school building, the men of the congregation now had the added chore of carrying one from another building every Sunday morning. These new accommodations did not last long.

Later in that year *Abiding Word* was granted Mission Status and began to call for a full-time pastor. This was good not only for *Abiding Word*, but also for Pastor Glaeske. Pastor Glaeske was serving three congregations in Houston and surely looked forward, with his full schedule, to some needed relief. After three calls had been extended without success, the Lord moved Pastor William R. Gabb to accept the call. He came to *Abiding Word* from Nebraska.

With the arrival of a new pastor on the horizon, the people

of *Abiding Word* had to get busy. A home had to be found which would accomodate the Gabb family and their children. This task was not to be an easy one, as many of the homes the congregation found carried rent well outside of what they had to work with. Finally, they found an old farm house on Spring-Stuebner Road (5 miles to the north of where the church now sits). The house was set back off the road about a quarter of a mile. It was very isolated, but the big oak trees that surrounded it made it a beautiful spot. The house was in fair shape, but required a great deal of cleaning up. The people exerted much elbow grease in spiffing up the home and the yard which also had suffered from lack of attention. The congregation at this time had grown to four families, all of whom helped with the preparation for the Gabbs arrival. All were thrilled with the prospect of meeting their own new pastor.

Soon the moving van which carried the belongings of the Gabbs arrived. It is a day which those members will never forget. The Gabb children eagerly explored their new house and yard. Beth Gabb, the pastor's wife, enjoyed the privacy of the home in the daytime, but had reservations at night when the wolves would howl and the owls would hoot and her husband was gone.

Many of the special occasions in the congregation's worship life were moved into the parsonage living room, which also housed the numerous meetings of the various church boards. It was becoming apparent to all that the congregation needed a permanent home. The congregation was really beginning to grow.

In 1971, land was purchased on Red Oak Drive, where the church still sits to this day. This location was only a stones

throw away from Bammel Elementary School. In February of that year, a relocatable building was erected which served as the congregation's chapel. Many hours of donated work were used in getting it ready. Everyone was happy that the new building meant an end to hauling the many items that had been needed to set-up the church each Sunday morning.

Plans for a parsonage were also begun in 1971, with members planning to donate the work themselves. The parsonage was completed in April of 1972, and was dedicated on July 23. In December of 1972, ground breaking took place for the present building which included both a chapel and an education wing. Weather caused numerous delays, but this new church was dedicated in June of 1973. The congregation uses this same building as its church and fellowship wing today.

Under the leadership of Pastor Gabb the congregation continued 'working' the neighborhoods that surrounded their church. Many hours were spent in canvass work, which kept the pastor busy offering instruction in Lutheran doctrine to many new souls. The worship services were growing in attendance every week.

In September of 1973 *Abiding Word* began a new endeavor: opening a Christian Day School. The school began with nineteen children enrolled in grades K-6. The school presently serves children from kindergarten through eighth grade. The first teacher was Miss Virginia Frey who had help from Mrs. Gay Weisbach (one of the members). Others who have taught in the school are: Bernice Spitzenberger, Christine Troge Gallipeau, Mr. & Mrs. Jim Moeller, Judy Osbourne, JoAnn Galkowitz, Cindy

Lange, and Diane Wilson. Presently, the school is staffed by Principal John Lange, Thelma Berg, and Kerri Bush.

In October of 1977, Pastor Gabb accepted a call to become Dean of Students at Northwestern Preparatory School in Watertown, WI. Soon the congregation began calling for a new pastor, but call after call was returned. A vacancy existed at *Abiding Word* from October of 1977 to July 30 of 1978. The vacancy was hard on *Abiding Word*, but the Lord gave the strength necessary for enduring such a vacancy. Pastor Charles Learman of Lord of Life, located to the south of Houston, served the vacancy during this period. The elders did yeoman duty in conducting the church services and Bible classes for six months of Sunday mornings. Pastor Learman then took over and conducted the services on Sunday evenings until a new pastor came.

In June of 1978 Roger Plath and Becky Sewall were united in marriage. The following month they made the long journey to *Abiding Word*. Pastor Plath was ordained and installed on July 30. An eager group of people were more than ready to work with the Shepherd whom the Lord had provided.

Under Pastor Plath the church once again was involved with expanding its facilities. The men of the congregation worked hard in building the new addition which would house the school. All of the work on the new building, except for the steel work, was done by the congregation. The project was completed in the summer of 1981, in time for the start of the new school year.

In the summer of 1981 Pastor Plath received a call from the World Mission Board to work in Hong Kong. Pastor Plath accepted this call in November of 1981. Shortly after that time, the

congregation extended a call to Pastor Stephen Valleskey. The Lord was gracious and moved Pastor Valleskey to accept the call. *Abiding Word* would not have to endure another long vacancy.

Pastor Plath stayed until December of 1981. The following month Pastor Valleskey and his family made the long move from Michigan to Texas. They arrived on January 8. Pastor Valleskey was installed as Pastor of *Abiding Word* on January 17, 1982. He currently is serving the congregation.

Under Pastor Valleskey the congregation has continued to grow, even with some of the membership being lost to a new mission located to the west. The congregation recently participated in a Mass Media program which incorporated the aid of the WELS OWLS program. An active evangelism effort typifies this church.

In closing, the past history of *Abiding Word* has seen the gracious hand of God actively working. The church has seen two of its sons enter the preaching ministry during its short history. From modest beginnings, the church has grown to number nearly 300 souls and has continued to offer the true Word of God to all. Although the congregation no longer is considered to be a mission, it retains the same spirit of enthusiasm and caring that is typical of a mission church.

Yet, many questions need to be answered by the church in the near future. The property upon which *Abiding Word* is built, has become quite valuable with the passing of time. What the founders had hoped would become a residential area, has instead developed into a medical complex. *Abiding Word* is somewhat hidden in the maze of office buildings that now surround it.

Also, the congregation is beginning to outgrow its facilities. They presently are considering possible plans of relocating the church to the north, in a more suitable neighborhood. The amount of revenue generated by the sale of the church property would more than cover the expense for new land and a more suitable building. Yet, leaving the present church is a bitter prospect for many. There are positive aspects also in the present location. May the Lord continue to bless and guide *Abiding Word* throughout whatever plans his future has in store for them.

This paper was written with the help of Dorothy Hildebrandt's memories of the early days at Abiding Word. She is one of the congregation's founding members. A note of thanks to her.