

Forward In Christ— The Advance of the Gospel in the WELS 1850–2000

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John Philip (better known as J.P.) Koehler served as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for 29 years (1900-29), nine of those years (1920-29) as the seminary's president. He was an influential spokesman in the Wisconsin Synod for many years. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler wrote, "Not all groups or organizations have the same tasks. There are organizations, like peoples, that remain small in number and in that have a token of their mission to do intensive rather than extensive work, by which the world may even profit more." He goes on to say, "The Wisconsin Synod had a college that was off to a good start....To maintain and develop that was mission enough for a while."

Koehler was by no means an enemy of mission work. Though he wasn't pleased with the haphazard way in which the synod began its mission among the Apaches in 1893, he supported the work there, even spending five months with our early missionaries in Apacheland. Some years later Koehler strongly encouraged the synod to begin mission work among the displaced Germans in Poland. Yet, though Koehler was not opposed to the Wisconsin Synod's involvement in mission work (which Christian can oppose expansion of the gospel?), in the above words he did set up sort of an either-or situation. Either a church body is going to be *internally* strong—holding fast to sound doctrine and spending its time, energy, manpower, and money on that which helps to maintain sound doctrine, e.g., schools and education; or a church body is going to be *externally* strong, known for and committed to using its resources for the expansion of the gospel to those who do not yet know it.

It is my intention in this paper on the advance of the gospel in the WELS 1850-2000 to demonstrate from a brief overview of the history of our synod that it is not a matter of either-or but of both-and. A solid, doctrinally sound church body has every reason to be involved in active and intense mission activity. If we have the truth, it is only natural that we will want to give it to others. On the other hand, a mission-minded church has every reason to be a doctrinally solid church; for what good is it to be reaching out to others if you have nothing of lasting value to give them? The two go hand-in-hand: depth of doctrine and depth of mission zeal. The former, in fact, fuels the latter, as St. Paul says, "We believe and therefore speak" (2 Corinthians 4:13).

In the 54th chapter of Isaiah, the Lord encourages both nurture and outreach. He exhorts his people Israel, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes" (Isaiah 54:2). This is a prophecy of the world-wide growth of the Church, which is pictured as a tent. "Enlarge the place of your tent," the Lord exhorts. "Lengthen your cords." He encourages his Church to make room for the heathen, always to be expanding.

As the tent becomes larger, however, it must be properly anchored down. The Lord therefore urges his Church, "Strengthen your stakes." The stakes of the Church are strengthened as it roots itself more and more deeply into the Word.

Both of these activities rightly will be going on at the same time. The Church will always be seeking to lengthen its cords, to stretch out into the unbelieving world with the gospel and by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring many others under the protection of its tent cover. At the same

time the Church will always be seeking to strengthen its stakes, to dig deeper and deeper into the Word so that the contrary winds and storms that try to topple it, such enemies as heresy and persecution, will fail in their attempts.

Since strengthening the stakes and lengthening the cords are inseparably intertwined, we will follow this approach as we trace the advance of the gospel in the WELS 1850-2000: We will look at some of the key events and circumstances the Lord used to strengthen our stakes, and then we will look at ways by which the Lord lengthened our cords over the years. We will begin by looking at the first 50 years, then at the second 50 under the heading "A New Millennium," and finally the most recent years, 1950-2000, under the heading "Approaching the Next Millennium." We will conclude the paper with a list of "Challenges for the WELS in 2000 A.D. and Beyond."

I. The First Fifty Years (1850-1900)

Strengthening the Stakes

Forging an Identity

In December 1849 three Lutheran pastors met together in Milwaukee at Grace Church with the intent of forming a new church body. These three men were all serving congregations in the Milwaukee area: John Muehlhaeuser at Grace in downtown Milwaukee, John Weinmann from Oakwood, south of Milwaukee, and William Wrede from Salem, Granville, northwest of Milwaukee. The following year, May 26, 1850, these three pastors, joined by a fourth, Kaspar Pluess of Slinger, WI, assembled at Salem, Granville. There a constitution was adopted and the Wisconsin Synod was officially organized. John Muehlhaeuser was elected as the first president of the Wisconsin Synod.

Who were these men? What was their background? What kind of church had they organized? For one thing, they were *Germans*, and it was a German church they were organizing. The minutes of the constituting convention in Granville state “that the synod to be formed should have and maintain the name, ‘The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin’ and *should be perpetuated for all time under that name and designation.*” This determination would have a definite effect upon the future of this small church body, which at its inception included just nine preaching stations and a handful of pastors. From its outset it was a church body *of Germans and for Germans*.

Secondly, the founders of our church were *Lutherans*, but Lutherans of a particular sort. Just as today one can divide Lutherans into two groups, conservatives and liberals, with various gradations within both groups, so 150 years ago Lutherans in the United States could be labeled “New,” or “American,” Lutherans and “Old” Lutherans. The roots of this division take us back to Europe and 1817. On the 300th anniversary of the Reformation the Prussian ruler Frederick William III, in an attempt to unite the German people, mandated a union between the Lutheran and Reformed denominations. The union permitted each denomination to retain its distinctive teachings, e.g., the Lutherans could continue to teach the Real Presence of Jesus’ body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, but Lutheran pastors would also have to minister to people of Reformed persuasion according to the dictates of their Reformed theology and vice versa.

Many Lutherans rebelled against such a compromise, one which Luther had totally rejected when at the colloquy in Marburg, Germany, he had refused to give the right hand of fellowship to Reformed leader, Ulrich Zwingli. “You have a different spirit than we,” Luther had told Zwingli, a reference to Zwingli’s rationalistic spirit that refused to accept the Bible’s teachings about the Lord’s Supper.

Lutheran pastors who refused to follow the dictates of the so-called Prussian Union faced persecution, which led many of them, along with lay people, to emigrate to the United States where there would be freedom to worship according to the dictates of one’s conscience. These were the so-called “Old” Lutherans. “Old” Lutherans founded such church bodies as the Missouri and Buffalo Synods, both of which had congregations in Wisconsin already in the mid-1800s.

The origin of the Wisconsin Synod was quite different. The founding pastors were all products of the German mission societies. In fact, of the 90 pastors who served in the Wisconsin Synod during its first two decades, almost one-half of them were sent over to North America by one of the mission societies, including three of its first four presidents, John Muehlhaeuser, John Bading, and Gottlieb Reim. Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede, the founding pastors of the

Wisconsin Synod, all received their training from the same mission society, the Langenberg Society. Muehlhaeuser, in fact, a baker by trade, was Langenberg's first trainee.

The two synods which in 1892 joined in a federation with the Wisconsin Synod, the Michigan and Minnesota Synods (both founded in 1860), also owed their existence to mission societies. The first president of the Michigan Synod, Friedrich Schmid, had been sent to America in 1833 by the Basel Mission Society. He was the first Lutheran pastor in Michigan and founded Michigan's oldest Lutheran congregation, in Scio (Ann Arbor). Six pastors from the Basel and St. Chrischona Mission Societies formed the Minnesota Synod. Its first president was Pastor J. C. ("Father") Heyer, about whom we will have more to say later.

For most of the first twenty years of our existence as a church body financial support and pastors came from these and other mission societies. What were these mission societies? Formed in reaction to a growing rationalistic spirit in the state church, the societies had the simple—and laudable—purpose of spreading the gospel. They trained and sent out workers to such places as Africa and India, where the gospel had not yet been heard. With colonization of North America, they also turned their attention to evangelizing the North American Indian tribes. As a growing number of Germans emigrated to America, the mission societies also began to prepare workers to serve these German emigrants.

This was the positive side of the mission societies: their zeal for mission work. The negative side was their relative unconcern for the niceties of doctrine. They did not struggle with or protest against the Prussian Union of 1817. The Basel Mission Society, for example, said of itself, "Our purpose is that in days when men seek to weaken the foundations of Christianity, the Christians of all churches must be kept together." Consequently, the mission societies supported both Lutheran and Reformed missions and trained men to work in either of the two.

It was out of this kind of background that the early pastors in the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota Synods came. They were "New" Lutherans. They wanted to be Lutheran, but at the same time they were not unwilling to hold hands with the Reformed. Interestingly, in the first constitution of the Wisconsin Synod all members had to pledge themselves to teach in harmony with the pure Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. But sometime later someone (Muehlhaeuser?) amended the original constitution in his own hand, crossing out all references to the Lutheran Confessions and replacing them with such phrases as "pure Bible Christianity" and "pure Bible Word." It is no wonder that the "Old" Lutheran Missouri Synod looked askance at the "New" Lutheran Wisconsin Synod. Such was the case for almost the first twenty years of our existence.

At first we looked to the East for fellowship ties, because Lutherans in the East, the Pennsylvania Ministerium being the predominant body, were more along the "New" Lutheran lines. But gradually, by the grace of God, through such strongly confessional leaders as John Bading, Gottlieb Reim, Philip Koehler, and especially Adolph Hoenecke, the Wisconsin Synod moved in a more confessional direction. It had joined the General Council in 1866, an association of Lutheran synods with which the Missouri Synod had refused to fellowship; but after a short time it left the Council. It withdrew because the Council refused to take a stand on what were called the "Four Points": 1) altar fellowship (close vs. open communion); 2) pulpit fellowship (Who can preach in a Lutheran pulpit?); 3) Millennialism (Will Jesus come back and rule for a literal 1000 years?); and 4) lodge membership (Can lodge members be communicant members of a Lutheran church?).

The 1867 convention of the Wisconsin Synod was a pivotal one. In that convention the synod took a stronger stand than previously against "unionism," that is, joint worship and work with those with whom we do not share a common faith. As a result the German mission societies a year later cut off all support to the Wisconsin Synod, both money and manpower.

Severing ties with the mission societies was a brave move on the part of the Wisconsin Synod, for it had been very dependent on these societies—for money and for workers.

Having extricated itself from its “New” Lutheran associations, the Wisconsin Synod turned now to the “Old” Lutheran Missouri Synod. Subsequent discussions between the two synods led Missouri Synod President C. F. W. Walther to report, “All our reservations about...Wisconsin...have been put to shame.” The result was that, in 1868, there was now fellowship between Missouri and Wisconsin. In 1872, these two synods, together with the Norwegian, Ohio, Illinois, and Minnesota Synods, joined together to form the Lutheran Synodical Conference. It was a union that would last for almost 90 years, until 1961.

It took some time for the Lord of the Church to move our synod into a more confessional stance, but through the at times painful process of stake strengthening as it was being transformed from “New” Lutheran to “Old” Lutheran, it had come to learn the value of the sound, solid doctrine confessed and taught by their Lutheran forefathers and succinctly summarized in the Lutheran Confessions. Now the synod could speak a clear message both to its own people and to the unchurched around it. The Lord was preparing it for its mission.

“How Can They Hear without Someone Preaching to Them?”

If the Wisconsin Synod for confessional reasons would no longer be receiving its pastors either from the German mission societies or from the “New” Lutheran seminaries in the eastern United States, from where then would they come? The solution would be to inaugurate its own ministerial education program. This, too, was a part of strengthening the stakes in the early days of the Wisconsin Synod.

Edward Fredrich, in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, writes about the growing need for the Wisconsin Synod to develop its own worker training program, both as it moved into a more confessional Lutheran stance and as the number of parishes serving German immigrants continued to increase: “Make-do efforts to find a supply of pastors was simply not meeting the needs. Men came to the synod trained by the mission societies—Langenberg and Berlin and Basel and Hermannsburg—but these mission societies had to fill many other requests for their graduates” (p. 15). Besides, as mentioned above, the Wisconsin Synod had gradually come to realize that not all of the men who came out of these mission societies were doctrinally strong. The synod had received some graduates from Lutheran seminaries in the United States, such as Gettysburg in the East, but they were few in number and, again, not altogether reliable in their doctrine.

Fredrich goes on: “Apprentice-type training in the existing parsonages was attempted, but already busy pastors could scarcely find time for the extra tasks. Resorting to fly-by-night, would-be pastors in time of desperate need too often proved to be the cure that was worse than the original bite” (p. 15).

It was this pressing need for pastors that led the Wisconsin Synod in 1863, only thirteen years after its founding and while it was still moving toward a firmer confessional Lutheran foundation, to begin its own seminary. The school was opened in the fall of 1863 in Watertown, Wisconsin. It had one professor, Edward Moldehnke, and one student, who, as it turned out, was asked to leave during the school year. But he was replaced by another student; so the first year of the seminary ended with one student in enrollment. In the 1864-65 school year, Fredrich reports, there were 14 students.

The story of the Wisconsin Synod is really the story of three synods—Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota—which in 1892 joined in a federation. In 1884 the Minnesota Synod had opened its own seminary and the Michigan Synod followed suit in 1885. We are getting a little ahead of

ourselves here, but for the sake of filling out the story, with the beginning of the federation in 1892, the Minnesota Synod's seminary in New Ulm became the teacher training college of the federated Wisconsin-Minnesota-Michigan synods. The Michigan seminary, which in 1887 moved to Saginaw, was designated as a prep school for the federated synod. It took some time, however, for the Michigan pastors and congregations to agree to this designation. They liked having their own seminary. It was not until 1910, therefore, that the Michigan seminary became Michigan Lutheran Seminary prep school.

Before we move on, we might briefly complete the account of our synod's worker training schools. The seminary remained in Watertown from 1863-70. From 1870-78, following declaration of fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod trained its future pastors at Missouri's Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Then the seminary moved to a few locations in Milwaukee and from there, in 1893, to Wauwatosa, a suburb of Milwaukee. In 1929 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary moved to a beautiful 80-acre site in Mequon, about 15 miles north of Milwaukee. It has been there to this day.

Not only has the Wisconsin Synod operated its own seminary to help strengthen the stakes of its future pastors. Very early on, 1865, it also started its own college, Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, which continued in existence as our pre-seminary college for 130 years until in 1995 it was amalgamated with our teacher training Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm. The two schools became Martin Luther College.

The WELS, it might also be mentioned, is a rarity today among church bodies, Lutheran and otherwise, in that it has retained high school preparatory schools for training those desiring to eventually become pastors and teachers. We have already mentioned Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan. Both Dr. Martin Luther College and Northwestern College operated preparatory school tracks on their campuses also. Jumping ahead a bit, in 1929 a fourth preparatory school was opened, Northwestern Lutheran Academy, in Mobridge, South Dakota.

That was the end of the expansion of our worker training school system, with the exception of the brief existence of Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' College (1960-70), which was opened in a time of great shortage of teachers. Since then consolidation, rather than expansion, has been the rule. In 1979 Martin Luther Academy, in New Ulm, and Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, merged to form Martin Luther Preparatory School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Then, in 1995, when Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College were amalgamated in New Ulm, Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, and Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie du Chien, merged on the Watertown campus to form Luther Preparatory School.

That's where we are today: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Martin Luther College in New Ulm, and two preparatory schools, Luther Preparatory School in Watertown and Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw. Through those schools the Lord has given and is giving us men and women who go out into the preaching and teaching ministries with correct knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures as well as with zeal for reaching out to others with the gospel. If you desire to lengthen the cords you need also to strengthen the stakes.

"In View of Faith"

In each of the three fifty-year periods of our existence as the Wisconsin Synod the Lord, through doctrinal controversy, has forced us to do intensive study of his Word, and in that way he has strengthened our stakes as a church body. In the first fifty years the major controversy was on the biblical doctrine of election. In the second fifty it was the doctrine of church and ministry and the final fifty the doctrine of church fellowship. It is understandable why controversy could arise with regard to the doctrine of election, for what the Scriptures teach

doesn't sound logical to our minds. The Scriptures clearly tell us that from all eternity God has chosen those who will live with him forever in heaven. Human logic leads one to conclude, "If God has chosen some for salvation, then he must have chosen others for damnation." This was the conclusion to which John Calvin permitted his reason to lead him—hence, the historic Reformed doctrine of double election. This, however, clearly goes contrary to the Scriptures which tell us that "the Lord does not want any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

What, then, moved God to choose from eternity some for salvation while at the same time he has chosen none for damnation? The answer of the Scriptures is simply God's love for us in Christ. Paul tells the Ephesians: "He chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world...In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:4-5).

That answer, however, did not fully satisfy all the original members of the Synodical Conference; for the question might be asked, "Doesn't God love *all* people?" The answer to that question, of course, must be "Yes, God does love all people." Some, therefore, injected another element to help answer why God from eternity elected certain people to salvation. They used the term "in view of faith." Edward Fredrich writes, "At best, the phrasing could be stretched to suggest the thought that God's electing in eternity presupposed that all the elect would be brought to heaven on the pathway of faith. At worst, an election *in view of faith* could be thought of as being caused by the person's faith that God foresaw in eternity," an understanding, Fredrich says, "which unfortunately many favored" (p. 59). Such an understanding makes God's mercy in Christ and man's faith twin causes of election and thus detracts from the glory of God.

The Missouri Synod, under the leadership of C. F. W. Walther, stood firmly on the biblical teaching of an election due 100% to God's mercy in Christ. Prof. Fredrich Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod was the main spokesman for election "in view of faith." Upon thorough study of the Scriptures, the Wisconsin Synod, with seminary president Adolph Hoenecke as its main spokesman, took its stand with the Missouri Synod. As a result of this controversy, both the Ohio and Norwegian Synods withdrew from the Synodical Conference in the early 1880s, only about ten years after its 1872 formation.

Of what benefit was this doctrinal controversy for the Wisconsin Synod, so recently brought by the grace of God into the camp of the "Old" Lutherans? It helped to teach it a humble submission to all of God's Word, even to that which human reason cannot fully comprehend. And it could not also but have served to make this little church body that much more cognizant of the fact that everything to do with our salvation, from start to finish, is due solely to the grace of God. That is the message it would preach and teach as it, under God, set about to lengthen its cords.

Lengthening the Cords

Our Founding Fathers' Mission-Mindedness

There is no doubt that the founding fathers of what today is the WELS were mission-minded men. Both John Muehlhaeuser, first president of the Wisconsin Synod, and Friedrich Schmid, first president of the Michigan Synod, were, as was already mentioned, products of German mission societies.

The Basel Mission Society, which sent Friedrich Schmid to America, was intended to be a school, as its charter stated, "in which well reputed religiously-minded young men of every creed and station might receive suitable instruction in a foreign language and simple Bible doctrine in

order...to go forth as useful missionaries to the unnumbered heathens in foreign places and preach to them the saving gospel according to Christ's commission [in] Matthew 28:19" (Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p. 21). When Pastor Schmid arrived in Michigan in 1833, he came with a deep desire to do mission work among the Indians. In fact, in 1842 or 1843 he was instrumental in organizing a short-lived "Mission Synod" in Michigan whose purpose was to evangelize the Indians.

John Muehlhaeuser, who was sent to America by the Langenberg Mission Society, received his early training in another mission society, the Pilgrim Mission. The purpose of this mission society was to train businessmen in the art of winning souls for Christ. The founder of the Pilgrim Mission, Christian Fredrich Spittler, had this to say to the young men he trained and sent out: "Endeavor, by faithful work in your trade, to penetrate into the dark spots of Christendom and do what you can to revive the lost faith in Jesus Christ among the people" (Koehler, p. 22).

Muehlhaeuser had a strong desire to go to Africa, but at age 35 he was deemed too old to learn a new language. So he was sent to Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia where he could evangelize using the German language. Imprisoned in Bohemia for eight months for proselytizing, such was Muehlhaeuser's mission zeal, Koehler reports, that "two Jews incarcerated with him, a police commissioner, and one of the two gendarmes who finally escorted him to the border, he won for Christ with his simple testimony" (p. 22). Muehlhaeuser, the former baker, may never have been much of a theologian, but no one could doubt his mission-minded heart.

"Father" Heyer, the first president of the Minnesota Synod, was also a very mission-minded man. In 1841, when he was 48 years old, he left the Middle West and set sail for India, becoming the first Lutheran pastor sent out from America to India. He remained there, working chiefly in the Guntur and Rajahmundry areas of Andhra Pradesh in South India, until 1857. Shortly after he returned to America, the Minnesota Synod was founded (1860) and he was elected president. Nine years later, in 1869, at the age of 77 "Father" Heyer again traveled to India and served there until 1871. He is still remembered in India. When I made my first trip to Guntur in the early 1990s and told the people that I was from America, their response was, "America! 'Father' Heyer came from America and brought us the gospel."

Lengthening Home Mission Cords

Though it would have to be their successors who led their respective synods into a more conservative Lutheran stance, all three of these leaders, Muehlhaeuser, Schmid, and Heyer, certainly brought a strong mission-mindedness with them as they assumed their offices as synod presidents. The pastors in their synods were also mission-minded men. Fredrich speaks of their "heroic efforts in evangelism and home missions." All the pastors, he says, "were both pastors and missionaries. They would begin work at their assigned post but in short order would be establishing preaching stations in the surrounding area." "Evangelism efforts," Fredrich reminds us, "did not begin in the Wisconsin Synod two decades or so ago. They built the Wisconsin Synod in its early years" (p. 14).

Much of this evangelism work was done by the Wisconsin Synod's version of the Methodist circuit riders. The Wisconsin Synod's "circuit rider" was called a "Reiseprediger," or "Traveling Missionary." These traveling missionaries, following the rivers and later the railroad lines, formed congregations throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota, and beyond. Men such as G. Fachtmann; E. Moldehnke, the first official "Reiseprediger" in the Wisconsin Synod, who later became the first president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary; E. Meyerhoff, who became the synod's first superintendent of home missions; and E. Boettcher, who formed 20 congregations in the Dakota Territory, were all used by God to spread the gospel into the newly-settled areas of

the Midwest. As a result of the work of such men, between 1880 and 1900 180 congregations, almost 10 per year, were formed that are still members of the synod today.

Though there clearly was much “home mission” outreach occurring in our early days, the efforts were quite narrowly focused. Basically, in our first 50 years, as mentioned above, we were a church body *of Germans for Germans*. We reached out to “our kind of people.” In his report to the 1883 synod convention, President John Bading quoted the passage from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, “Let us do good unto all men, *especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*” His reason for quoting the verse was to emphasize the need to conserve the faith of, as he put it, “the children of our people.” The 1882 Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings* lists among the reasons for calling a Reisedprediger: “So that the *children of our people* might not fall into the hands of the sects or because of lack of preaching fall away from the church.” Quite obviously, back then soul conservation was more the concern than was reaching out for souls who had never heard the gospel.

We should not be quick to criticize our fathers, however. This was a time of massive German migration to the Midwest. The number of Germans in Wisconsin, for example, jumped from 40,000 in 1850 to 125,000 in 1860. There were so many Germans to reach that this took up the bulk of our pastors’ time, in addition to their preaching and teaching duties (the pastor was more often than not also the school teacher).

The fact that the pastors in those early days by and large spoke only German also hindered outreach to the broader community. The 1891 synod convention talked about English as the outreach language of the future; but it was well into the 20th century before our church began to use English on a regular basis (As late as the early 1930s most of the classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were still being taught in German). We will talk more about this later.

Lengthening World Mission Cords

Yet we do see a strong desire, at least on the part of some, to reach out with the gospel to those who did not yet know Christ. The Wisconsin Synod’s earliest efforts at what we today call world mission work were actually cross-cultural thrusts within the United States. In 1877 it joined with the other member churches of the Synodical Conference, established just five years earlier in 1872, to begin what at that time was called the “Negro Mission.” It was a ministry to African-Americans in the South, mission work that began not many years after the conclusion of the Civil War. This early attempt at working among people of a different culture helped to prepare the Synodical Conference for beginning mission work in Nigeria in the 1930s.

The mission-mindedness of our fathers was also evident in the strong desire of some to do mission work among an American Indian tribe. In 1876 the Wisconsin Synod commissioned a pastor by the name of Dreves to travel along the recently built Union Pacific railway and seek out an Indian tribe to evangelize. Unfortunately, Pastor Dreves never stopped until he reached California. There he found many German immigrants to serve. Our first attempt, therefore, was a failure.

It would not be the last attempt, however. In 1883, the synod formed a committee that was asked to find a truly Lutheran mission society that was working among the Indians, which the synod could support with mission festival offerings. The committee was unable to find such a society. It therefore recommended that we should begin to train some of our own men for working among the Indians. In 1884 the synod instructed the commission to “look for young men of true piety, willing, and according to human judgment able, to devote themselves to the service of the mission among the heathen. These are to be trained in our educational institutions for the mission service.”

The result was that in 1893 the synod commissioned seminary graduates John Plocher and George Adaschek to travel to Arizona to begin mission work among the Apache Indians. The decision to work among the Apaches, whose chief Geronimo had just recently (1886) surrendered, was at least partially in response to the synod's specific resolution to "seek a tribe where no missionaries or any denomination had as yet set foot." And so a beginning was made, by the grace of God. We had entered our first "foreign mission field."

Koehler does not treat this first foray into world mission work very kindly. He voices two objections. For one thing, he writes, "There was something not entirely sound about synod's heathen-mission endeavor, the idea that a church is not living up to its mission unless it engages in heathen-mission work according to the Lord's great commission.... That idea is dogmatism, with a streak of pietism." And, Koehler adds, "In distinction from the mission houses abroad, the tackling of the work here was unintelligent in that the prospective missionaries were not given adequate training at the college or the seminary.... A further misstep was to train young men who are still unknown quantities in this inadequate way and then put them on their own in strange surroundings" (p. 198). In addition to this, Koehler speaks of "the lukewarm attitude of synod's leadership that dreaded the added cost to the budget. But the constituency showed enthusiasm for the undertaking," Koehler adds, "and so the 'mission brethren' had to be given the rein" (p. 199). Nevertheless, in spite of the rather inauspicious beginnings, a beginning it was. And our work among the Apache Indians continues until this day.

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Though numbers, of course, do not tell the whole story, they can be seen as a visible manifestation of the blessing of God upon a church body that is seeking to preach and teach his Word faithfully. In that light we mention that a church which had begun in 1850 with three pastors and five congregations and preaching stations had by 1900 grown to a synod with 214 pastors, 84 teachers, 329 congregations, 49 preaching stations, and cross-cultural mission endeavors among the Blacks in the South and the Apache Indians in the Southwest. This was truly the blessing of a gracious God.

II. A New Millennium (1900-1950)

Strengthening the Stakes

From Federation to Joint Synod

We have already mentioned briefly that in 1892 three synods joined in a federation, the Wisconsin Synod (founded 1850), the Minnesota Synod, and the Michigan Synod, both of the latter founded in 1860. In 1904 a fourth synod, the Nebraska Synod, joined the Federation. The Nebraska Synod had been founded by Wisconsin Synod members who, ironically, had moved from Ixonia, near Watertown, WI, to Nebraska to get away from synodical entanglements and the bickering and infighting that this often entailed. But in time they became a synod themselves. Being in doctrinal unity with the Wisconsin Synod from which they had come, they also sought membership in the Federation.

The Federation helped to strengthen the constituent synods in three important areas. We have mentioned previously one of the three areas: preparation of full-time workers for the church. A second area was that of publications. The Federation would be responsible for publishing a theological journal (which first appeared in 1904 as the *Theologische Quartalschrift* [*Theological Quarterly*], more recently changed to the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*), a church

periodical (today's *Forward in Christ: The Northwestern Lutheran*), a school journal, and an annual (today's synodical *Yearbook*).

The third area of responsibility for the Federation was that of missions, both home and world. The constitution of the Federation stated that "all missions are under the direction and supervision of the Federation, which is to elect for this purpose a superintendent and which is to allocate men and monies for this purpose. Home missions is at the present the assignment of the district synods. World missions on the other hand should be the province of the Federation." Even though home missions was to be the responsibility of the respective synods, yet, according to the 1892 Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings*, the work was still "to be under the supervision of the Federation, which will allocate men and monies available for this purpose."

Twenty-five years later, in 1917, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation, the Federation, in which the constituents had retained their own identity as individual synods, decided to merge. The four synods became one synod with six districts. Since the Wisconsin Synod was the largest by far of the four, it was divided into the three districts that still exist today: the Southeastern, the Western, and the Northern Wisconsin Districts. In 1918 another district was added, the Pacific Northwest District. (Already in 1894 St. Paul's congregation in Tacoma, WA, had become a member of the Wisconsin Synod.) An eighth district, the Dakota-Montana District, became a part of the Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, as it was known at that time, in 1920.

The reason for the merger of the various synods into one synod was a simple one. Fredrich reports: "This was basically a realization that the limited joint efforts in publication, worker-training, and missions were proving so beneficial that they ought to be enlarged" (p. 130). With the establishment of the joint synod, our fathers were now structured in a way that was very conducive to the establishment of missions and the provision of workers and the printed word to help nurture a growing church.

Intensive Study of the Scriptures on the Biblical Doctrine of Church and Ministry

Before we look at mission expansion in the middle 50 years of our synod's history, we should take note of the major stake strengthening that occurred during this same time through intensive study of the Scriptures on the biblical doctrines of church and ministry.

The necessity of this study was precipitated by controversy surrounding an excommunication that occurred in a Missouri Synod congregation in Cincinnati. In time the Wisconsin Synod was drawn into the controversy. There was strong debate with regard to two questions: One, does any group of believers other than the congregation possess the Ministry of the Keys and thus the right to practice church discipline? Specifically, is such a grouping of Christians as a synod also church? The second question: Has any form of the public ministry other than the pastoral office been divinely instituted by Christ?

The prevailing view of the time was that only the local congregation could properly be called church and that only the pastoral office was instituted by God. The three men who had begun to teach at the seminary during the last years of Adolph Hoenecke's long tenure there (1866-70, 1878-1908), J. P. Koehler, who taught 1900-29, August Pieper (1902-41), and John Schaller (1908-20), set out to make a fresh study of these two questions. They did so by turning solely to an exegetical study of the Scriptures. Because the seminary was located in Wauwatosa, WI, at this time, their approach to the study of theology has often been termed the "Wauwatosa Theology." Fredrich describes the approach of these three men in this way:

The Wauwatosa theologians simply looked beyond the current viewpoint and the ready dogmatical explanation and the deposit of the ecclesiastical situation of the past to what Scripture actually said about church and ministry. This and nothing else was determinative for them in their doctrinal formulations....What this amounts to is employing the historical-grammatical approach to Scripture. This contrasts with the historical-critical approach, so much in vogue at this time, that sets itself as judge over Scripture. It contrasts also with the deficient dogmatical approach, divorced from the foundation of exegesis, that ignores Scripture. The goal in Bible interpretation remains what Eli told Samuel to say to God long ago, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (p. 117)

As a result of their careful study of Scripture, the Wauwatosa professors came to the conclusion that the congregation is not the only divinely instituted gathering of believers, but that the synod, too, possesses the Means of Grace and thus has the right to use the Ministry of the Keys. They also reached the biblical conclusion that, while the public ministry of the gospel has been divinely instituted, this ministry may assume many different forms. The pastoral office is the most comprehensive form of the public ministry, but it is only one of several forms that the public ministry might take.

This view did not find a wide following in either the Missouri Synod or in the majority of European Lutheran bodies. Though it did not cause the 1961 separation in fellowship between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, since the doctrine continued to be under study by the two bodies, it is one of many doctrinal issues that would have to be resolved if Wisconsin and Missouri should ever be able to be brought back together.

We might add here that this study on the doctrines of church and ministry also had at least a potential impact on our church's outreach with the gospel; for it also helped to bring into sharper focus the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, a doctrine that Luther had vigorously championed.

John Schaller writes:

The Holy Scriptures incontrovertibly show that the ministry, that is, the commission to preach the gospel, is given to every Christian; that at conversion not only the ability but also the impetus for this preaching is implanted in him; and that the gospel by its very nature as a message presupposes this preaching activity and at the same time by the effect it has guarantees it will occur (WLQ 78:1, p. 38).

In that, Schaller is echoing Luther, who says, "No one can deny that every Christian possesses the Word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest....But if it is true that they have God's Word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread [his Word]" (LW 39:309).

We still have a long ways to go in putting the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers into practice in our congregations; but this doctrine that resurfaced during the church and ministry study in the early years of the past century is very much a part of the current emphasis on personal evangelism in the WELS.

Lengthening the Cords

The Great Depression

Two factors hindered WELS outreach with the gospel during the middle 50 years of our existence as a church body. One of these factors, which affected both home and world mission expansion, was the Great Depression of 1929 coupled with the \$700,000 debt the synod had accumulated. A \$700,000 synodical debt may not seem to be a huge amount by today's standards, but in 1929 this amount was considerably larger than the entire annual budget of the synod. Bringing this figure up to date, it would be like the synod today, whose annual budget is around \$50 million, being more than \$50 million dollars in debt!

"The worst aspect of all," Fredrich reports, "was the wet-blanket effect the awesome debt had on every effort to extend and even maintain the church's mission program. Any proposal of the sort was countered with the old refrain, 'We are in debt already'" (p. 191). In the 1933 synod convention, synod president G. E. Bergemann had to sadly report:

Under prevailing circumstances there could be no thought of an enlargement of our work. No additional mission programs could be undertaken. The number of parish schools, also, did not increase. Therefore the majority of this year's candidates for the pastoral and teaching ministry are without a call; even several from the past year are still on the waiting list (Fredrich, p. 188).

In the 1935 convention the new president, John Brenner, had to report that 32 seminary graduates, some from as far back as 1932, were still without calls.

It took time, ten years in fact, but with determined effort and by the grace of God, by 1945 the huge synodical debt was not only reduced but totally eliminated. John Brenner would serve as president for 20 years, until 1953, some years after the synod debt had been retired, enabling us as a church body to think about moving forward more rapidly in our mission outreach. Brenner, by the way, is viewed by some as an anti-missions man since he did not enthusiastically endorse new mission proposals that came before the synod. But his caution needs to be viewed in light of the situation he inherited when he came into office. He had, as Fredrich puts it, "the unenviable assignment of overseeing synodical fiscal problems in the Great Depression. The grim experience left Brenner forever wary of any rapid expansion" (p. 189).

Slow Transition from German to English

A second factor hindering outreach with the gospel in our middle 50 years was our relatively slow transition from the German to the English language.

There were voices throughout this time urging that we expand our mission work to non-German speaking people. Already in the 1900 Wisconsin Synod convention, the Reisprediger Committee reported that it "feels constrained to call to attention that ever more frequently in several places the need is apparent to call to life English mission congregations." A 1901 convention report stated: "We must call the attention of the synod to the fact that also in our circles congregations will be established which will use English exclusively. The synod should take a position whether it wishes to receive such congregations into membership." In his 1919 essay, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," August Pieper states that the Wisconsin Synod "did not use the English language earlier with greater vigor was a serious mistake, which has robbed us hitherto of much influence among the people" (WLQ 62:3, p. 201).

A Michigan District memorial to the 1929 convention called attention to the cities of our land where mission work among the unchurched, regardless of nationality, should be done. In 1932, August Zich, professor at the seminary, wrote in the *Theological Quarterly*, “By this time it should be plain to all of us that the unique position of our Lutheran church among the numerous sects prevailing in the land places us under obligation to explain and defend our faith in English.” The home missions report to the 1941 synod convention urged: “Let us free ourselves from the thought that our home mission work is done with the same kind of people that were available a generation ago. Then this type of mission work was done almost exclusively among ‘those of the household of faith.’ Today it is different.”

Nevertheless, the progress was slow. The 1902 Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings* stated that the establishment of an English circuit-riding pastor is premature “since the English Lutherans in our congregations at present will be cared for with Word and Sacrament in satisfactory fashion by our German pastors.” John Brenner (grandson of synod President John Brenner) writes for an article to appear this summer in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*:

In 1920 about one-half of the synod’s congregations had periodic English services (from a few times per year to three times a month). Only about nine percent of the congregations and preaching stations, however, had English services every Sunday. Only 11 congregations and preaching stations conducted worship services exclusively in English, and five of those 11 were served by two pastors in the Pacific Northwest.

Brenner reports that by the 1930s the transition was sufficiently widespread that now we could reach out to *all* of our neighbors in English. Yet it wasn’t until 1938 that all classes at the seminary were taught in English, and as recently as the early 1950s at least some of the faculty meeting minutes were still being recorded in German. *Continuing in His Word* reports that in 1950, the time of the writing of this book that records the first 100 years of the existence of the Wisconsin Synod, eight percent of home mission work was still being done in the German language.

Though war between nations can hardly be looked upon as a blessing, World War I was beneficial in at least one important way to the Wisconsin Synod: the great animosity toward all things German that this war provoked hastened our movement as a church body to the use of the English language. Today the transition is close to 100 percent. In 1999, only ten of the more than 1200 congregation in the synod reported that they conducted German services. There are more services that are signed for the deaf or conducted in Spanish than there are services conducted in German.

Home Mission Advances

Nevertheless, in spite of the twin hindrances of the synod’s huge debt and its very slow movement from German to English, there were some positive signs on the home mission front between 1900 and 1950. Among them:

- As far back as 1905 there was a recommendation brought to the synod that the president of the synod also be the mission superintendent, and that this position be full-time. The idea of a full-time mission executive was broached again in 1923 and 1929. It took a number of years for these recommendations to be acted upon positively, but in time they were. In 1959, Edgar Hoenecke (grandson of early seminary President Adolph Hoenecke) was called as full-time chairman of the Board for World Missions, and in

1963 Raymond Wiechmann was called to serve as the first full-time Executive Secretary for Home Missions. It is significant that early on there were at least some voices advocating that a man serve full time in this role, certainly an indication of the importance they attached to outreach with the gospel.

- Already in the 1901 Wisconsin Synod convention the general concept of a church extension fund to help finance the establishment of new congregations was approved. Loans to the fund were to be sought from the well-to-do of the synod. The beginnings of this fund were not tremendously auspicious. In the first year \$150 was received. By 1911, however, the CEF had grown to \$3,000, by 1925 to \$300,000, and by 1963 to \$3 million. Today that fund has grown to almost \$100 million in total assets.
- Beginning especially after World War II we began to spread out from our narrow Midwest base. By 1945 we had congregations in 14 states. Because of its proximity to our Apache mission, we began work in Arizona quite early (Grace congregation in Tucson was organized in 1911). In 1950 we moved even farther west, to California, with the establishment of a congregation in Los Angeles and, two years later, in suburban Tarzana. Moving a little beyond 1950, in 1955 we began work on the other coast also, in Florida. As a church body we now stretched from coast to coast (but with a lot of gaps in between!).
- In 1939, the synod convention authorized the calling of so-called “General Missionaries” who were to do exploratory work in various parts of the country. Pastor F. Stern was called to serve in Arizona, Pastor I. P. Frey in Colorado, and Pastor R. Scheele in Michigan. Eighty-eight “trial fields” were opened between 1941 and 1945.
- In 1941, the synod authorized the establishment of mission districts, which enabled district mission boards to do more intensive work in areas on the boundaries of their districts. The first such mission district was the Colorado Mission District, a part of the Nebraska District. Later the Arizona-California District formed two mission districts, first one in California and then one in Texas.

World Missions

On the world mission front we see two significant advances between 1900 and 1950 and the beginnings of two others. The first of these advances displayed our continuing concern to minister to Germans, but this time Germans outside of our country. Following World War I, several northeast German provinces were annexed to Poland. Poland was a Catholic country. Some of the German Lutherans living there who were struggling to remain true to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions appealed to the Wisconsin Synod for help. The 1923 synod convention passed a resolution that “our General Board for Missions should undertake the mission in Poland with all energy.” Fredrich comments, “It may not have been a truly heathen mission and it may have had language and ethnic limitations, but that resolution put the Wisconsin Synod squarely into the work outlined so clearly in Mark 16:15, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation’” (p. 165).

It may also be of interest to note that J. P. Koehler, who had made some disparaging remarks about the way the Wisconsin Synod had embarked on mission work among the Apaches, was in Europe at the time, doing research for his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*. He was asked to investigate the mission potential for working in Poland. He reported to the synod that “Poland presents a great and ripe mission field and it ought to be worked by our Lutheran church body.”

For 15 years, from 1924-1939, when the outbreak of World War II prohibited a return to Poland, that is just what we did. The Wisconsin Synod, under the leadership of such pastors as O. Engel, A. Dasler, and W. Bodamer, assisted this group of Germans that in time organized themselves as the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Poland. In 1939 this church body numbered some 8000 souls.

When the Russians advanced across Poland in the latter stages of World War II, these German Lutherans were forced to flee. They returned to Germany where, as refugees, they continued to receive financial support from the Wisconsin Synod. Eventually those who settled in West Germany became a part of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church, with which the WELS is not in fellowship. Those in the East, who suffered for years under Communist domination, in time became a district of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church and are still being supported to a degree by the WELS today.

The second advance on the world mission field was done jointly with the other synods in the Lutheran Synodical Conference. In 1934 the Ibesiko clan of the Ibibio tribe in tropical Nigeria appealed to the Synodical Conference for assistance. The Synodical Conference, which had gained some experience working with Blacks in its "Negro Mission" in the United States, determined to enter this field. The first superintendent of the Nigerian mission field was Wisconsin Synod pastor William Schweppe, who in 1936 accepted the call to serve there. Pastor Schweppe was also instrumental in starting a mission in neighboring Ghana, which, along with the Lutheran Church in Nigeria, is now affiliated with the Missouri Synod. In 1960 Pastor Schweppe was granted a leave of absence from his work in Nigeria to assist with the new WELS mission in northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). While serving there, in 1968 he was killed in a car accident, thus ending almost 30 years of continuous service on the world mission field.

Though the WELS is not directly involved with the Lutheran Church of Nigeria any longer, two church bodies in West Africa with whom we are now working, Christ the King Lutheran Church in Nigeria and the Lutheran Church of Cameroon, have their roots in the Lutheran Church in Nigeria. Just recently another Nigerian church body with Lutheran Church of Nigeria roots, All Saints Lutheran Church, has sought to establish fellowship with the WELS. From little beginnings the Lord of the Church has produced far-reaching results.

Before leaving Nigeria, it might be good to mention that already 65 years ago mission strategies were put into place in Nigeria that we are still seeking to follow in our world mission fields today. The Synodical Conference resolved right from the beginning that "it must be our objective in the new mission venture in Africa to build a church there that will not remain dependent on us, but as soon as possible become independent, self-supporting, and self-governing." It continues to be a prime mission strategy of ours today to work toward producing indigenous churches, churches that are self-supporting, self-administering, self-propagating, and self-disciplining. Secondly, in 1949, thirteen years after its founding, the Nigerian church established a small seminary for training of native workers. Education, ministerial education in particular, remains today a high priority in each of our world missions. Our goal, under God, is to help produce a solid church with strong, well-educated, solidly confessional leaders.

The second 50 years of our existence as a church body came to a close with two other mission beginnings that have since blossomed into much more than those who were involved at the beginning may have imagined. With the huge synod debt having been fully liquidated in 1945, the 1947 synod convention authorized "the expansion of mission work in foreign mission fields." One result of that resolution was the calling of Pastor Venus Winter from a congregation in Flint, MI, to begin Spanish mission work in the Southwest. Pastor Winter began his work in Phoenix, but in time moved to Tucson. If Pastor Winter were alive today, how he would marvel

at the expansion of his initial Hispanic work that the Lord has brought about in the 50 years since that time!

The same would be true of Pastor Arthur Wacker, who along with Pastor Edgar Hoenecke made a 4,000 mile trek in 1949 through much of sub-Saharan Africa in search of a place for the Wisconsin Synod to do mission work in Africa in addition to the work we were doing jointly with other synods in the Synodical Conference. The place to which the Lord in his providence led them, as most of us undoubtedly know, was northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Pastor Hoenecke, now in his mid-90s, has lived to see the fruits of his and Pastor Wacker's initial labors. The Lord is good!

We might close out this section with a summary of synodical statistics as of 1950 in comparison with those numbers in 1900.

	<u>1900</u>	<u>1950</u>
Pastors	214	631
Teachers	84	438
Congregations and Preaching Stations	378	829
Communicant Members	109,879 (1892)	214,425

Of the 829 pastors, 290 reported that in 1950 they still were doing at least some of their work in German.

III. Approaching the Third Millennium (1950-2000)

One-hundred-fifty years, 1850-2000, may seem like a long time, but it really isn't all that lengthy a time period. A man such as Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, for example, whom the Lord has blessed with a long life on this earth, has been alive during almost two-thirds of the history of the Wisconsin Synod. There are any number of us, including myself, who have a first-hand acquaintance with the most recent one-third. In 1950 I began my high school years at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. I graduated from that school in 1954, from Northwestern College in 1958, and from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1962. I've been a part of "the system" since the beginning of the most recent 50 years of WELS history. It has been, as is true of the previous 100 years, a time of both stake strengthening and cord lengthening.

Strengthening the Stakes

A Painful Break in Fellowship

The major stake strengthener occurred at the beginning of this time period and culminated in what to many was a very traumatic experience: the 1961 break in fellowship with the Missouri Synod that severed the ties we had enjoyed with this church body since 1868. This was the church body, you will recall, the "old Lutherans," that the Lord had used to help bring the "new" Lutheran Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota Synods into the fold of confessional Lutheranism. There were many family ties between members of the two synods and close friendships as well; and quite a bit of joint work was being carried on, e.g., the Nigerian mission, area Lutheran high school associations, etc.

Almost ironically, just as it had been disagreement on the doctrine of fellowship that had kept Missouri and Wisconsin separated in the 1800s, it was growing differences in the understanding and practice of this same doctrine that now threatened to and eventually did cause a rift between

the two bodies. This time, however, the shoe was on the other foot. It was Wisconsin that clung to the “old” Lutheran position that for the practice of church fellowship (altar, pulpit, and prayer) there needs to be complete agreement in doctrine and in the practice of doctrine. It was the Missouri Synod at this time that began to turn away from this position.

Missouri’s waffling on the doctrine of fellowship began already in the mid-1930s. At that time the two other large Lutheran church bodies in the United States were the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), which had been formed by several eastern United States synods, and the American Lutheran Church (ALC), which had come into being largely through a merger of midwestern Lutheran church bodies. Missouri first met with the ULCA, but it soon became apparent that the ULCA’s attitude toward the Scriptures (it rejected inerrancy) made it impossible to keep discussions going.

Next Missouri began to meet with the ALC. The position of the ALC, as formally adopted at its 1938 convention, was that “it is neither necessary nor possible to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines” in order for churches to work together in fellowship. The term “non-fundamental doctrines” does not refer to doctrines that are unimportant but to doctrines that are not absolutely necessary for saving faith. For example, if a person in ignorance believes that Jesus is going to come back one day and reign on earth for 1000 years (millennialism) but still trusts in Jesus as his Savior, we would not have to doubt his eternal salvation. The issue, however, is this: are some doctrines, such as those relating to the final coming of Christ, unimportant enough that it doesn’t make any difference what one believes or teaches about them? The answer of the ALC to that question was “yes.” The answer of the Scriptures is that *every* doctrine it teaches is important. In his Great Commission, Jesus emphasized the importance of teaching and holding onto “everything” he had commanded. And the Scriptures also counsel Christians to “keep away from” that is, not to practice fellowship with, those who “cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned” (Roman 16:17).

That was what the member churches of the Synodical Conference had always believed and practiced. Now, in its 1938 convention, the Missouri Synod expressed itself as ready to regard the position of the ALC, that “it is neither necessary nor possible to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines,” as “a doctrinal basis for future church fellowship.”

Many years of meetings and admonition and study of the Scriptures followed, resulting in some finely-crafted, clear doctrinal statements—such as the statement on fellowship which still today, almost 40 years after our break in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, stands as the public doctrinal statement of the WELS on this teaching of the Scriptures. This statement, as well as many other doctrinal statements of that era, came largely from the pen of then Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President Carl Lawrenz.

Not all Wisconsin Synod pastors and congregations were willing to wait until 1961, the year in which we officially severed fellowship with the Missouri Synod because we had reached the conclusion that an impasse had been reached and that there was clearly no longer agreement on the doctrine of fellowship. Beginning already in 1953, various pastors and congregations withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod because in their mind it was not following Romans 16:17 and breaking fellowship with the Missouri Synod. In time, these pastors and congregations formed their own church body, the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Fredrich reports that in 1962 the CLC numbered 62 pastors, 60 congregations, and about 9000 souls. A large number of the pre-1961 class pictures on the walls of the seminary include photographs of men who graduated from the seminary, served for a time in the WELS, but in those difficult days left and became a part of the CLC.

Doctrinal struggle is always difficult, especially when it becomes as personal as it did during the almost 25 years of the Wisconsin/Missouri debates, which began in 1938 and ended with the severance of fellowship in 1961 and the dissolution of the Synodical Conference in 1963. At the same time, doctrinal controversies are beneficial if they lead a church to dig ever more deeply into the Scriptures, the source and norm of all true doctrine. Such is what occurred during those 25 years.

How did this affect the advance of the gospel in the WELS? In the short term, it consumed a tremendous amount of time and energy. Over that period of 25 years, more attention was being paid to conserving the truth than to spreading it to others. In the long term, however, it could not but have greatly benefited the advance of the gospel; for the WELS came out of those years of doctrinal struggle even stronger than it had been before. There was no doubt that it intended to continue to be, under God, a truly Lutheran church, clinging to the Scriptures in their entirety as well as to the Lutheran Confessions. We were determined to continue to be “old” Lutherans. With our tent stakes that much more solidly anchored, it was now time to pay more attention to lengthening the cords.

Bringing things up to date, we might add that a successor to the Synodical Conference has recently come into existence, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which held its first convention in 1993. This is an international conference of confessional Lutheran church bodies consisting largely of the WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and their mission churches. As of 1999, 16 church bodies were members of the CELC. Wilbert Gawrisch, the first president of the CELC, describes the organization and purpose of the conference in the 1997 Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings*:

The theological basis of the CELC is the same as that of the former Synodical Conference of North America, which was a bastion of sound Lutheranism until its demise in the 1960s. Subsequently, there was a call for a new organization that would bind confessional Lutheran churches and enable them to practice fellowship with one another. The CELC differs from the former Synodical Conference [only] in that it is international in scope.

In the interest of testifying to and conserving sound biblical doctrine, each triennial convention of the CELC centers upon one doctrinal theme. The essays presented are then used as the raw material to prepare a statement in booklet form on the doctrine treated at the convention. The doctrines treated so far are justification, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit.

Sinking Deeper Roots

Not only is it important for our church leaders to be sound in doctrine, but it is equally important for *all* to be solidly rooted in the Word—both for their own sake and for the sake of their children and children’s children. That is why from early days on the Wisconsin Synod has had a deep interest in Christian education. Already in 1860 the Wisconsin Synod had 23 day schools. By 1875 the number had grown to 85. Today there are more than 360 Lutheran elementary schools in the WELS, taught by close to 2000 teachers.

Quite early on the value of giving also our high school youth a Christian training was recognized. In 1903 the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods joined together to open Milwaukee Lutheran High School, the first Lutheran high school in the United States. Several years later, in 1925, a second area Lutheran high school, Winnebago Lutheran Academy, was opened in Fond

du Lac, WI. In 1948 our Apache mission began East Fork Lutheran High School in Whiteriver, AZ.

It was especially in the period between 1950 and 1970 that we see the opening of a large number of area Lutheran high schools. Six schools were opened in the 1950s: Fox Valley in Appleton, WI; Wisconsin Lutheran in Milwaukee, as the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods went their separate ways in high schools; Luther in Onalaska, WI; Manitowoc in Manitowoc, WI; Lakeside in Lake Mills, WI; St. Croix in West St. Paul, MN. Another four schools came into existence in the early 1970s: Michigan in St. Joseph, MI; Shoreland in Somers, WI; Kettle Moraine in Jackson, WI; and Huron Valley in Westland, MI. In the late 1970s another eight schools were founded: California, now in Wildomar, CA; Arizona in Phoenix, AZ; Evergreen in Des Moines, WA; Nebraska in Waco, NE; Northland in Merrill, WI; West in Plymouth, MN; Minnesota Valley in New Ulm, MN; Illinois in Crete, IL. More recently yet another high school has opened its doors, Great Plains in Watertown, SD, giving us a total of 20 area Lutheran high schools. There are hopes and dreams for still more schools to begin, in Florida and Colorado, and perhaps other places as well.

The opportunity for a Christian education extended to our college age youth with the opening of Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, which began as a junior college in 1973 and in 1985 expanded to a four year liberal arts college. The college utilized the facilities of Wisconsin Lutheran High School for its first five years. Since 1978 it has had its own campus about a mile west of the high school.

In recent years much emphasis has been placed, and rightly so, on *adult* nurture. The slogan has been, "Adult Nurture is Job #1." Hopefully, we will continue to treat this as more than a slogan. As the days of our Lord's coming draw near and false doctrine and false teachers become more numerous and more blatant, it is critical that we remain solidly grounded in the truth. Otherwise we will have little of value to pass on to the next generation and to those without Christ living all around us. Strong stakes are necessary if we are to lengthen our cords. It is encouraging to hear of the increase in percentage of WELS members who are participating in their congregations' Bible classes; but we still have quite a ways to go.

Lengthening the Cords

There were many prophets of doom who predicted that when the Wisconsin Synod severed its fellowship ties with Missouri it would shrivel up on the vine and die, since it had leaned so heavily on Missouri over the years. Precisely the opposite has occurred. The extensive cord lengthening that the Lord has graciously permitted in the years since the break with Missouri is the subject of what follows.

Home Missions

Close to the beginning of the 1950-2000 period, in 1953, the synod determined to divide the General Mission Board, which had been responsible for overseeing all synodical mission work, both at home and abroad, into two boards: the General Board for Home Missions, since shortened to the Board for Home Missions (BHM), and the General Board for Foreign and Heathen Missions, now simply called the Board for World Missions (BWM). This was a wise move in view of the rapid expansion on both the home and world mission fields that our gracious

God would bring about in the years to come. (Interestingly, there has been some talk recently of combining the two boards once again because, with the large influx of people of different cultures into the United States, Hispanics and Asians in particular, we have a world mission field at home also, which has not been the kind of work with which the home mission board has gained much in the way of expertise. At any rate, the two boards are talking to each other much more frequently and intensely than in the past.)

The number of new home mission congregations grew rapidly during the five decades between 1950 and 2000. The most rapid expansion occurred in the years immediately following the decision to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod. A number of factors may well have contributed to this:

- The need to serve our own WELS people in various parts of the country who up to this time would simply join a Missouri Synod congregation if no WELS church was in the area. If we as a church body wanted to continue to serve our people, we would have to go where they were going. We could not be content to remain what for all intents and purposes was a Midwestern church body, with a majority of its members concentrated in Michigan, Minnesota, and especially Wisconsin.
- The 1961 synod convention's call to "all who are of a like mind with us in this matter [primarily the proper scriptural practice of the doctrine of church fellowship] to identify themselves with us in supporting the scriptural, historical position of the Synodical Conference." In the 60s and 70s especially we received many a call from groups of conservative Lutherans seeking to be served by the WELS. I'm sure that many of the WELS congregations in Texas and other South Central District states came into existence through such appeals for help.
- In 1963 the synod convention permitted the Board for Home Missions to divide up the entire United States into areas of responsibility, thus abolishing the old policy that mission boards could not "jump states" with mission openings without synod authorization. (In the 50s the Michigan District had sidestepped that policy when it made a big jump all the way from Michigan to Florida!)
- The 1963 authorization by the synod to call a full-time home missions executive secretary (now called the Administrator for Home Missions). Pastor Raymond Wiechmann was the first to serve in that role. He was followed in 1968 by Pastor Norman Berg, who had been serving as the president of the Michigan District. It was Pastor Berg, I believe, who coined the phrase "every state by '78." We almost made it. By 1978 the WELS was represented in every state but West Virginia, Vermont, Maine, and Mississippi. By 1983 we were, by the grace of God, in all 50 states.

With the rapid expansion on the home mission front there came also an expansion in the number of synodical districts. Since 1920 the Wisconsin Synod had been able to function well with eight districts. In 1954 the Arizona-California District was organized. Grace congregation in Tucson had been founded already in 1911. About 20 more congregations had come into existence since then, including two in California. It was time for this area, which included the states that now form the South Central District, to become a district. As it turned out, 15 percent of the WELS' communicant growth in the 70s came in the Arizona-California District, a district whose membership was nowhere near the size of the five Midwestern districts.

In 1973, the South Atlantic District, whose congregations had been a part of the Michigan District, was organized. In 1983 districts number eleven and twelve came into existence, the South Central (formerly a part of the Arizona-California District) and the North Atlantic, whose

congregations, along with the congregations on the South Atlantic seaboard, had been under the Michigan District.

Home mission expansion in the 80s and 90s has not been as great as in the previous two decades. At least three reasons come to mind. For one thing, we are no longer receiving the number of requests from groups of concerned, conservative Lutherans that we were receiving in the years following our termination of fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Secondly, the cost of land purchase and chapel construction has sky-rocketed, making it more difficult to open as many new missions. Thirdly, many of the congregations founded in the 1970s are still receiving synodical subsidy, tying up synod dollars that could be used for new mission starts. In too many cases it has turned out that confessional groups who called upon the synod for help displayed more of a “we want to be served” attitude than an attitude which said, “We want to serve by spreading the gospel in our community.” In recent years, the BHM has been more strongly emphasizing that any nucleus wishing to be served by us must be displaying on its part a willingness to serve.

Before we take a brief look at world mission cord lengthening that God has granted us in the past 50 years, we might close this section with another look at statistics as an indicator that the promise of God that his Word will not return to him empty does not fail:

	<u>1900</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1999</u>
Pastors	214	631	1230
Teachers	84	438	1976
Congregations and Preaching Stations	378	829	1239
Communicant Members		109,879 (1892)	214,425 315,637

World Missions

If we can call what has taken place in home missions 1950-2000 a rapid expansion, then what has occurred by the goodness of our merciful God in world missions during this same time would have to be termed an “explosion.”

Time will not permit us to trace in detail the spread of the gospel through world missions in the WELS between 1950 and 2000, but even a cursory look will impress upon us how marvelously the Lord has blessed us in these years.

You will recall that at the end of the first 50 years of our existence as a church body our world mission program consisted of the Synodical Conference work among African-Americans in the South and the beginnings of our work among the Apache Indians in the Southwest. By 1950, we had begun work among German Lutherans in Poland and had joined in another synodical conference endeavor, the mission in Nigeria. We had made just a bare beginning of Hispanic work in Tucson and Pastors Hoenecke and Wacker had made their 1949 African safari.

What has happened since then? God’s blessings have surpassed all expectations. He has visibly demonstrated to us that he “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

Who would have imagined that Pastor Venus Winter’s modest beginnings in Spanish outreach in Tucson in the late 1940s would have blossomed into work today in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Brazil?

Who would have foreseen that just 50 years after Hoenecke and Wacker’s exploratory trip into Central Africa there would now be a 40,000 member Lutheran Church of Central Africa?

God continues to surprise us with unanticipated blessings. In *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People—A Century of WELS Missions* there appears this statement about mission

work in India: “So far our experiences there have been disheartening. Perhaps we need to be reminded that it was possibly India where Thomas, yes, doubting Thomas, served his Lord. Perhaps we need once again to dare trust that there is a rich harvest field in India, committing our faith and resources to bringing this harvest into the Master’s storehouse” (p. 278). That was written in 1992. Today India has become our second largest mission field. We are serving about 12,000 people with the gospel and training about 185 workers to bring the gospel to their fellow Indians. This work, by the way, is centered in Guntur, the place to which “Father” Heyer had come with the gospel 150 years earlier!

“Europe,” the writers of *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* observe, “remains a spiritual enigma. Apparently the ‘local shower’ of the gospel, as Luther put it, has moved with greater effect to other places” (p. 306). What do we see eight years after these words were written? We see that doors have been opened to bring the gospel to the people of Russia, Bulgaria, and Albania, and also several of the Baltic countries. We also rejoice that our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran Free Church in Germany are exhibiting a strong desire to reach out to their fellow Germans with the gospel.

We took a tentative first step toward mission work in Asia when we commissioned Missionary Fred Tiefel in 1952 to bring the gospel to Japan. Now we are not only at work in Japan but in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Thailand. God has been good to us. Who knows what blessings await us in the future!

Names of places and numbers do not tell the story of missions, of course. Mission work involves people—missionaries and their families, national workers, seminary students, members. Nevertheless places and numbers can be an indication of what God has accomplished as we have gone out into the world in Jesus’ name with the gospel.

Here, then, are some statistics for which we cannot but thank our gracious God:

- We are carrying out mission work in 36 different languages on five continents: Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, and North America.
- We are supporting the work of missions in one way or another in 26 different countries. We began work in most of the places mentioned below within the past 50 years, the vast majority of them since the early 60s:

USA (Native Americans)	Thailand	Albania
Zambia	India	Mexico
Cameroon	Germany	Puerto Rico
Malawi/Mozambique	Sweden	Colombia
Nigeria	Norway	Brazil
Japan	Finland	Dominican Republic
Hong Kong	Latvia	Cuba
Taiwan	Russia	
Indonesia	Bulgaria	

- 60,500 baptized children of God around the world in 581 congregations and 90 preaching stations are being served by 70 missionaries, 20 teachers, 30 layworkers, and 356 national workers (pastors, evangelists, and vicars).
- 214 men are being trained for the ministry in Bible institutes and seminaries.

Thank you, Lord, for opening so many doors! Give us the zeal and the means to continue to lengthen our world mission cords!

IV. Challenges Facing the WELS in 2000 A.D. and Beyond As it Seeks to Advance with the Gospel

We will bring this presentation to a close by listing ten challenges, which can also be viewed as opportunities, that face our church as we enter this new millennium. They are not listed in any particular order. All of these items are under discussion at the present time and need to be wrestled with continually.

1. Maintaining a Proper Balance between Strengthening Our Stakes and Lengthening Our Cords

Serving in the area of ministerial education as I do, I know how costly our ministerial education system is. I also know first-hand the pressures being put on ministerial education to cut back on its spending, to forego new building programs or find different ways of financing them in the interest of expanding outreach with the gospel. I also serve on the Board for World Missions, and for a number of years I served in a congregation supported by the Board for Home Missions. So I also know by personal experience the importance of sufficient funding for mission outreach.

It strikes me, however—and I hope I’m not being too parochial here—that recently the pendulum seems to be swinging in the direction of lengthening our cords at the expense of strengthening our stakes through sufficient financial support of our ministerial education programs. For example, funding for needed facilities at our ministerial education schools, such as additional dormitory and classroom space to provide for growing enrollments, is becoming more and more dependent on increased student-generated revenues. Over the years in our church we have wisely seen the support of Christian education as a responsibility of the whole church, whether it be on the congregational or synodical level, not just of the “users.” In fact, one of our strengths over the years has been the support the *whole synod* offers to train its future workers. I would pray that this strong support continues. It would not be wise, in my opinion, to go too far in the direction of requiring our schools to become self-financing rather than synod-supported institutions.

2. Preparing Church Workers to Face the Unique Challenges That Lie Before Us

Currently, the presidents of our four ministerial education schools comprise a Ministerial Education Curriculum Committee, chaired by Board for Ministerial Education chairman, Pastor Donald Sutton. The committee is charged to take a bottom to top and top to bottom look at the entire ministerial education curriculum. As we do this, we are asking such questions as: What is the church looking for and what does it need in the pastors and teachers who will fill our classrooms and pulpits in the year 2000 A.D. and the years to come? How are we doing in producing these kinds of workers? What *dare not change* in our ministerial education program? What *might be changed* to make things work better? What, if anything, *must be changed* to produce candidates to serve in an ever-changing world? In carrying out this task we need to be flexible, yet without compromising the truths our fathers fought for and which God has graciously preserved in our midst.

To illustrate, we might take an example from the pastor track of our ministerial education program. How much training is necessary for a man to serve as a pastor in one of our congregations? Over the years we have come to recognize the value of a solid liberal arts education to prepare students for entrance into the seminary. But does this mean that all need training in Latin and German and classical Greek, or at least the amount of training that we are presently providing? We have already waived these requirements for second career students.

Are there other avenues to a classical liberal arts education? Should there be more choices for those who are following the traditional prep school (or area Lutheran high school), Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary route? This is just a small sampling of questions that need to be asked and answered as we seek to continue to advance with the gospel in the WELS.

Also worth mentioning is that in recent times the synod, recognizing that the public ministry can take different forms as needs dictate, has begun several new programs designed to assist us in moving forward in Christ in the new millennium. I'm thinking, for example, of the staff ministry and early childhood education programs at Martin Luther College and also of the multi-ethnic pre-seminary program that is preparing men of minority cultures to enter the seminary. This fall the first graduate of that program will be starting classes in Mequon.

Just recently a cross-cultural, cross-divisional committee consisting of members from the Board for Home Missions, Board for World Missions, and Board for Ministerial Education set up a program to train congregational "evangelists." This program is designed especially to fill needs in culturally diverse fields. The training for such a position is intended to take place almost entirely within the congregation. Upon completion of the required credits of course work (34 credits are envisioned at present), the congregation could, if it so desires, "certify" the person as a congregational "evangelist" and call the person to serve full- or part-time. Such a person would serve as an assistant to the pastor, but he would not occupy the pulpit since he would not be trained to write and preach sermons.

As the situation dictates, there may well be other forms of public ministry that we as a church body will find beneficial to create as we seek to move forward in Christ with the gospel in the years before us.

3. Growing in Our Ability to Do Cross-Cultural Mission Work, Especially in the Cities of North America

The Wisconsin Synod started out as essentially a church body consisting of rural congregations, with the exception of the large number of churches serving Germans in Milwaukee. Serving rural people, serving Germans, that was our forte. Both groups are in relatively short supply today. The Germans have moved out of the areas of the city in which we established congregations one hundred and more years ago, and the number of people in rural areas continues to decline.

If we want to be able to work in the large cities, and increasingly the smaller cities and towns as well, we need to learn how to work among people of cultures different from our own, just as our forefathers needed to learn how to bring the gospel to their non-German neighbors. In a 1997 paper, "Unchurched Demographic Trends and WELS Perspectives," WELS evangelism administrator Robert Hartman lists larger cities in the United States (100,000 population and over) with a large non-Anglo population. Among them are such South Central District cities as Dallas 53.1%; Austin 38.8%; Corpus Christi 56.5%; Fort Worth 43.9%; Houston 56.1%; Oklahoma City 27.6%; and San Antonio 64.1%.

Much of this non-Anglo influx comes from recent immigration. Robert Samuelson, a contributing editor to *Newsweek* magazine and columnist for *The Washington Post*, in an editorial that appeared May 4, 2000, in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, talked about the effect that immigration is having on our nation. He mentioned that the Census Bureau projects that by 2025 immigrants will comprise 12% of the population of the United States and that their American-born children will conservatively comprise another 12-13%. That's about 25%, one-fourth of the population of the United States projected to be

immigrants or first generation children of immigrants 25 years from now. (That is the case already today in California, where one in four residents is foreign born).

Where are these immigrants coming from? In 1970, 62% of all immigrants came from Europe and 9% from Canada (about seven out of ten of all immigrants). Arriving from Europe and Canada, these were more or less “our kind of people.” In 1997, however, 51% of immigrants came from Latin America and 27% from Asia. Almost eight out of ten immigrants today are no longer “our kind of people.” Most importantly, they are people who do not know God, or, if they do, they do not know what he has done for them. What a potential mission field this immigrant population is!

It can and should be said that we are making a determined effort to learn how to work in the big city and also among people of different cultures, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian in particular. Some fine work is being done in the African-American community in Milwaukee by pastors and congregations that have determined to remain in the central city and work among and with the people who live there. We are taking some baby steps in Hispanic work in such places as Miami and Milwaukee’s near-Southside. We are working among the Asian population in such places as Houston, Minneapolis, Manitowoc, and in some of the university communities. We are offering a heavily-subscribed cross-cultural elective to our students at Martin Luther College. We are giving our seminary students opportunity for hands-on cross-cultural experience through participation in the African-American Milwaukee Northside Lutheran Ministries and its Southside Hispanic ministries counterpart. We have given one of our pastors, Allen Sorum of Milwaukee’s Garden Homes Lutheran Church, time off for study on urban ministry. The document that is the result of his study, “Mission and Ministry Across North America,” is helping to guide us in our cross-cultural work. We have just assigned two seminary graduates to a team ministry in New York City.

Yet, even with the progress we have made, there remains much to learn and much to do. May the Lord of the church move and enable us to continue with this all-important work.

4. Learning How to Approach a Postmodern Society with the Gospel

Some are calling our contemporary society a postmodern society. Postmodernism is clearly a strong ally of Satan because it is a philosophy that denies that there is such a thing as truth (except presumably, for the assertion that truth does not exist, which statement, so far as I can figure out, is “true” to a postmodernist). Gene Vieth writes in his book *Postmodern Times*: “The new generation of college graduates has been immersed in this kind of thinking. Our new teachers, journalists, lawyers, judges, and political leaders have been indoctrinated. Many of them are coming out convinced there is no objective meaning and that truth is nothing more than an act of power” (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994, p. 56).

Pastor Steven Degner, in an essay, “Postmodernism and the Gospel,” delivered in 1999 to the Arizona-California District Pastoral Conference, speaks of the frustration of a guest lecturer at the University of California-Santa Barbara, as he taught a course on the philosophy of history to a class of students who had been imbued with postmodernist kind of thinking. The lecturer, a man by the name of Jeffrey Russell, writes:

I tried in vain to get the class to admit that the Sistine Chapel was better than a stick figure I scrawled on the board, that a Bach cantata was better than my toneless humming, that King Lear was better than Roses are Red, Violets are Blue. No way. Some people, they replied, might prefer the stick figure or the

greeting card sentiments. One young woman in the class was particularly bright and later went on to a successful career as a lawyer. She was an oboe player in the Santa Barbara Symphony....I had never done more than look at [an oboe]. I challenged her to bring her oboe, and we'd see whether it was possible to determine whose playing was better. "Some people might prefer the way you played," she responded....At the end of the term, the young woman turned in the best paper in the class. I gave her an A...and she was delighted. But what if I had taken her at her word? What if I had told her, "You are getting a C along with everyone else, because there is no basis on which to judge one paper better than another"?

According to the postmodernist, even words themselves have no objective meaning. The May 22, 2000, issue of *U.S. News and World Report* gives a graphic example of this. Columnist John Leo writes:

The scheduling of a picnic to honor Baseball Hall of Famer Jackie Robinson led to a furor over alleged racism at the State University of New York-Albany. Some 40 students at the university insisted that the word "picnic" originally referred to the racial lynchings of blacks. They were wrong. Picnic comes from a 17th-century French word for a social gathering in which each person brings a different food. But in reply to the 40 protesters, affirmative action director Zaheer Mustafa put out a memo asking all student leaders to refrain from any use of the word *picnic*. "Whether the claims are true or not, the point is the word offended," he said. In publicity for the event honoring Robinson the word picnic was changed to "outing." This offended gay students, so the event formally known as picnic was publicized without a noun describing what was going on.

It is not hard to see that such a philosophy, which blatantly denies the existence of truth and maintains that words mean only what you want them to mean, presents a challenge to the Christian message. For the Christian message consists of words and it testifies that there is such a thing as truth. In fact, not only do we claim that truth exists, but we maintain that Jesus is *the* truth (John 14:6) and that his Word not only *contains* truth but *is* truth (John 17:17).

It strikes me that we are more comfortable in and adept at refuting errors found in Reformed theology and Roman Catholic theology, which maintain that there is such a thing as truth, than we are in facing a philosophy which doesn't even say, "I won't believe it until you prove it," but rather states that nothing can be proven because truth per se does not exist.

Learning how to approach a postmodern society with the gospel is certainly a major challenge facing all Christians in general and we of the WELS in particular.

5. Utilizing More Fully the Vast Reservoir of Laymen and Laywomen in the Home and World Mission Program of the Church

Priesthood of Believers

We mentioned earlier that one of the blessings of the synod's study of the Scriptures on the subject of church and ministry in the early 1900s was that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was put into sharper focus. While every Christian is not a public minister of the gospel, if you are a Christian you are a priest of God to whom the Lord has given the

commission to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2: 9).

We are still growing into a full appreciation and practical application of this truth, but we have, by God’s grace, come a long ways since 1850 when the Wisconsin Synod was organized as the German Evangelical Lutheran *Ministerium* of Wisconsin. We began as a church body that was for the most part controlled by and run by the pastors.

That has changed. Today, for example, of the 21 members of the Synodical Council, twelve are laymen, one from each district of the synod. Laymen thus form the majority of the Synodical Council, which is responsible for planning the synod’s work and for preparing the synod’s program and budget to present to the synod convention. The synod convention likewise has a larger lay involvement today than in the past. By synodical resolution 50% of the delegates are required to be laymen.

In my opinion this is a most healthy development, an indication that the pastors of the synod have confidence in the ability of the laity to serve the Lord capably and responsibly and that lay people recognize that they, too, are a vital part of our church body who have gifts that can and should be utilized for the advancement of the gospel.

Lay Evangelism

A major emphasis on the use of laymen and laywomen in outreach with the gospel began with a memorial to a synod convention from the Milwaukee City Pastoral Conference. The memorial requested the synod to create a synodical evangelism committee. It spoke of the laity as “a vast, unused reservoir for personal evangelism work.” It mentioned “our present pastoral shortage” which “emphasizes the urgent need of employing our laity for this work.” The 1957 synod convention received this memorial favorably and created a synodical evangelism committee.

Not long thereafter each district also formed an evangelism committee, the Michigan District being for some years the most active and creative. Materials emanating from this district such as “Talk About the Savior” were distributed and used throughout the synod.

In 1984, the synod called its first full-time evangelism administrator, Pastor Paul Kelm, who was subsequently replaced by Pastor Robert Hartman. And in the same year the call the undersigned received from the seminary asked him to teach, in addition to New Testament, pastoral theology *with emphasis in evangelism*. Professor Daniel Leyrer is now working into that position.

Yet, in spite of much effort that has gone into giving laymen and laywomen the opportunity to be trained in evangelism, it strikes me that what Pastor Reuel Schulz, former chairman of the WELS Commission on Evangelism, said in a 1978 paper entitled, “Evangelism in the WELS,” would still have to be said today. Schulz writes: “It seems to me that most of the rank and file members of our church body remain uninvolved, unchallenged, and untrained in evangelism in the narrow sense of personal proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian.” At pastoral conferences, I often ask the pastors present, “How many of you utilize the gifts of some of your lay people in making calls on visitors to the church and other ‘prospects’?” Usually the percentage of pastors who say they do this is quite small. We still have work to do in utilizing more fully this “vast reservoir for personal mission work” in our congregations.

Kingdom Workers

Another most promising use of lay people in mission work in recent years has centered in the work being done by WELS Kingdom Workers. It was in 1987 that the synod convention encouraged the organization of the lay organization that became Kingdom Workers. In 1988, in Muskego, WI, Kingdom Workers was formally organized, and in 1989 it was registered with the State of Wisconsin as a non-profit corporation.

Kingdom Workers works very closely with the Boards for Home and World Missions. It will, in fact, carry on no projects that have not been approved by one of these two boards. In recent years, in addition to providing funds to finance non-budgetary mission programs, Kingdom Workers has been supplying lay volunteers for short-term service in both home and world mission fields. At the end of 1999 our 120-person world mission team included 30 lay volunteers. Builders for Christ, which began in 1990, and is a part of Kingdom Workers, provides people power to construct buildings for our home mission congregations at considerable savings to the congregations.

We also could include here the work of the ladies of our synod in establishing and maintaining the Lutheran Church of Central Africa Medical Mission, concerning which we will have more to say below.

6. Increasing the Movement towards Full Indigeneity on the Part of Our World Mission Churches

It is truly a blessing of God that we are now working in 24 different mission fields. Yet we have touched just the tip of the iceberg. Of the six billion people now living on earth, only around 20% of them embrace Christianity.

We cannot reach all of these people, of course, but we can perhaps reach more than we are at present. The number of missionaries we can send out, however, and the number of dollars available for mission outreach are limited. One way to expand our world mission outreach, therefore, is to bring our current mission fields to a point where they can function on their own, or at least with a minimal level of assistance from the WELS.

As of this date, none of our world mission fields has become a totally indigenous church body (defined as a self-administering, self-propagating, self-financing, and self-disciplining church). The Board for World Missions is addressing that issue at the current time. Through its Committee for Mission Expansion (CME) it recently prepared and sent out to each mission field a form entitled "Measuring Progress toward Indigeneity." This measuring tool contains 28 "benchmarks" that the missionaries on the field, together with the national church, are asked to rank on a scale of 1-7 to indicate where the field is at present in achieving the particular benchmark.

The CME will be studying each of the mission fields' responses to these 28 benchmarks. Then we will formulate a plan of action and take it to the entire BWM. Please join in prayer that we see a growing number of our world mission fields reach the point of near or total indigeneity that we might re-deploy our missionaries and utilize our world mission dollars in other areas desperately needing the gospel.

7. Properly Using Humanitarian Aid in the Cause of Missions

Providing humanitarian aid on the mission field is nothing new for the WELS. The roots of the East Fork Nursery (now closed) in our Apache Mission go back into the 1920s. In 1957 the

synod in convention approved the opening of a medical mission in Africa, and in 1961 the Lumano (now called the Mwembezhi) Lutheran Dispensary was opened outside of Lusaka, Zambia. In 1970 this work was expanded to Malawi, when a medical dispensary was set up on a site alongside of Lake Malawi. (In 1982 the headquarters of the Lutheran Mobile Clinic, as it has come to be known, was moved to Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi.) Supported by the women of the WELS, the medical mission in Africa has continued in operation until this day. Many faithful nurses from the WELS have served in these medical missions over the years, putting into practice the words of Jesus, "I was sick and you looked after me" (Matthew 25:36).

The writer of the chapter on WELS mission work in Africa in *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* comments on the blessings of our humanitarian work in central Africa:

How well has the medical program served its stated purpose as an arm of the mission? The program stands in its own right as a ministry of mercy and compassion. An older African one day told one of our nurses, "If you were not here, we would be dying like flies." As an arm of the mission the medical program has shown the love of Christ to the people and in this way has helped break down some barriers to the gospel.

Not to be forgotten is the direct gospel ministry carried on at the clinics through the daily devotions in God's Word led by men like the now sainted Solomon Bimbe, the spiritual counsel for the ailing and their families, as well as the emergency baptisms of many babies at the clinics. A small chapel was set up in the Lumano Dispensary for providing spiritual counsel and comfort. The angels of heaven have been given good reason to rejoice at the healing of souls as well as of bodies that has occurred through the years in the medical mission program (p.198).

Recently, in 1998, the BWM resolved to create a Humanitarian Aid Committee with the threefold purpose of 1) encouraging and promoting humanitarian work in our various world mission fields within the parameters established by the BWM; 2) assisting and advising the administrative committees with regard to questions of fund raising and administration so that humanitarian work does not become a major, time-consuming issue for the administrative committees or the missionaries; and 3) evaluating all humanitarian efforts in our world mission fields from the perspective of their balance, effectiveness, or possible hindrance to the Means of Grace ministry.

All three of these purposes are important, as was brought out nicely in a paper presented by Missionary John Sullivan in 1996 to the WELS world mission conference in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. After clearly bringing out that "the objective of our mission activity is to make and nurture disciples for Christ through the preaching of the gospel," Missionary Sullivan then pointed to the benefits of engaging in humanitarian efforts on the world mission field. Among the benefits he lists the following:

- If our light shines before men, they will see our good deeds and perhaps ultimately praise our Father in heaven.
- A charitable assistance program provides a point of contact for the gospel, a bridge, or approach, to bring Christ to the unbeliever.
- Humanitarian aid can reassure suspicious authorities, who cannot appreciate the treasure we are offering with the gospel. In this way it also serves the preaching of

the gospel by helping to create a climate in which we can peacefully proclaim the message of salvation.

Sullivan also lists certain dangers and pitfalls to be avoided:

- There is the danger that an ongoing charitable program can gradually demand more and more time, attention, energy, and money, resulting in a shift from the mission's main purpose and objective, the saving of souls. Since this is more visible than the spiritual rescue that the gospel effects, it can easily come to be perceived as more important.
- Humanitarian aid can sometimes backfire. It may be perceived by others as a deceitful means to an end. The line between building bridges and buying allegiance is not always easy to see, especially when we cannot be sure of what the recipient is thinking.
- The reputation of our humanitarian services may become so great that we become known as the church or mission that distributes mission supplies, does pregnancy counseling, runs food stores, etc., rather than the church that preaches the gospel and offers comfort, forgiveness, and eternal hope to sinners.

What Missionary Sullivan writes about humanitarian efforts on the *world* mission field applies equally to our work here in the United States. The continual challenge before us will be to keep a proper balance. May the Lord give us wisdom to keep on a course that continues to give priority to the needs of people's souls without neglecting the needs of their bodies.

8. Using Alternate Forms of Ministry to Reach the Otherwise Unreachable

In a brief paper written in 1990, entitled "Embryonic Thoughts on Alternate Mission Methods," now-sainted BWM member Pastor Leonard Koeninger wrote, "With rising costs of placing expatriates in a field and with some countries increasingly difficult to enter, it would appear that alternate mission methods ought to be explored and considered." He then listed some possible alternate mission strategies. With our Lord's return drawing closer with every passing day, it has become increasingly important that we become more and more creative in our attempts to bring the gospel to as many people as possible, including those living in areas closed to traditional mission work, nations such as China and the various Muslim countries of the world.

If Pastor Koeninger were alive today, he would undoubtedly be pleased to see that the BWM has adopted many of his suggestions and has added even more. The following are some of the alternate mission strategies being utilized today to one degree or another by the BWM, or that are at least under consideration. In some situations they are being utilized in conjunction with our traditional expatriate-missionary-onsite-approach and in others as stand-alone strategies.

- Sending short-term teaching or outreach missionaries to assist a national church. This is being done in such countries as Cuba, Haiti, Nigeria, Cameroon, and in Scandinavia.
- Sending lay persons for a special ministry complementing field mission work. As mentioned previously, at the end of 1999 thirty WELS lay people were serving as

volunteers in several of our world mission fields. This is one of the most exciting developments in recent years. It has the potential to grow greatly.

- Sending a team for a limited time to explore opportunities for outreach. This has become the standard approach for entering a new field. After a two-year exploratory period, a decision is made whether or not to enter the field permanently. A few years back Thailand became an official mission of WELS after such a two-year exploration.
- Training nationals in the United States for evangelizing their home country. This is a major element of our outreach to international students on U. S. campuses—to help international converts to Christianity to become informal missionaries when they return to their own countries.
- Christian Information Centers, bookstores, etc. We are following this approach in several countries, e.g., Colombia, Bulgaria, Russia.
- Christian Correspondence Program. The idea is to connect individual WELS members with inquirers around the world and to let them share the gospel with them via correspondence. This is still in the embryonic stage of development.
- Regular two-week (or more) teaching seminars. This is being done to assist with work in such countries as Russia, Bulgaria, Japan, and India. Forward in Christ offerings will enable us to expand this program.
- Developing new radio and/or T.V. programs. A proposal for a world-wide WELS radio program is before the BWM right now.
- Managing a school for the government. We are doing this in Hong Kong. In addition, some of our WELS members have served as teachers (and informal missionaries) in public or private schools in such places as Thailand, Indonesia, and Colombia. The BWM is seeking two couples right now to teach in the United Arab Emirates, an Arab country.
- Study and outreach centers. This has become a major way by which we carry out our work in Hong Kong and in several other countries.
- Business person outreach. The idea, not yet implemented, is to provide some basic cross-cultural and evangelism training for WELS businessmen and businesswomen who spend time overseas, especially for those whose work takes them to countries where we are unable to send missionaries. As the opportunity arises, they could in an informal way share the gospel with people.
- Bible translators. This is another idea that is yet to be implemented: To send translation teams into areas that as yet have no Bible in their language. They would work among the people, learn their language, and gradually put the Word of God into the tongue of those among whom they are living.
- Distribution of Christian literature. In 1996 the Board for World Missions formed a Multi-Language Publications Committee. The committee was asked to “provide a comprehensive listing and production of confessional Christian literature and other mass media in the languages of countries where the WELS is working and other areas or language groups where we may never work.” Under the capable leadership of its project coordinator, retired pastor and missionary Harold Essmann, in less than five years this program has, among other things,
 - established a large database of foreign language materials known as the World Mission Collection, housed in the library of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

- translated and published books and other literature in as many as 22 languages
- supported the establishment of translation teams in five different languages

It is truly amazing what has been accomplished within this short time span.

There may well be other alternate mission strategies to pursue. The intent is that, as the Apostle Paul put it, “by all possible means” we might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22).

9. Holding On to Our Biblical, Confessional Lutheran Theology

This essay has been about moving forward in Christ, about the advance of the gospel in the WELS during the first 150 years of our existence. We need to continually remind ourselves that the only way we can move forward in a God-pleasing manner is to move forward *in Christ*, that is, within the framework of his will and Word. And we dare not forget that the only God-pleasing advance is the advance of *the gospel*.

Satan will always be tempting us to take shortcuts, to adopt the ways of the world to produce outward, external results. God, however, works in only one way: through the gospel in his Word and Sacraments. Such is the teaching of the Scriptures. Such, therefore, is the testimony of our Lutheran Confessions, as Luther so solemnly insists in the Smalcald Articles: “We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and Sacrament” (Part III, art. VIII, 10).

Get the Word out. Let the gospel advance to ever-widening circles of people. That’s what it means to move forward in Christ. Let God “worry” about the results. We plant the seed; God makes it grow. We let down the net; God fills it. The Word will produce its own results because the almighty God himself stands behind it.

10. Recognizing That We Are Working Against the Clock

“Night is coming, when no one can work,” Jesus tells us (John 9:4). Recognizing this to be true, our WELS *World Mission Handbook* states: “Our King’s business requires haste. The time for doing the Lord’s bidding in an intensive mission program is running out. The Lord, who has placed the sacred trust of his Word into our hands, has also blessed us with religious freedom, peace, and material blessings. His faithful followers will heed his warning and redouble their efforts to preach the gospel in all the world before it is too late.”

In *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language and People*, the first administrator of the WELS Board for World Missions, Edgar Hoenecke, quotes an old German field marshal by the name of Bluecher: “Our battle cry must always be ‘Vorwaerts!’” (p. 279)—forward in Christ with the gospel while there still is time. May the Lord give us continuing zeal and means for this, *the work of the church*.

For Further Reading:

To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People—A Century of WELS Missions, multiple authors (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992).

The History of the Wisconsin Synod [1850-1930], by John Philip Koehler (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970).

Continuing in His Word, a history of WELS 1850-1950 (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1951).

You and Your Synod (Milwaukee WELS Board for Parish Education, 1961).

The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, by Edward C. Fredrich (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1992).