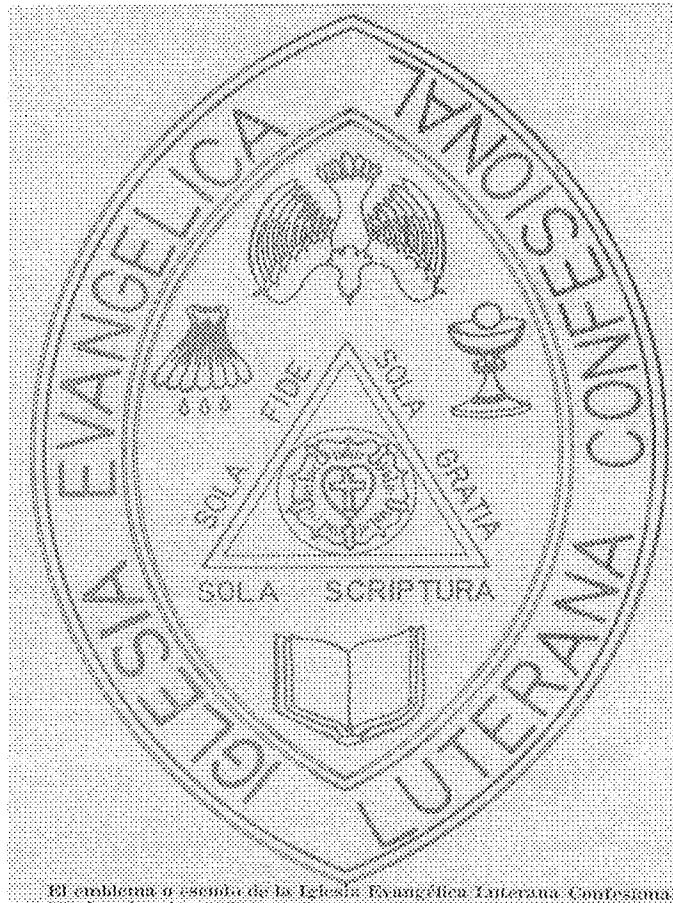


# CRISTO RESUCITADO

A HISTORY OF THE WELS' FIRST MISSION CONGREGATION  
'SOUTH OF THE BORDER'



*(The emblem or shield of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church)*

by  
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May 15, 2002

# CRISTO RESUCITADO:

## A HISTORY OF THE WELS' FIRST MISSION CONGREGATION

### 'SOUTH OF THE BORDER'

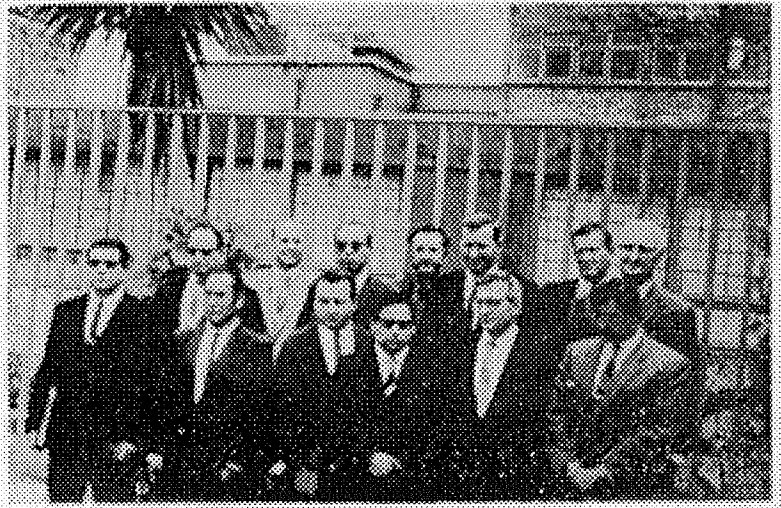
“This is the day the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!” On July 12, 1970, Pastor Edgar Hoenecke joyfully proclaimed these words within the newly finished building of Cristo Resucitado (“Risen Christ”) Lutheran Church, in Mexico City. After only about a year of planning and building, the hopes and dreams of many confessional Lutherans, from both the U.S. and from Mexico, had come to fruition. Finally our brothers and sisters in the faith could gather together and worship Christ in this simple, yet beautiful, new church building.

Cristo Resucitado, located at Monrovia #522, in the colonia of Portales, Mexico City, became the first church in Mexico dedicated “under the auspices of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,”<sup>1</sup> as articulated by Pastor Harold Essmann at the dedication service. Cristo Resucitado’s dedication indeed was the first mission church built and dedicated in Mexico under the care and guidance of the WELS. More importantly this new church could serve as a true light of the gospel, sharing the life-giving water of the Word with the thirsting souls of this heavily populated community in Portales, Mexico City.

On the historic dedication day of Cristo Resucitado, four WELS pastors were present to celebrate this great blessing for both synods, the WELS and the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico (also known as IELC, *‘Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Confesional.’*) Besides the aforementioned Pastors Edgar Hoenecke and Harold Essmann, Pastors Rupert Eggert and Venus Winter made the trip to Mexico City to express their joy and support for this

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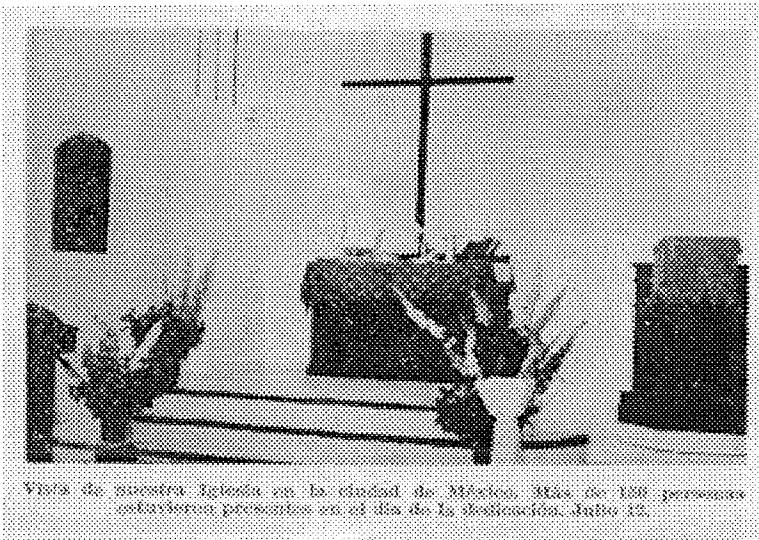
<sup>1</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 7, p. 13.



Participantes en la Conferencia Latinoamericana en la Ciudad de México los días 9, 10 y 11 de julio.

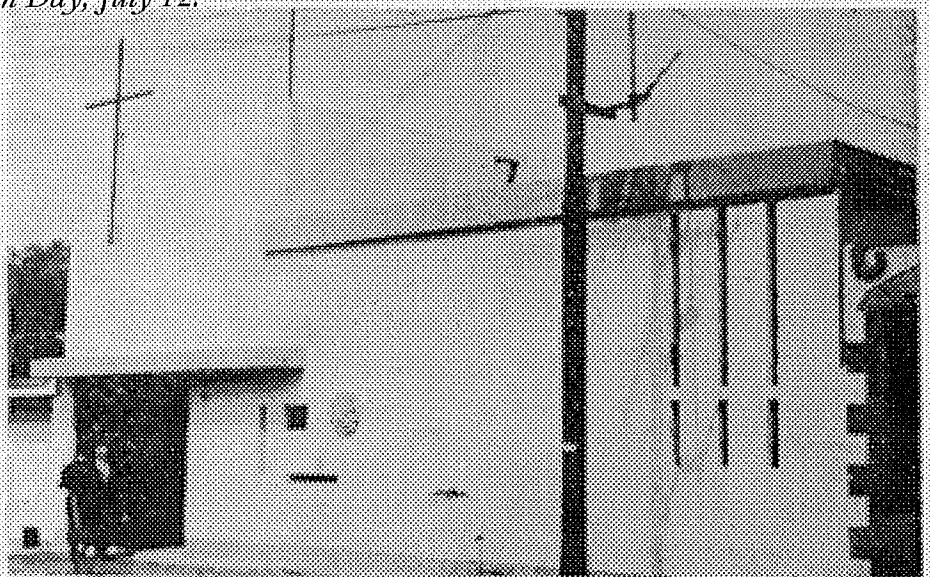
AMERICAN

*"Participants in the Latin American Conference in Mexico City, July 9, 10, and 11, 1970."*



Vista de nuestra Iglesia en la ciudad de México. Más de 150 personas asistieron presentes en el día de la dedicación, Julio 12.

*"View of our church in Mexico City. More than 150 people were present on this Dedication Day, July 12."*



Vista exterior de nuestra Iglesia Luterana en Monrovia 522, colonia Portales, Ciudad de México.

*"View of the exterior of our Lutheran church at 522 Monrovia, colonia Portales, Mexico City."*

new mission base in Mexico City. However, as they already understood, their visit to Mexico at this point in time could only be a temporary one. The roots of Biblical orthodoxy and ties with the WELS would have to be maintained through the faithful and Spirit-guided work and study of the Mexican members and pastors of Cristo Resucitado.

*Limited access for Protestant missions*

In 1857, Mexican president and reformer Benito Juárez opened the doors of Mexico to Protestant missionaries. “Before 1857, Mexico was sealed.”<sup>2</sup> President Juárez had recognized Spain’s Catholic influence in Mexico held his country in subjection, religiously, politically and socially. For this reason he began to welcome Protestant churches into Mexico. On various occasions President Juárez asserted such sentiments:

“The future happiness and prosperity of my country depend on the growth of Protestantism...I would like to see Protestantism become Mexicanized and gain the natives. They need a religion that would induce them to learn to read and not spend their savings on candles for the saints.”<sup>3</sup>

The Mexican Constitution of 1917 once again inhibited the work of all religious entities, Catholic as well as Protestant.

“The Constitution of 1917 mandated that all public worship was to be under the supervision of the government; even the church buildings were to be government property; the clergy was required to register with the government...aliens were prohibited from ministering to Mexicans.”<sup>4</sup>

Until 1993 the Mexican government did not grant residency to foreign missionaries. They could travel into Mexico on a tourist visa, as did the four American pastors who attended Cristo Resucitado’s dedication. Because of these limitations imposed by the Mexican

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<sup>2</sup>Eggert, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.3.

government, WELS missionaries would have to operate from a state-side headquarters. In 1966 Ernest Zimdars was called to serve the Spanish-speaking community in El Paso, Texas, with the hope of entering Ciudad Juárez, across the border from El Paso.

Before the WELS was involved with any missions in Mexico, several other Lutheran church bodies had been planting the seeds of the gospel. The Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church in particular were among the first Lutherans to begin Spanish missions south of the border. The Missouri Synod helped to make contact with a Mexican pastor who would eventually turn out to be one of the key figures in the founding and direction of Cristo Resucitado. His name is David Orea Luna.

*Pastor David Orea Luna takes root in Lutheranism*

Orea Luna began his ministry with the Church of the Nazarene, graduating from their seminary in 1939. Throughout his ministry he displayed a zeal to learn from the Word of God. “Although he graduated as a priest he never gave up his love of investigation, and more and more each day his spiritual and intellectual restlessness grew inside him, and in the Bible he found the water for his spiritual thirst.”<sup>5</sup>

A man with such gifted intellect, Orea Luna soon was assigned a professorship at the seminary in Mexico City from which he graduated. He taught Church History, Literature, Spanish, Rhetoric, and Logic. However, it seemed that the more he learned about what he was teaching, the more doubts were raised in his own mind, especially concerning the Nazarene doctrine of salvation.

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<sup>5</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 25/26, p. 8.

Around the beginning of 1941 he was sent to deal with a Missouri Synod Mexican pastor who was “corrupting” other Nazarene seminary students there in Mexico City. What Pastor Cezar Lazos told Orea Luna was moving him closer to the truth which he was studying in his Bible. Sent by his peers to Monterrey, Mexico, so that he, too, would not be corrupted, he soon met another Lutheran pastor in San Antonio, TX. Not long afterward he started taking classes at the Lutheran Bible School in San Juan, TX, where he was confirmed as a Lutheran. His next step led him to the Lutheran Seminary at Capital University in Columbus, OH.

In a personal letter of his he wrote: “I found the truth, and I understood that the Lutheran church was the only church that taught the pure gospel doctrine.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *Beginnings of the Mexican Lutheran Church*

He graduated from the Columbus seminary and was ordained on June 15, 1947, by authority of the American Lutheran Church. A few months later on October 12, he held his first religious service in a rented home, located at 244 Moctezuma Street, in the colonia of Guerrero, Mexico City.<sup>7</sup> Because the government did not allow public gatherings for worship in private homes, they could not do much evangelism or Bible classes. For the time being, this would have to serve Orea Luna and his small Lutheran congregation.

In 1949 Orea Luna’s dreams came true with the publication of “Amanecer” (“Dawning”), a monthly periodical whose “sole purpose was to carry the gospel of ‘by divine grace alone’ to the remotest places.”<sup>8</sup> This magazine continued publication until November of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Chichia, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>8</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 25/26, p. 9.

1967, in affiliation with the Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM), the ALC, and LCMS. Later these three church bodies in Mexico would merge. As learned in Church History class, when it comes to synods and mergers, “bigger does not mean better.” This axiom would prove to be true in the years from 1949 to 1967 in this Mexican Lutheran mission.

On October 12, 1951, Pastor Orea Luna and his members finally had a church in which to worship legally. They had bought some land and built a church in the colonia Portales, located at 9 Zacahuizco Street, and named the church *Gracia*. By 1955 four more churches had been established and “nationalized.” Three pastors had been ordained, along with seven licensed church workers, four deaconesses, and “his magazine *Amanecer* was being circulated throughout Latin America and in Spain.”<sup>9</sup> Truly the Lord was blessing his work in the Word.

Through Orea Luna’s mission work, combined with the support of LCMS and the ALC, he was able to establish the Mexican Lutheran Church (ILM) in 1957. He served as president of the ILM for ten years, and worked out its official constitution and bylaws. Under the auspices of the ILM, he helped to found two more seminaries. In the years that followed until 1967, Orea Luna discovered that fellowship with false teachers would destroy the purity of the Word which he had so desperately sought out.

*“Those who cause divisions...Keep away from them!”*

By 1967 Orea Luna was fully aware of the changes which had been taking place among many Lutheran church bodies throughout the world, especially by the influence of rationalism. In July of that year he called together a meeting with the ILM Executive Committee, warning

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

them about the dangerous deviations from Scripture which were infecting their sister synods. He therefore recommended that their church separate from the ALC. Consequently the committee agreed and signed a declaration of independence from the ALC and from their doctrinally corrupted seminary, *Centro Augsburg*, to be presented on December 6, 1967.

Pastor David Chichia González, who was a student at the Centro Augsburg Seminary at this time, described the situation in this way:

“When the American Lutheran Church and Missouri merged with the Mexican Lutheran Church, that’s when problems with doctrine arose. They were teaching things that weren’t in agreement with the Scriptures. They were teaching languages like Hebrew and Greek, along with Spanish and French, doing scientific and linguistic studies. But they didn’t have anything to do with doctrine. The seminary curriculum had more of a cultural emphasis than a doctrinal one.”<sup>10</sup>

However, “there wouldn’t be any brave men in the world if there were no cowards.”<sup>11</sup> At the moment of truth, the Secretary of the ILM Executive Committee along with the other committee members decided to remove their signatures from the declaration. They no longer recognized the importance of their own seminary’s teaching that Christ physically rose from the dead. “As a reward for their retraction of the declaration, the pastors and other legal members of the ILM received an increase in salary and other monetary gifts from the ALC.”<sup>12</sup> They would settle for a doctrine that Christ lived in the sense that he “lived on in the hearts of his followers.”

Needless to say, Orea Luna was greatly disappointed, yet he tried once more to convince them to watch out for false teachers. He urged them to go through with the declaration of

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<sup>10</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>11</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 25/26, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 1, p. 13.



separation from the ALC, in order to maintain pure doctrine. To this the Secretary of the committee sharply replied, “Mr. Luna, our children are not going to eat with pure doctrine!”

*Search for brothers in the true faith*

Such an answer from those whom he once called his brothers in the faith left him no choice but to leave them behind. On December 6, 1967, Pastors David Orea Luna and David Chichia González, broke fellowship with the ILM. After 22 years of service within this body of Lutherans, he was forced to leave “for love of the truth and confessional Lutheranism.”<sup>13</sup>

Several years prior to the confrontation and withdrawal of fellowship from ILM and its straying sister synods, Orea Luna had already been in contact with the WELS. Having realized the liberal, unionistic tendencies as well as blatant heresy being taught at the seminary, he sought out other confessional Lutheran brethren as early as 1960.

In 1964, “Orea Luna began communicating by letter with President Oscar Naumann of the WELS without the knowledge of the *Centro Augsburg* Seminary faculty.”<sup>14</sup> Orea Luna was looking for information about the WELS, hoping to find others who were interested in preserving the purity of the Word and maintaining Confessional Lutheranism. President Naumann replied by saying that “he would put Orea Luna into contact with the proper channels of communication — namely, with Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, the Chairman of the Board for World Missions of the WELS.”<sup>15</sup>

Pastor Hoenecke was then sent to Mexico City to meet with Pastor Orea Luna. Along

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<sup>13</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 1, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>15</sup>Huebner, interview, May 13, 2002.



Dr. Oscar J. Naumann, Presidente del Consejo Evangélico Luterano de Wisconsin, (WELS).

*“Dr. Oscar J. Naumann, President of the WELS.”*



Dr. Edgar Hoenecke, Secretario de Ejecutivo de las Misiones Mundiales del Consejo Evangélico Luterano de Wisconsin.

*“Dr. Edgar Hoenecke, Executive Secretary of WELS World Missions.”*



HAROLD ESSMAN, Secretario del Comité Ejecutivo de Misiones Latinoamericanas y a.s. del Consejo de Wisconsin.

*“WELS Secretary of the Executive Committee for Latin American Missions.”*



Momentos de la Ordenación del pastor Felipe Luna Garcia.

*“Moments from the ordination of Pastor Felipe Luna Garcia.”*



El pastor Edgar Hoenecke con el veterano de las Misiones de habla hispana, Reverendo Venus H. Winter.

*“Doctor Edgar Hoenecke with veteran of the Spanish-speaking missions, Reverend Venus H. Winter.”*

with Pastor Venus Winter, veteran missionary among the Spanish-speaking population in Tucson, AZ, “he came to Mexico City to exchange viewpoints, sort of an interview, to see if there were real possibilities for fellowship with us.”<sup>16</sup> This interview took place in March of 1968.

By the grace of God, gospel connections were being made between Lutherans from different countries, striving for confessionalism and Scriptural orthodoxy. When the WELS could not enter Mexico to do mission work, the mission work came to WELS in the form of these two pastors, Orea Luna and Chichia. In May of 1968, these two Mexican pastors traveled to Tucson for a colloquy meeting, in order to be received into fellowship by the WELS. They were received in fellowship with the WELS on May 3, 1968. “For the first year Orea Luna and Chichia would be subsidized by the Arizona-California District, of which they became members. After this year they were added to the main budget of the WELS.”<sup>17</sup>

#### *Starting from scratch: nationalizing a church*

No longer did Orea Luna and Chichia have their church building, having severed ties completely with the ILM. Much support was given by WELS members, enough to be able to fund the building of a chapel for the congregation and its pastor, Orea Luna. In order to build the church, several steps were required by the Mexican government. The WELS, with the help of a Mexican attorney, decided for the formation of a legal corporation to represent the WELS in Mexico. Pastor Elton Huebner, who served as the Administrator for the Board of Trustees, dealt with the business administration of this enterprise. He explained the process and the

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<sup>16</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>17</sup>Flunker, interview, April 29, 2002.

corporation in this way, which began in 1969:

“Because the Mexican government had taken away land ownership rights from all religious groups, no church body could own land in Mexico. In order to get around this, so that our Mexican pastors could have a church, we decided to make contact with a Mexican lawyer who could help us and offer us some options. The lawyer’s name was Federico Martínez Montes de Ochoa. With his advice we found out that we, as an official church body, could not buy land for the purpose of building a church. This was against the law. However, individual members, as long as they did not represent a religious organization per se, could indeed purchase land. A dummy corporation would be formed to do this. In this case we named the corporation ‘Inversora Inmobiliaria, S.A.’ I was the Chief Dummy of the corporation, along with Rupert Eggert, Paul Unke, and Mr. Martínez Montes de Ochoa. Having purchased the land, later we could ‘decide to build a church’ on the land we had purchased. We could play by the Mexican government’s rules by ‘donating’ the land to the government. Then we would make request to build a church on the land. They would then give us permission to build the church. As long as we played by their rules, they never gave us any problems.”<sup>18</sup>

This process is known as *nationalizing a church*. Pastor Huebner mentioned that this process had been the long-standing law in Mexico. Earlier forms of this law were initiated in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, described earlier at the beginning of this history. To this day the property of Cristo Resucitado is still owned by the government. However, “the chances are very slim that the government would interfere with our church. Unless we would put up another building or stop giving religious services, Bible classes, etc., we face no real danger of government intrusion.”<sup>19</sup> We can give thanks to God for his care and guidance in this legal aspect of the history of our sister congregation in Mexico City.

### *First years and last years*

July 12, 1970, was the historic day of dedication of our sister congregation’s church, Cristo Resucitado, which was described at the beginning of this essay. After two years of not being able to hold worship services legally, the day included a few other special events. More

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<sup>18</sup>Huebner, interview, May 13, 2002.

<sup>19</sup>Flunker, interview, May 14, 2002.

than 150 people were in attendance. "Many people from the neighborhood came to this first service out of curiosity, but it was a very special service."<sup>20</sup> Pastor Carlos Avendaño Castro was ordained, received in colloquy from the Missouri Synod. Both sacraments were administered in this service, evidenced by two baptisms and celebration of Holy Communion. Twenty-five members from the sister congregation in Puebla also traveled over 90 miles to attend the dedication service of Cristo Resucitado.

"The building itself is constructed completely of concrete, with a capacity for 200 people. The contract costed about \$15,000. The congregation donated most of the furnishings. With special aid the front of the church was able to be furnished as well [including the pulpit, lectern, altar, baptismal font, hymn boards, etc.] The building also has an office, a sacristy, and a large room for the use of our Spanish language magazine, *El Amanecer*."<sup>21</sup>

The building is now almost 32 years old, but the original furnishings are still in good, working condition. Recently some remodeling and repairs have been done, but the building itself has remained intact, despite rough weather and a severe earthquake in September of 1985, which measured 7.3 on the Richter Scale.

The first years of Cristo Resucitado began under the supervision of Pastor Orea Luna. Not only did he take on the role of pastor of the new congregation, but he also became the first president of the Mexican Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), officially formed in November of 1970.

Still hoping to establish a full-fledged seminary program, Orea Luna was the only professor for seminary students. *Martin Luther Theological Institute* was the name of the fledgling seminary program. The classes were held five hours a day, five days a week at Cristo Resucitado.

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<sup>20</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>21</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 7, p. 13.

Since 1969 Orea Luna had been teaching these seminary classes at Cristo Resucitado. However he wrote an article in *El Amanecer*, asking for a willing and able man to take over this position of seminary professor, in order to relieve Pastor Orea Luna of some of the responsibility which he had taken on. He recognized the need for a full-time professor:

“...in order to develop a sound, theological program...which would require someone who could direct the seminary, someone who could communicate and understand the Spanish language, especially theological terminology, since none of the students as far as I can tell understand English.”<sup>22</sup>

Besides teaching seminary courses, Orea Luna resumed publication and editing of the magazine once known as *Amanecer*, whose new and improved title would be: *El Amanecer*. “This slight change would tip off the fact that the publication was under different auspices and sponsorship. Later it became known as *El Mensajero Luterano*.”<sup>23</sup> The content however would continue to focus on the same goal of spreading the gospel. *El Amanecer* had a broad circulation in Mexico, the U.S., Puerto Rico, with about 1,000 copies being distributed monthly. Another 1,000 copies were circulated in Central and South America, as well as in Spain and other places. Dr. Orea Luna expressed his sentiments concerning the revival of the periodical:

“I felt very blessed when I saw that “El Amanecer” had come back to life. It’s truly wonderful to read a magazine dedicated to proclaiming the true doctrine of the gospel in accordance with the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.”<sup>24</sup>

Besides this periodical, Mexican missions began to incorporate radio broadcasts to go and make disciples of all nations. This program, called “Message of Salvation,” began airing in Mexico City on August 2, 1970, and continued into 1973. Each program lasted 15 minutes at

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<sup>22</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 5, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

10:00 a.m. on Sundays. These programs reached eight of the largest cities in Mexico.<sup>25</sup> Within the first two months of airing the program, "...sixty-two letters were sent asking for information about our program...[however] government restrictions prohibited any and every type of announcement regarding invitations to public worship, places and times..." The work of spreading the gospel was being challenged once again, but the workers would continue to serve.

Pastor Chichia González served as one of the announcers for this program. He said that Pastor Zimdars and Winters provided the recording and transmission equipment, while he and two other Mexican pastors would take turns announcing. Each program would begin with introduction music, be it a hymn such as "A Mighty Fortress" or a piece performed by the DMLC choir. The following excerpt further describes *Mensaje de Salvación*:

"Another part of the program were the announcements which encouraged the radio listeners to write in. The announcers also gave information about the schedules and places of the worship services of the IELC. The main part of the program was the sermon, of course, always based on the truths of the Word of God as found in the Holy Scriptures."<sup>26</sup>

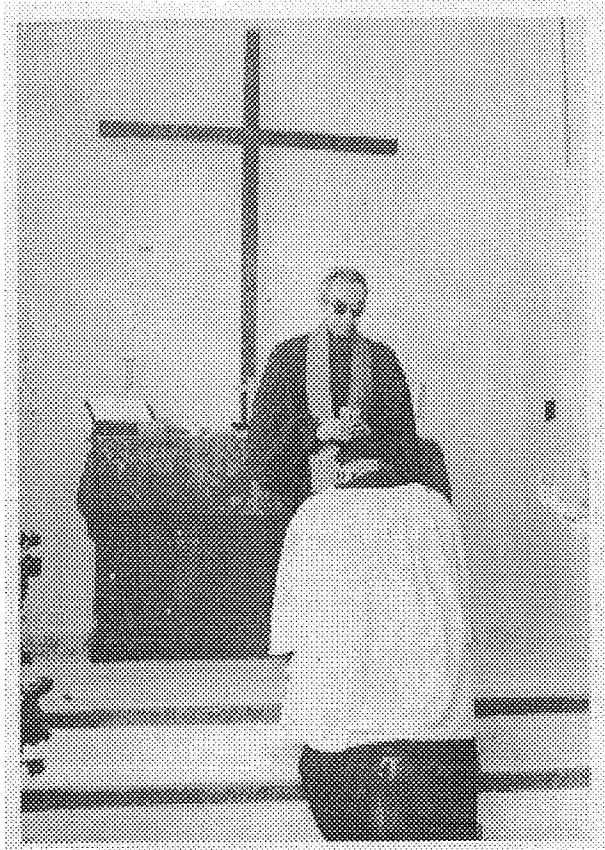
Pastor Orea Luna's prayer was answered concerning a new worker to support and direct the work of the Seminary. Pastor Rupert Eggert was installed in El Paso, TX, on July 4, 1971, not only to head up the Mexican seminary, but also to serve as liaison between the WELS and the missions in Mexico. Pastor Orea Luna was relieved of the responsibility of being Director of the Seminary, while continued to teach seminary classes in Mexico City at Cristo Resucitado.

"Orea Luna's evangelism program in Mexico City was quite simple and logical: to reach people through family, friends, work, and school. In addition, he strove to spread the gospel

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<sup>25</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 8, pp. 4, 7.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



111 Reverendo David Orea Luna administra la comunión al ordenado.

*“Reverend David Orea Luna administers communion to the one ordained.”*



*Pastor David Orea Luna*



El Pastor David Orea Luna impartiendo la clase a tres estudiantes, como parte de nuestro programa de Estudios Teológicos en la ciudad de México. Los estudiantes son: Daniel Pérez Rodríguez, Josué Lorenzo Pérez y Vicente Guillén Aguilar.

PAGINA DOCE

*“Pastor David Orea Luna teaching class to three students, as part of our program of theological studies in Mexico City. The students are: Daniel Pérez Rodríguez, Josué Lorenzo Pérez, and Vicente Guillén Aguilar.”*



through *El Amanecer*, as well as through sermons he wrote for the radio programs.”<sup>27</sup> Orea Luna was indeed known as a scholar and theologian, and he had qualities which many young pastors aspire to develop and to put into practice. “For so long it was considered that Orea Luna was a great gatherer of souls, when in reality he had those souls follow him...Orea Luna’s true abilities were in finding pastors in other churches and improving their doctrines, in an attempt to make them confessional Lutherans.”<sup>28</sup> His family and the Chichia family soon became *the* congregation. This may sound strange, that Orea Luna’s congregation soon consisted only of the two families. Conjectures have been made: either evangelism efforts were just not meeting success, or evangelism was not being done properly.

Through preaching of the Word, and with thorough instruction in the truths of Scripture, evangelists lead prospects into membership of the visible as well as the invisible church. Orea Luna, being the confessional theologian and teacher that he was, should have been able to provide the Bible information courses to instruct the prospects of the of Cristo Resucitado. Why his success in this area of his pastorate was so limited, this author cannot write definitively.

However a pastor who has struggled so much with and for confessionalism, may become cautious to the point of being intolerant and unsympathetic toward some people. These people may have doubts and confusions concerning what the Bible says and means about basic doctrines of law and gospel, of justification and sanctification. Sadly some pastors like this may no longer see the need to spend the time and effort on such lost and non-confessional people.

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<sup>27</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

<sup>28</sup>Flunker, interview, Apr. 29, 2002.

A case may be made (and has been made) for the presence of such attitudes among those who have served at Cristo Resucitado in its earlier years.

These were the first years of Cristo Resucitado, but they were also the last years of its pastor's time of grace. On March 7, 1972, David Orea Luna suffered a heart attack and was called home to his Lord. Indeed, if it were not for this "leader, writer, pastor, and teacher,"<sup>29</sup> confessional Lutheranism would most likely not have entered Mexico so soon. We can give thanks to our Lord for this man, Dr. David Orea Luna, who struggled to preserve the purity of God's Word among his Mexican compatriots. His influence and direction has been and will be remembered with thanksgiving to our Lord. "Through him the doors have been opened for our mission work in Mexico."<sup>30</sup>

#### *Transition years for Orea Luna's successors, 1972-1975*

When Orea Luna was called home to heaven, two main positions needed to be filled. Felipe Luna García, who had just been ordained on February 3, 1972, returned to Mexico City from Ciudad Juárez to fill the vacancy his uncle had left. He was installed on March 12, 1972, as pastor of Cristo Resucitado.<sup>31</sup>

Besides the pastorate of Cristo Resucitado, Orea Luna left the presidency of the IELC to be filled. Within two days of his death, Pastor David Chichia Gonzáles was elected to assume this position. He would hold the presidency of the IELC until 1985.

Pastor Luna García wrote a fine article in *El Amanecer*, volume 35/36, which is entitled

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<sup>29</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 25/26, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 28, p. 7.

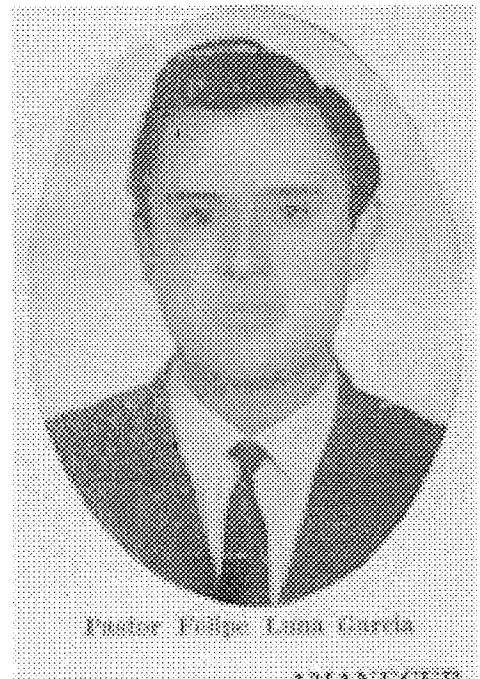
<sup>31</sup>El Amanecer, Vol. 27, p. 15.



*“Pastor Rupert Eggert speaks with Mexican pastors and students. From left to right: Pastor Rupert Eggert, Pastor Felipe Luna García, Pastor David Chichia González; estudiante Lorenzo Pérez y el Dr. David Orea Luna.”*



*Pastor Carlos Avendaño Castro*



*Pastor Felipe Luna García*

“Evangelism.” In this article he discusses the theology of evangelism, reasons for evangelism, obstacles within the church and outside of the church, qualities of an evangelist, and methods of evangelism. Whether or not Pastor Luna García followed his own advice and faithfully put into practice what he wrote, is not known to this author. What is reported is that from 1972 to 1975, Pastor Luna García seemed to be slowly drifting from a solid confessional Lutheran stance toward ecumenism.<sup>32</sup>

By 1975 Pastor Luna García “was suspended because of neglect of duty and unchristian conduct, which had caused a loss of members in the congregation.”<sup>33</sup> Pastor Chichia González was then transferred to Mexico City’s congregation from Guadalajara, where he had served since 1967.

*Cristo Resucitado led by Pastor Chichia González*

When Pastor Chichia began serving at Cristo Resucitado in 1975, one of the issues on his agenda seems to have been improving Sunday worship attendance. “Not everyone was able to come on Sunday mornings, so later I began having services in the afternoon as well. In order to reach more groups of people, we scheduled worship on Sundays at 10:00 a.m. and also at 6:30 p.m.”<sup>34</sup> He was told by some that holding two different services, one for the morning crew and the other for the afternoon bunch, would become a divisive factor in the congregation. He did not see it this way, and from 1976 until 1984, Pastor Chichia maintained this double-service Sunday schedule.

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<sup>32</sup>Flunker, interview, Apr. 29, 2002.

<sup>33</sup>Dose, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup>Chichia, interview, Feb. 24, 2002.

During these years also, from 1976 to 1983, each Sunday Pastor Chichia made the 90 mile trek, by bus or by car, from Cristo Resucitado to the Puebla congregation, Cristo Glorificado. The Sunday morning schedule was changed, so that his first service at Cristo Resucitado started at 7:30 a.m. Following the service he would make the trip to Puebla, about a 2 hour drive, and conduct their service at 11:00 a.m. Then he would turn around and come back to Mexico City for the second service at 6:30 p.m.

Besides preaching on Sundays, he conducted one Bible class each week. Unfortunately his did not focus much on recruiting a church council. He kept no records of offerings, but instead collected the money and acted as the church secretary as well by depositing it in the church's bank account. Presently there are no records of any baptisms or confirmations during his pastorate. "I know they happened, because some of them are still members at Cristo Resucitado. They've told me so. It's just he didn't keep any records."<sup>35</sup> This is most unfortunate and somewhat frustrating, especially for an aspiring church historian who desires to gather specific details on the congregation's work during this time period from 1975 until our recent three-man mission team entered Mexico City in 1999.

As president of the IELC from 1972 to 1985, Pastor Chichia was able to establish contacts with two pastors who had been affiliated with the LCMS. Pastor Chichia found out that Pastor Felix Segovia, founder and pastor of the church in Santa Cruz, Monterrey, was looking to leave the LCMS for a more confessional group of Lutherans. The same was true of a Pastor Ibarra from El Redentor, Torreón. Pastor Chichia was able to make connections with

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<sup>35</sup>Flunker, interview, May 14, 2002.

these congregations' pastors, and by God's grace they were led to join the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico (IELC). Santa Cruz joined the synod in 1984, and El Redentor, Torreón, joined in 1990.

In 1985 the WELS had a three-man missionary team operating out of El Paso, TX. This allowed the WELS to rotate them in and out of Mexico to conduct seminary classes, congregational seminars and Bible classes, to basically "get the ball rolling again." Larry Schlomer and Paul Hartman took turns making trips to Mexico City to every six weeks. They noted that Pastor Chichia was not providing records of any sort. "From 1986 to 1989, the missionaries continued to try to encourage the national pastor to be faithful in his pastoral service. However after so many suspicions were confirmed concerning Pastor Chichia's laxity toward his pastoral duties, the synod decided to cut his subsidy in 1989.

One of the suspicions was that Pastor Chichia was dedicating a generous amount of time to other side jobs, such as carpentry and plumbing work. This work was meant to supplement the subsidy that Pastor Chichia was receiving, since the subsidy was not enough to support him and his family. On one side of the story his subsidy was justly cut because it was found out that he just was not doing the work. On the other side of the coin, he has claimed that the WELS cut his subsidy, not because he was unfaithful, but because he could not produce the results expected of him.<sup>36</sup> The objective truth of the matter has not been disclosed to this author.

In any case the work of pastoring Cristo Resucitado was in need of a boost. From 1989 to 1999 the Mexico City congregation was at best receiving "maintenance ministry."<sup>37</sup> Pastor

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<sup>36</sup>Flunker, interview, May 14, 2002.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

Chichia continued to conduct services during this time, still with one bible class a week. The missionaries, who had previously made check-up trips to Cristo Resucitado, no longer were available. Missionary Larry Schlomer was not involved in the Mexican mission from 1990-93, when he went to Nigeria to teach seminary classes and assist in evangelism.

“From 1992 until 1998, Cristo Resucitado was really no longer a priority mission of the WELS. One reason was that Cristo Resucitado rarely sent offerings to support the IELC. Very few updates or progress reports were given at conventions on the congregation’s behalf. Pastor Chichia did not share much information, and at times lost contact with the IELC for longer periods of time.”<sup>38</sup>

### *Missionaries sent to jump-start Cristo Resucitado*

In 1998 the IELC decided to have missionaries Larry Schlomer, who was living in Monterrey, and Steven Wagenknecht, serving in Torreón, to go to Mexico City. Steve accepted the call to work with the congregation, assisting Pastor Chichia in the duties that had for so long been neglected. It was also decided that Larry Schlomer would be teaching in the seminary, which was to be moved from Monterrey to Mexico City, on the premises of Cristo Resucitado.

In that same year the Latin American Missions Committee decided to call a third man from the graduating class of 1999 at Mequon, to help jump-start the evangelism program at Cristo Resucitado. “Two donors had given a total of \$250,000 so that a sem grad could be called. Michael Hartman was assigned to the team upon graduation and was commissioned in July, 1999.”<sup>39</sup> A new tool was also to be implemented in the efforts for outreach: EFL (English as Foreign Language).

In April of 1999, Missionary Wagenknecht received a divine call to serve in Cuba, and

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<sup>38</sup>Flunker, interview, May 14, 2002.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., May 10, 2002.

he accepted. Consequently a call was immediately issued to Pastor Tim Flunker, serving at Flower Mound, TX. On September 30, 1999, Missionary Flunker arrived Mexico City with his wife, Terri, and his three children.

*EFL: key tool of evangelism for Cristo Resucitado*

Cristo Resucitado had a new goal by the end of 1999, and that was to jumpstart their outreach program through the use of EFL classes. In our modern society English is the language of business. The mission team has taken advantage of the ever-growing popularity to learn English there in Mexico City. By means of this program, the church has offered its services free of charge and has expressed the desire to help the community in a unique manner.

Mission workers collaborated with WELS Kingdom Workers who volunteered to teach English classes. Every two to three months, church workers and members handed out around 2,000 flyers a few days before the inscriptions. They also hung up posters around the *colonia* to advertise the classes. At inscriptions, which were held at the church itself, teachers, pastors, or the vicar would record the student's name, address, phone number, age, etc. This way they were able to have on record his/her data for future evangelism visits. The vicar assisted in giving oral and written examinations to the students, and it was really an excellent way to get to know the students, albeit a superficial meeting. The important thing, which was always stressed, was to view these English classes as a means, not as an end.

With all these names on the prospect list (when the vicar arrived, over 400 names were on the list), mission workers worked to visit the students in pairs: the student's English teacher along with one of the pastors or the vicar. The teacher would introduce the pastor or vicar to



the student. Then she would continue to make 'small talk'<sup>40</sup> and ask questions about the class, what the student likes or dislikes about the classes (no one ever disliked the classes!), and if they had any questions about the church. The pastor or vicar would then explain about service times etc., and Cristo Resucitado's desire to reach out to the community with the good news of Jesus our Savior. The first goal was to establish whether or not the student was a communicant member of another church. If so, his or her name was taken off the prospect list. If they were not churched, the mission workers continued to visit them until there was commitment to come to a Bible class, or better yet to come to worship on Sunday morning.

A side note to consider is a mistake the missionaries realized they were making earlier. That was to try to visit as many people on the list as possible, to make contact with all the students at least once, and as soon as possible. They realized that a better strategy was to assign five to ten names to each mission team member, and to have each member focus on visiting their prospects at least once every other week. This is a better method, since it does not allow the prospect to become 'too cold' after a visit. If a prospect expressed his desire to only come to English classes and was not interested in going to church, he was removed from the prospect list, and another prospect was added to the mission team member's list. The main problem with this system was that if a mission team member were out of town or could not do visits for a number of days, someone's prospects would be neglected.

Our EFL program was and still is a great blessing from God, that he would make English such a 'hot commodity, the language of the most christianized country in the world.

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<sup>40</sup>'Small talk' is not meant here in a derogatory way, since it often times dealt with personal and family issues, if there was already that level of acquaintance.

He has opened the doors for our mission workers once again through this growing demand to learn English. May we respond with wisdom and enthusiasm, using this tool for the spread of God's message of salvation.

*Missionaries learn to 'adapt and overcome'*

Tim Flunker's call was "primarily to shepherd the congregation and to help develop the congregation to be self-propagating."<sup>41</sup> Missionary Michael Hartman was to focus on outreach, but illnesses and "an unexpected change in philosophy in December of 1999, moved Michael primarily to the position of teaching in the seminary."<sup>42</sup> At the time he would have students, one of which was Mario Domínguez from Ciudad Juárez, who was also serving as the pastor of the church there. The other was Emmanuel Fernández, originally from Monterrey, but he would live in Mexico City where he would receive instruction.

Before Pastor Flunker and his family arrived in September of 1999, God provided another man on the field to assist with the many and varied challenges the mission team faced. By God's grace another seminary graduate, Pastor Andrew Schroer, was called to serve in Mexico City on a temporary basis. He and his wife, Clariza, had to remain in the country and wait for her visa, before they could move to Pastor Schroer's permanent call in Miami, FL. This work was a blessing for both pastors, as well as for the Cristo Resucitado.

"At the time we arrived, about nine were worshipping weekly, and seven of these were expats. The property had had little work done to it for several years (about 15 actually<sup>43</sup>), and the

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<sup>41</sup>Flunker, interview, May 10, 2002.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

congregation was spiritually weak and unguided.” Pastor Flunker decided to implement more Bible classes on Sunday and during the week. After about nine months the congregation started to come together. They had VBS that summer of 2000, and celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of Cristo Resucitado. At this time the congregation, members along with prospects, joined into work on the physical appearance of the building. Many hours were spent cleaning and painting, inside and out. Altogether the effort took 18 months, and the results were definitely noticeable — not only of the church itself, but also among its members and pastors.

*Current status of Cristo Resucitado — May, 2002*

Pastor Flunker recently received notice from the Board for World Missions that his call will be concluded by July of 2003, due to lack of funding for his position. Missionary Michael Hartman will be assuming the duties of head pastor of Cristo Resucitado in the course of the next year.

Pastor David Chichia González continues to assist with the ministry at Cristo Resucitado, preaching once a month, filling in to teach Bible classes when needed. Pastor Chichia’s own pastoral skills have improved, but he has admitted that it is not an easy thing to adapt to doing things differently, especially after such a long time. We keep him and our other Mexican national pastors in our prayers, that they may learn to use whatever gifts they have to better serve our Lord’s kingdom of believers here on earth.

“Home visits were the forte at the beginning, but our own emphasis has switched a little

to meeting their needs while they are at church, that is, in English classes or Bible classes.”<sup>44</sup> For the year 2001 Cristo Resucitado averaged over 50 people a week in Bible classes, 20 on Sunday mornings and 30 during the week.

Whether at the prospect’s home or at church, a clear presentation of law and gospel has often drawn confessions of faith from the people with whom Pastor Flunker has met and shared *God’s Great Exchange*. “Over the last three years I calculate that I have given over 3,000 *GGE*’s. I have the firm belief that many of those people will be in heaven, due to the confession of faith they responded with.”<sup>45</sup>

An obvious challenge to the mission work of Cristo Resucitado has been and still is the influence of Catholicism. Pastor Flunker attributes slow growth in part to the cultural expectations and pressures of Catholicism’s Mexican families:

“Why they aren’t becoming members of the visible church is still a big quandary to some, but for me I see the age-old desire of the Latino not to offend his family — so he will come to church, come to Bible study regularly, but not become a member. Those people, due to the power of the Word of God will be in heaven, I believe. Therefore we have had much *éxito* (“success”) Godly speaking, even if our own numbers don’t grow humanly speaking.”<sup>46</sup>

Over the last two years at Cristo Resucitado there have been 15 confirmations, about ten baptisms, mostly children; and the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the dedication of the temple on July 12, 2000. The vicar played his saxophone for this service.

God’s work has been and is being done in Mexico City at Cristo Resucitado. The message of salvation continues to be preached and taught, studied and heard by the workers, members, and prospects of this first mission congregation of the WELS in Mexico. In spite of

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<sup>44</sup>Flunker, interview, May 10, 2002.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

the frail human servants who have worked on behalf of Cristo Resucitado, the good news has reached the ears and hearts of lost sinners. Through Cristo Resucitado souls will continue to be nourished and brought into eternal glory with our Lord Jesus Christ, because he is our *Risen Christ*. To him alone be thanks and glory.



Presbiterio del templo Cristo Resucitado de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Confesional consagrada el día 12 de julio de 1970 en Monrovia 522, Colonia Portales.

*“Nave of the temple, Cristo Resucitado, of the IELC, dedicated on July 12, 1970, at 522 Monrovia, in the colonia of Portales.”*

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## Appendix I

# Timeline of people and events related to the history of Cristo Resucitado

| DATE    | EVENT   |
|---------|---|
| 1939    | * David Orea Luna graduates from Nazarene seminary  |
| 1940    | * returns to serve as professor at seminary   |
| 1941    | * sent by Nazare seminary to confront meddling LCMS Pastor Cesar Lazos<br>* begins Bible classes in Lutheran school in San Juan, TX<br>* confirmed in the Lutheran church                                   |
| 1943    | * begins studies at Lutheran seminary, Capital University, Columbus, OH   |
| 1947    | * (Jun 15) graduates and is ordained as ALC pastor<br>* (Oct 12) conducts first religious service as Lutheran pastor  |
| 1949    | * publishes first issue of <i>Amanecer</i>  |
| 1951    | * (Oct 12) first service in nationalized church <i>Gracia</i>   |
| 1957    | * ILM (Mexican Lutheran Church) is founded in conjunction with LCMS and ALC<br>* Augsburg Seminary ( <i>Centro Augsburg</i> ) is founded in Mexico City<br>* David Chichia González enters seminary         |
| 1957-67 | * Orea Luna is troubled by growing heterodoxy within ILM, LCMS, and ALC   |
| 1960    | * begins to seek out other confessional Lutherans<br>* Chichia González leaves seminary, continues working with Orea Luna   |
| 1964    | * makes contact with WELS President Oscar J. Naumann and Edgar Hoenecke   |
| 1967    | * (Jul 17) meets with ILM committee to condemn heterodoxy of ALM, to withdraw on Dec 6, all members agree and sign<br>* (Dec 6) Orea Luna and Chichia González declare break in fellowship with ALC and ILM |
| 1968    | * (Mar) personal meeting with Hoenecke and Winter in Mexico City to seek colloquy<br>* (May) Oreal Luna and Chichia González are received into fellowship with WELS   |
| 1969    | * WELS begins work to build and nationalize a church a Mexico City  |



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|-----------|--|
| 1970      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* (Jul 12) Cristo Resucitado is dedicated</li> <li>* (Aug) <i>Mensaje de Salvación</i> radio program airs in Mexico City</li> <li>* (Nov) Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico (IELC) is founded</li> </ul>   |
| 1971      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* (Jul 4) Rupert Eggert installed in El Paso, to serve as Director of IELC Seminary and liaison to Mexico</li> </ul>  |
| 1972      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* (Feb) Felipe García Luna is ordained</li> <li>* (Mar 7) Orea Luna passes away</li> <li>* (Mar 9) Chichia is elected IELC president</li> <li>* (Mar 12) García Luna installed at Cristo Resucitado</li> </ul>  |
| 1975      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* García Luna is suspended from IELC</li> <li>* Chichia González transfers to Cristo Resucitado</li> </ul>  |
| 1976-85   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Chichia serves as president, makes contact with other non-IELC Lutheran pastors in Monterrey and Torreón</li> <li>* Cristo Resucitado's membership reduces to members of Chichia and Orea families</li> <li>* evangelism seems to be neglected</li> </ul>   |
| 1984      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* congregation Santa Cruz, Monterrey, joins fellowship with IELC</li> </ul>   |
| 1985      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* three-man mission team operates in Mexico from El Paso, visits made to Cristo Resucitado to encourage pastor and members</li> </ul>   |
| 1989      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* WELS cuts Chichia's subsidy</li> </ul>  |
| 1990      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* congregation El Redentor, Torreón, joins fellowship with IELC</li> </ul>  |
| 1992-1998 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Cristo Resucitado 'lies dormant,' little contact made with IELC or WELS</li> </ul>  |
| 1993      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Mexican government legalizes residency for foreign missionaries</li> </ul>  |
| 1995      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* IELC adopts five-year plan take steps toward the mission's self-propagation, self-discipline, self-support, and self-administration</li> </ul>  |
| 1998      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* IELC plans to send Larry Schlomer and Steven Wagenknecht to Mexico City</li> </ul>  |
| 1999      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* (Apr) Wagenknecht accepts call to Cuba, Tim Flunker accepts call to Mexico City</li> <li>* (Jul) Schlomers moves to Mexico City from Monterrey, Andrew Schroer begins temporary call to serve in Mexico City</li> <li>* (Aug) 1999 WLS graduate Michael Hartman moves to Mexico City</li> <li>* (Nov) EFL teachers move to Mexico City</li> </ul> |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 2000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* EFL proves effective tool to gather prospect names</li> <li>* (Jan-Feb) EFL volunteer Dale Laine assists Rachel Buschkopf and Rachel Moldenhauer, also visiting prospects</li> <li>* (Mar) Schroers leave for Miami, FL</li> <li>* (Jun-Aug) Flunker is absent due to sickness in the family, evangelism and Sunday worship carried on by other mission workers</li> <li>* (Jun) first Mexico City vicar begins language study</li> <li>* (Jul 12) 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dedication service</li> </ul> |
| 2001 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* (Jan-Feb) Mr. Laine assists 'the Rachels' in EFL, visiting prospects</li> <li>* EFL classes grow, Bible classes and church attendance grow</li> <li>* (Jun) Christine Hagedorn replaces Rachel Buschkopf as EFL teacher</li> <li>* (Sep) Hartman and Moldenhauer become the Hartmans, Schlomers move to Puebla to start new EFL center</li> <li>* EFL classes are reduced</li> </ul>   |
| 2002 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Chichia continues to serve Cristo Resucitado on a part-time basis</li> <li>* WELS decides to cut Tim Flunker's position, due to funding difficulties</li> <li>* (Apr) plans made for Michael Hartman to replace Tim Flunker's position</li> <li>* (May) Tim Flunker reports 15 confirmations, 10 baptisms over past two years, and countless other blessings at Cristo Resucitado</li> </ul>   |