

Our Continuing Mission to India:

The Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India



Senior Church History Thesis

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Acknowledgements

The writing of this paper involved a number of persons. To begin with, I would like to make mention of Pastor and Mrs. Eugene Kauffeld. Their contribution through a personal interview gave me insight into the living, breathing character of our new mission, LMSI. There were so many faces and names connected with this mission that I didn't know where to begin. An equal mention of appreciation is extended to Mr. James Haag, Financial Secretary for the Committee for India Missions, and also to Mr. and Mrs. Krupavaram Pudi who also graciously granted me their time for a personal interview.

A special word of thanks to Pastor John Kurth, Coordinator for Mission Training, for granting me a very helpful phone interview. And finally, a word of thanks to both Pastor Kurth and Professor John Hartwig, Chairman of the Committee for India Missions, for offering their time to review the preliminary manuscript.

To all, sincere thanks for helping to bring the following story to me and into the reader's hands.

When India declared its independence in 1947, the wording of the Constitution reflected the fact that Indian people are basically free to worship as they choose. Accordingly, in India you will find Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and others. India represents the largest democratic style government in the world in which even Christianity has been allowed to take root. In fact, Christianity has had a presence in India for centuries. Believe it or not, the San Thome Cathedral, close to the sea front in Madras, is said to house the remains of Thomas the Apostle. The simple fact is India has always benefited from at least some kind of Christian mission work for at least 400 years. The arrival of William Carey in 1793, called by many the "father of modern missions", marked the beginning of the steady work carried on by the European missionary societies. India allows people to worship mostly as they choose, and yet, the people of India are far from being spiritually free.

As children of the Father, we know that true freedom originates in, and proceeds from His heart through the gospel. Sadly, in India's case, the very day she declared her independence, she also drastically limited the role that Christian missionaries can play in the country. Even though the church in India has a rich and very long history, India remains steeped in false religion. India's population of over 952 million (1997 est.) is dominated by Hinduism, so that Christian adherents comprise but 2.7% of the overall population.

This paper will review and update the history of the role the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has played in bringing the gospel to India. This study especially highlights God's love in action in our newest mission in India, "The Lutheran Mission of

Salvation, India. By God's grace and mercy, our mission endeavor in India, while continuing to be full of challenges, is also one that is teeming with opportunity.

I. India Past and Present

The Birth of The Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India and Other Early WELS Involvement.

Early Exploration

The usual course of action when beginning world mission work is to sow the seed of the Word in order to gather believers around the gospel. However, beginning in 1994, representatives of the WELS began a series of visits to a mission field with the mission already in it. After one of the final visits (1996), one of the WELS delegates, Pastor Harold A. Essmann, wrote these introductory words in a report summarizing their October, 1996 visitation:

Today is Reformation Day commemorating the nailing of the ninety-five theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg by Martin Luther. The cornerstone of the Reformation was laid in the three words -- Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Sola Scriptura. It was those three solas that were stressed during our visitation to India from October 6 through October 28. . . Our purpose was to determine if the Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India could be used as a basis for extending the mission work of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in that country. This report gives us the answer. We pray that wherever our Lutheran church establishes missions, the three solas will ring out clearly based on the scripture verses from Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."¹

In that same report it was recommended that:

The work of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India in the Rajamundry, Hyderabad and Jabalpur areas be accepted by the Committee for Mission Expansion as an exploratory mission for up to two years. During this time the needs expressed in this report need to be addressed. At the end of this period of time, a decision would be made as to whether

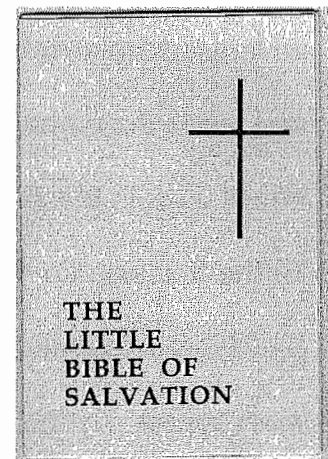
¹ Comments of Pastor Essmann in "Mission Visit", p.1. This visitation report was prepared for the WELS Committee for Mission Expansion. October 6-28, 1996 visit to India.

this work will become an on-going part of the mission outreach of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.²

Two years later in 1998, it was officially determined that the Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India (hereafter LMSI), was to officially become an official mission of the WELS. Let us turn back a number of years to see how the mission was born, and where appropriate, make a connection with the historical development of our other work in India.

How the Mission was Born - "The Little Bible of Salvation"

In 1971, a retired minister (LCMS) by the name of J. Einar Bach published a small pamphlet entitled, "The Little Bible of Salvation." The pamphlet itself is in booklet form, and fits easily into the palm of one's hand. It was initially meant to be used in our country as a personal evangelism tool. Rev. Bach had left some copies with the Concordia Tract Society in St. Louis, Missouri. He recalls that:



One day, a young man from India wrote to Concordia Tract Society and asked for free literature to give to the people of India as he tried to establish a Christian witness among the people. "The Little Bible of Salvation" was thus sent to India.³

This request for the booklet came from a man residing in the village of Kesavaram, near Rajamundry in the Telegu state of Andhra Pradesh. The man requested money to print the "bibles" in the native language of the people, Telegu, for free distribution. One room in the man's home served as the "Bible center" where the outreach materials were stored. After this went on for some time, the man also told Bach about a home he was

² Ibid., p.13.

³ J. Einar Bach. "Mission to Kesevaram: How the Little Bible of Salvation Brought the Good News to India," R.C. Law & Co., Inc: Fullerton, California, 1990.

maintaining in Kesevaram for indigent children. Bach enlisted American congregational support and sent clothing and \$30 a month to help take care of the children. The mission still had no name, and Bach himself had not even had the chance to visit to see things in person.

In October 1979, Rev. Bach made his first trip to India. He was a guest of the India Bible League, an inter-denominational organization with the goal of making the Bible available to every home in India. Just prior to Bach's arrival, the people in the village had advertised the mission as, "The Rev. J. Einar Bach Memorial Bible Center." Bach arrived and pared the name down to "The Little Bible of Salvation Center." Not long after his arrival back in the states, he began drumming up more and more congregational support for the "mission" in Kesevaram. Eventually, the tract ministry using "The Little Bible of Salvation" expanded to other villages so that numbers increased. More and more people were added. By the time someone from the WELS came into contact with the mission, Bach claimed membership to be at about 250,000! But it was uncertain as to how many could really be called "members." Many had been heavily influenced by Pentecostal, Baptist or Seventh-Day Adventist teaching. Much "seed-scattering" had been done, but there was little organization or nurturing being done for those who had come to the mission for help, or who were baptized into the faith. While there were undoubtedly many sincere people involved with the mission, there were also many who might be referred to as "rice Christians." In other words, they were people who came because they were poor and saw the mission as a source of relief from poverty or a way to obtain an education on the way to a better life.

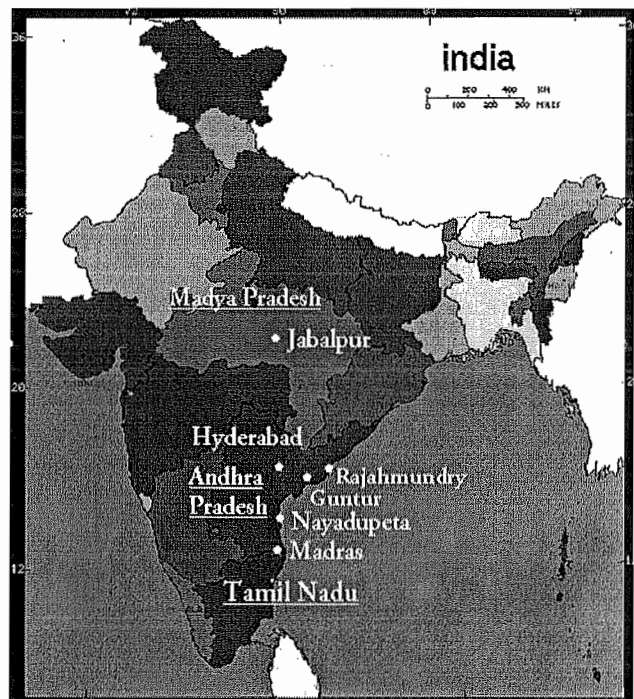
The challenge: How could our little synod with limited man-power and funds, bring order out of chaos in such a mission as LMSI? A decision to make a commitment to such a large mission certainly was not an easy one. More will be said later about the actual events that lead to LMSI's official status as a WELS mission. But at this point, it is interesting to turn aside in order to see the way our other WELS missions were established in the Madras, Nayadupeta and Guntur areas. It may be helpful to refer to the map below as the various places of outreach are discussed. In these fields, our synod was learning about Indian missions and maturing through the years. During these years the Spirit was preparing us so that we would be able to move sensibly in taking on a massive mission such as LMSI. This will also prove helpful in discussing the WELS philosophy behind the way we carry on world outreach in a particular field.

Madras - T. Paul Mitra

Our basic goal in doing mission work is to gather people around the Word and sacraments in order to plant churches. Our basic philosophy which has this goal in mind may be boiled down into three words:

"Train, Teach and Reach."

For years and years, the only avenue we had to India was through a national



pastor by the name of T. Paul Mitra⁴. One early report of Mitra in Madras:

Mitra is doctrinally sound. At the same time, it must be said that this man possesses such an abundant zeal to tell people of Christ that we feel it may be difficult to restrict him to the type of ministry we practice. His present zeal to speak of Christ to all men outweighs, for him, our pattern of additional private word nourishment and cultivation in order to establish a strong nucleus of Christians. It wasn't unusual, when in his presence, to have him wander off and speak to people, approaching them with the question, "My dear friend, have you heard of Jesus Christ?" When asked what led him to such enthusiastic evangelism, he stated, "I may never see that person again, and on Judgment Day, my Lord may ask me why I didn't use this opportunity to bring him to His Savior." We do feel that Mr. Mitra, together with his wife, would be more inclined to train more fully their people in Christian doctrine, provided they had ample quarters to do the same."⁵

In 1971, Mitra was invited to begin a course of study at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

That same year he was ordained by the WELS and called to serve as our first national pastor in India. Our prayers went with Mitra as he returned to India. WELS subsidy for Mitra's work provided funds for the purchase of transportation and land for a house and chapel. There were high hopes that he would be able to extend the work he was doing in Madras. Unfortunately, the reports of following years tell a rather depressing story.

Things in Madras began to stagnate. In 1976 there is evidence of attempts made by the S.E. Asian Missions Counselor, John Chworowsky, to not only encourage Mitra in his work, but also to join him with other contacts we had made in the area⁶. Still, things didn't improve. In addition, he cut himself off from regular communication with the mission board so that finally, the 1987 report to the convention floor read, "News from our contact

⁴ Former seminarian, Michael P. Bartsch, chronicles the history of Mitra and his work in a paper written in 1984 for partial requirement in senior Church History at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Some recent information has been added here in an attempt to fill in some of the history where it was evident that archival material was limited.

⁵ L.J. Koeninger files, 1969-1970. "Executive Committee for Chinese Missions." November, 1969 Field Visitation Report," p.7. (WLS Archives: World Missions Division; Southeast Asia Committee; India--1968-1989).

⁶ In 1974 John Chworowsky, missionary to Hong Kong, was also called to serve as the "Friendly Counselor" for the S.E. Asia Committee encouraging and supporting our workers in the various S. E. Asian stations. Chworowsky attempted to join Mitra with others like Kaki Devabhusanam who was also in Madras at the time. This will be mentioned in greater detail in the next section on Devabhusanam's work in Nayadupeta.

person in India is virtually non-existent.”⁷ One writer summarized this period of time of our work in India this way:

It is hard to know whether this chapter of WELS mission history is slowly being closed or just beginning to unfold. So far our experiences have been disheartening.⁸

Only a Ray of Hope

For years there were mostly words of frustration in many of the reports summarizing our work in Madras: *"India seems to be a huge problem which seemingly defies solutions."*⁹ In 1989, the work in India was transferred to the Committee for Interim Missions since we had no WELS expatriate in the country. If there was any hope for the future in India during the late 1970's and early 1980's, it was to be found in the new contacts we were establishing with others, both at home and abroad in India.

The first contact after Mitra was a man who went on to start a series congregations located in the Nayadupeta area. In fact, every one of his village churches is the only Christian church in that immediate area. His name is Pastor Kaki Devabhushanam. He is involved in work with several groups there who are all converts from Hinduism.

Missionary John Chworowsky, mentioned above in connection with T. Paul Mitra, made

⁷ Cf. 1987 BoRaM, World Missions division, "Report of the Executive Committee for Southeast Asia", p.75.

⁸ Cf. "To Every Nation, Tribe, Language and People." Harold H. John and E. H. Wendland, editors. Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1992. No doubt Missionary Chworowsky also knew by this time, along with the Executive Committee, that for various clear reasons, we had to look for other contacts in India in addition to Mitra. As the years went by Mitra chose not to stay in regular contact with the WELS mission board. Mitra encountered a number of factors such as natural disasters, famine, poor health and rejection to his witness--all of which took their toll on Mitra. More recently, Mitra's congregation is struggling with how much it should support him in his retirement years. As a result, Mitra (now 77 yrs. old) has reached out to us for help in this situation. At present, we continue to encourage Mitra as always, and have been sending him regular support. We pray that he will be able to nurture his flock in this important matter of Christian stewardship. We continue to thank the Lord for the many things he has accomplished through this man during his long, and many times, very trying ministry in very difficult circumstances.

⁹ Cf. 1987 BoRaM, World Missions division, "Report of the Executive Committee for Southeast Asia", p.75.

first contact with Devabhushanam. After a December, 1975 visit to Madras as "Friendly Counselor", Chworowsky reported:

Through our attorney Mr. Das, who studies part time at the Lutheran Seminary in Madras, I met a man who serves as a teacher in the municipal government, but who holds a diploma from the Lutheran Seminary in Madras. He is a member of the South Andrah Lutheran Church, a group rather loosely connected with the A.L.C.. His name is K. Devabhushanam. He claims he is independent of any larger church body, and that he finds himself completely in accord with our synod's doctrinal position as summarized in "This We Believe."

Mr. Das claims that Devabhushanam is a totally dependable man, is capable and will prove to be a good and faithful worker.¹⁰

Efforts were made to obtain more information about this new prospective worker and to further confirm his doctrinal stance. Missionary Chworowsky wrote Pastor Mitra from Hong Kong about the possibility of meeting with Devabhushanam, and one other contact made at about the same time:

The Lord seems to be indicating the possibility of combining your work with that of K. Devabhushanam, and Rev. V.J. Emmanuel. It appears that both men are ready to join hands with us, and there have been evidences too, that they confess orthodox Lutheran Christian faith, at least to the degree that we have discussed doctrine and practice with them.

As the Executive Committee emphasized during their visit, however, the final answer to whether unity of faith does exist could best be given after on-going discussions with the three of you over the next few months, and then a possible pastoral conference between you three and the missionaries from Hong Kong.¹¹

The efforts to learn more about Rev. Devabhushanam revealed that he enjoyed the good report of those he served and who knew him. In the process we learned that the South Andrah Lutheran Church, which Devabhushanam was loosely affiliated with, had been in turmoil. The A.L.C. (U.S.A.) had recently withdrawn their support of the Indian

¹⁰ L.J. Koening files, 1975-1977. "Executive Committee for Chinese Missions, January 2, 1975. Field Visitation Report, p.2. (WLS Archives: World Missions Division; Southeast Asia Committee; India--1968-1989). Earlier on, while he was working as the headmaster of a middle school, Devabhushanam decided to take night classes at a nearby seminary to prepare himself for the ministry. In time he began his own rooftop church in Madras.

¹¹ Ibid., Letter of Missionary John Chworowsky to Pastor T. Paul Mitra, June 16, 1976.

churches, and national pastors like Devabhushanam and Emmanuel had been forced to either resign or seek support elsewhere. This helped to explain why they were looking to the WELS at that time. As we shall see, we can thank the Lord that he guided us to this faithful servant.

It is appropriate at this point to interject a thought. It must be kept in mind that people may look to Christianity for all kinds of different reasons. Just as in the case of "rice Christians" seeking help from L.M.S.I. early on in its inception, there are many reasons that workers too, may want to join hands with our synod from time to time. As anxious as we were to keep things going in India, Scripture reminds us, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22). Our mission board has learned to seek out or to carefully train men as pastors and missionaries. God's Word is the determining factor for success in a mission field. This is why the WELS philosophy for world mission work is so concerned with maintaining pure doctrine and practice, in love; without God's pure Word, souls cannot be won for Christ. This is always the key issue. This brings us back to the words of Pastor Essmann at the beginning of our treatment of LMSI; the three solas of Lutheran teaching guide us in all that we do. Later, when we return to a discussion of worker training and nurture in connection with LMSI, we will stress these thoughts once again.

Pastor Kaki Devabhushanam went on to play a vital role in our continuing mission to bring the gospel to the multiplied millions living in spiritual poverty in India. Pastor Devabhushanam moved from Madras back to his home town of Nayadapeta to continue his ministry there. He also is training his two sons, Michael and Zaccharias, to continue his work some day. It should also be added that T. Paul Mitra has been busy training two

young men, V. Daniel and D. John, to carry on work as evangelists in a similar way in Madras. The Lord has blessed these men and we hope that they too, will further their training to become pastors one day. These new contacts, along with the others that we have made, have offered us a ray of hope in India.

Full Speed Ahead!

July 16, 1995 was an important milestone in the history of WELS mission work in India. Upon completion of a colloquy (including a year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary), Pastor Rao Dasari became the first WELS expatriate missionary to be commissioned to India.¹² Presently, Rev. Dasari (age 57) helps to oversee the work of 20 different congregations which unite together to form "The Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India." Membership is about 3000 souls (1996 report). Dasari also helps to maintain a home for needy children (57), and he oversees a full-time seminary training program at Guntur (20+ presently enrolled).

How did we first come into contact with Pastor Rao Dasari? The earliest correspondence seems to be in 1984 when Dasari requested a meeting with the Board for World Missions. His case is another example of the way our mission board learned to carefully confirm, on many different levels, that we have a committed brother in the faith who will work for us in the field. Various issues were brought up in the meetings that were

¹² Cf. "The Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India", by Pastor Rao Dasari. Dasari offers a summary of the history of how he came to the WELS and also traces the history of his congregation founded in Guntur. This paper was written in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Senior Church History, and can be found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library file for senior Church History papers. (See also Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1996 Vol. 93:1, pp.38-41. Here Prof. David Valleskey offers an informative summary of Dasari and our history in India. He also gives helpful background concerning the liberal religious scene that our workers face in India.)

considered over a period of ten years! In the year just before we welcomed Pastor Dasari to the seminary for colloquy, one member of the WELS Committee for Mission Expansion gave this evaluation of Dasari after a visit to Guntur in April, 1994:

I can hardly speak highly enough about Rao Dasari. On this trip he showed himself to be a godly man, a solid theologian, and evangelical in his approach. He is intelligent, discerning, and relates well to people. We would be remiss, in my opinion, if we did not utilize his gifts in India. . .It appears as though the Lord is laying this opportunity right in our lap right now for expanding the work we are presently doing in only rudimentary fashion in India.¹³

Once Dasari attended the seminary and was commissioned he wrote these words in his letter of acceptance of the divine call:

In obedience to my Savior's call extended on May 24, 1995. . .I do hereby accept it on this day. . .along with my wife Devakaruna trusting in He who began a good work in me and will continue it till the day of His coming. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." May God help me as I adhere to his exhortation "watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." Yours truly in Christ, Pastor Bhushana Rao Dasari¹⁴

Once Dasari returned to the field, the Mission Board entered into a critical time for our India work. Careful steps had to be taken to insure that Pastor Dasari and his wife would have all the support they needed. A special Indian sub-committee was formed with its sole objective of overseeing and assisting where needed in the field. All too easily, the administrative work, record-keeping, pastoral calls, upkeep of the orphanage, and organization of the new seminary could prove to be too overwhelming for two people. Visitation teams are regularly sent from the U.S. to see things firsthand, and to help Dasari orchestrate things.

¹³ "Report on India Trip", March 30 - April 16, 1994. Prepared by Prof. David Valleskey for the Committee for Mission Expansion.

¹⁴ Excerpt of letter from Pastor Rao Dasari to CME. May 26, 1995.

Across the miles

The biggest challenge for the mission board, aside from the obvious cultural and language barriers, is perhaps the barrier imposed by distance. Since India does not allow permanent foreign missionaries in the field, it is all the more crucial that we do what we can from a distance well—and of course, pray! This “working-at-a-distance” approach isn’t ideal, but for now it is our only option in India. The next two people we will meet are mentioned simply because they are examples of the way the mission board is improvising when it comes to enhancing our effectiveness in India across the miles.

Meet Mr. And Mrs. Krupavaram Pudi. They were born in villages close to Madras and have been life-long Christians. They came into contact with us while they were searching for a new church home in the Chicago area. While the Pudis have been in the U.S. for 28 years, they have connections with some Lutheran churches and preaching stations in India. They help their family back in India support a church and orphanage there. How are these two Christians helping in our WELS mission in India? For one thing, they have experience in running a church and orphanage in India. In addition, their broad knowledge of Indian people, culture and language, qualify them as ideal consultants in the field for us. In fact they just returned recently from a visitation to the villages associated with LMSI. Placing these two Christians where they can help, is a prime example of the way the mission board is improvising in order to increase our effectiveness in a field that we must manage across the miles. Their contribution leads us back to a discussion of the latest, and most exciting new chapter in the history of the WELS in India.

II. New Developments and Challenges

The Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India

God's People Respond

We now take up the story relating the series of events leading up to the time LMSI became a WELS mission. The story begins with two faithful servants of the Lord, Pastor and Mrs. Eugene Kauffeld. Considerable space is devoted to the background and faithful contribution of these two individuals. While they received helpful counsel and support from representatives of the WELS Board for World Missions (BWM), not enough can be said about the way the Lord used them to bring LMSI into the care of the WELS.

Pastor Kauffeld was born in Southern India, the son of a Missouri Synod missionary stationed there. He spent all of his early years in India and came to know and love the Indian people. Later, Kauffeld trained for the ministry and was planning to come back to India in order to share the gospel in India just as his father had done. Unfortunately, the year before he was to be commissioned, the door was closed to foreign missionaries in India. After some time serving as a pastor in the LCMS, Pastor Kauffeld left Missouri because of its doctrinal stance. In time he found a place in the WELS.

Pastor Kauffeld was called to serve St. John's Lutheran in Watertown. For many years he had hoped to return to India; he dreamed of being able to show his wife, Julie where he had grown up as a boy. Finally his dream came true. In recognition and heartfelt appreciation for 25 years of service in the ministry, the congregation gathered a special offering to send the Kauffelds to India. At this time the Kauffelds did not realize that this trip would be opening up a new chapter in their lives. Just before they left together on their trip in April of 1993, Pastor Kauffeld's sister told him about

Rev. Einar Bach's work, 300 miles to the north of Madras in Rajahmudry, then called "Little Bible of Salvation Mission." Bach had offered the task of supervising the mission to the LCMS, but they declined. Upon their return from India, Bach approached Kauffeld on the matter of taking over the work at LMSI. Soon after this, Kauffeld wrote these words concerning his deliberation over this opportunity to serve:

I can't explain the feeling that came over me as time went on. I felt compelled to go. I prayed a great deal about it, but the feelings just became stronger. It was as though God was saying "Go!" I was raised in India and love India. It is like a home to me. . . Now at the end of my ministry, I feel he is telling me to use what he has taught me in the greatest task of my life. . .It is the strangest feeling of my life. I can't say "no". What the future holds, I don't know. I'll leave that up to him. He will guide and bless.¹⁵

Once a decision was made to commit to the task of serving LMSI, the Kauffelds planned for their first visit in February of 1994.

A Himalayan Task!

The first order of business was to see the field for themselves. As was to be expected, there were things that were very encouraging and things that were anything but encouraging. The Kauffelds reflect here about some of the more heartening experiences during their first visit in February of 1994:

We saw fellow Christians receive us with open arms; they pressed around us and placed colorful flower leis or garlands around our necks. We saw children gathered into classes sitting at the feet of their teachers in a small area under a thatched roof. For the Sunday service. . .chairs had been set up with an altar at one end. The small room used for church and school was far too small for the crowd of men, women and children who gathered for worship – old men and women bent over with age, a blind man led by another, women in their beautiful saris and children in their Sunday best. The last words we heard from all our new Christian friends were, "Pray for us – pray for us!"¹⁶

¹⁵Excerpt of letter from Pastor Eugene Kauffeld to Prof. David Valleskey (CME), February 3, 1994.

¹⁶ Excerpt from article entitled "Our Mission in India," in the May issue of The Observer, Vol. 41:9, p.3ff. The Observer is published under the auspices of the Public Relations Committee of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Watertown, WI., WELS.

In April of that same year, another visitation was planned to see things again. This time they were joined by a visitation team consisting of Professor David Valleskey from the WELS Committee for Mission Expansion (CME), and Pastor Rao Dasari from our mission in Guntur. Together as “observers” for the CME, they met the Kauffelds and Rev. Einar Bach in Rajahmundry, the base of operations for LMSI. It was during this visit, on Friday the 8th, that there was a “passing of the torch” ceremony, as Kauffeld officially took over as director of the mission. During this visit however, other things became evident at the mission that were not so encouraging.

Just seeing the Rajahmundry area was overwhelming and frightening in itself because of the numbers and the widespread area involved. It became clear that in addition to the challenges of bringing people together and solidifying things, that there was some weeding out to do too. There were some in leadership positions who were lying about, and misappropriating funds sent to the mission. Some were withholding money for their own extended family members, instead of giving it to those who needed it the most. Others were running fictitious orphanages for income. There were a number of creditors making calls on the directors of the mission about unpaid loans, back pay, etc., totaling several thousand dollars. In view of all these things, Professor Valleskey of the CME, had to give this matter-of-fact report of things:

It seems clear that, while there may be some very sincere people involved in the Lutheran Bible of Salvation Ministry, such does not appear to be the case with the present leadership. There is no way at present to determine who is a part of this group, how many belong, what their theological background and training is, what their needs are, etc. From the questions Dasari asked while we were there, his conclusion was that very few, if any, of them are of a Lutheran background. I would not recommend that we involve ourselves with this group at the present time.¹⁷

¹⁷ “Report on India Trip” – Prof. David Valleskey report to CME. March 30-April 16, 1994, pp.5-6.

While our Wisconsin Synod will enter any and every mission field for on-going exploration, it was clear, at least from the standpoint of the CME, there were no easy or short-term solutions to the many problems in LMSI. Gradually, it became clear that the CME and Pastor Kauffeld each had somewhat diametrically opposed views in terms of how things ought to progress in these early stages of our involvement with LMSI. Pastor Kauffeld thought it best at the time that he work independently of the BWM. He felt as though he owed it to Pastor Bach to turn things around as soon as possible. In time there was a gradual wish of the Kauffelds to hand over the work to the WELS since a synod would be in a much better position to offer worker-training and long-term support. But it wouldn't be until October of 1996 that LMSI would be officially recognized as an exploratory mission of the WELS. In the meantime, the Kauffelds procured funds from the Schwan foundation, rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

“The Banyan Tree”

Despite all the corruption and in-fighting mentioned above, the Kauffelds resolved to try to figure out what was real and true in LMSI, and then to determine how to bring the various elements together and begin to place a stress on worker-training. Pastor Kauffeld wrote the members of the mission saying:

It is time for members in villages nearby to join together and build a church in a central location. It doesn't have to be expensive. It can be thatched siding to begin with. As I told you at Kannepuram, you are large enough to form a church body. . .In order to help stabilize the mission we plan to return in October to hold two training sessions of three days each. I will begin teaching some courses in order to begin to prepare men to become certified pastors, teachers and evangelists. My wife will work with the women for Bible women, teachers, evangelists and Sunday School teachers.¹⁸

¹⁸ Letter from Pastor Eugene Kauffeld to workers of “Little Bible of Salvation Mission,” March 1994. During the previous month of February there was also a Constituting Convention for the mission. At this time the mission was given a new name: “The Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India.” This was done in order to disassociate the mission from the rather unfortunate affairs under the previous leadership.

In regard to those members giving the mission and the gospel a bad name, Kauffeld had this to say:

We have some difficult problems to face. . .some workers have been receiving support who are not worthy of support. Some have shown themselves to be pastors, who are not pastors and who do not have a congregation. Some have shown orphan homes under the Lutheran Mission of Salvation who do not have orphan homes. We have been very disappointed and upset to find that we have “bogus” workers in our midst. This cannot and will not continue. As we find out about the bogus work, the support will be removed. . .there have been problems of bribes being asked, bribes being taken.

The growth of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation is not based on how many orphans we feed, the handing out of tracts, the claim by many that they have workers under them, or that they have huge numbers of baptisms. . .The growth of a mission centers in the churches and the congregations. . .It is in the church that the people’s souls are fed and nourished with God’s Word that they may learn of their Savior from sin and their heavenly home. . .We look forward to spending more days with you and helping you in every way we know how to help you build a strong Lutheran Church in India.¹⁹

If LMSI was to develop into a viable mission, steps had to be taken to bring stability by forming congregations rooted in solid Lutheran teaching. If you ask around, many in the mission will still recall an illustration Pastor Kauffeld used to impress this truth upon the people. In a parable-like sermon, he pointed to the “Banyan tree”. The Banyan is a big tree that is unique tree because of the way it grows. No matter how big and tall it gets, it constantly sends out branches which drop down roots from the branches. Each root turns into a trunk—another tree, and keeps extending itself in this way. It was shortly after the people’s first election of new officers that Kauffeld said, “You are a Banyan tree!” He told them that each time they go to God’s Word and to a study of that Word, they are sending down their roots, again and again, nourishing themselves as they continue to extend like a mighty Banyan over all India! On the other hand, a church not firmly rooted in the Word is like a Banyan tree with weak trunks that a strong wind could easily destroy.

¹⁹ Letter printed in Message of Peace, the newsletter for LMSI. February 13, 1994.

Not long after this, in October of 1994, the first of a series of workshops organized in Rajahmundry to teach doctrine and Bible history. These workshops also served as a means of determining who had an aptitude for teaching and preaching. Six days of workshops centered on a study of Luther's Catechism. Kauffeld developed 12 lessons for guided study through the use of a translator (Telegu). Likewise, Mrs. Kauffeld drew upon her many years of experience teaching Sunday School to handle the women's sessions. Each woman received a Sunday School folder containing lessons and teaching aids; complete sets of flannel graphs for the Life of Christ were also freely distributed. And there were other workshops that followed in the months to come. After the February 1995 workshop and Constituting Convention, the Kauffelds wrote:

A strong group is beginning to emerge under a new name, "The Lutheran Mission of Salvation". . .the churches and people. . .are poor tribal people, laborers, not able to support their church or to build a church. Most churches are only thatched huts. . . They are very excited to receive teaching, guidance and badly needed support.²⁰

Tightening and Development

The WELS Committee for Mission Expansion conducted two more important visits in 1995 and 1996. By this time the Kauffelds had made several visits and had conducted workshops in all three major areas of the mission. The work had been supported by the Schwan foundation in the amount of \$250,000 to \$300,000 per year. During the prior two years an effort was made to construct churches, schools and homes for needy children before turning the work over to the WELS.

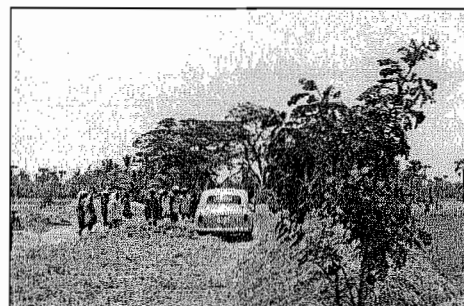
²⁰ The Observer, February, 1995. Most of the poorest members of LMSI live in the Rajahmundry area. Those in and around Hyderabad and Jabalpur are better off. In recent years there has been an on-going effort by the Indian government to gradually bring the people out of the more isolated tribal areas. Government reforms have the aim of trying to educate people and improve medical standards. With this in mind, one can understand why Christian church bodies such as our own are welcomed if they support education and alleviate suffering.

In October of 1995 a CME visitation team arrived consisting of Professor David Valleskey, Pastor John Kurth, and Pastor Rao Dasari. The main reason for this visit to LMSI, was to further explore the work of the Kauffelds in the Rajahmundry area with a view to determining whether or not to recommend BWM involvement. Arriving at Rajahmundry, the team spent two days with the Kauffelds visiting as many churches, schools, and homes for needy children as they could. Since it was the fall monsoon season, the countryside was flooded in many places, and many homes were under water. As the team continued on their journey, water was running across the road in several places. This report describes some of their adventure together:

With rain, bad roads, train crossings, heavy travel with buses and trucks (often and usually on a one-lane road), cows and herds of goats, and oxen carts, the travel was indeed slow. . .during the day we would come to where they were harvesting the rice, and huge piles of rice straw would be laid on the road for cars, trucks and tractors to run over to knock off the rice which would then be separated from the straw and swept away into piles to be sacked. . .but no matter how late we were, the people were waiting—churches filled to overflowing, areas set up outside under canopies when the church was too small— orphan children still waiting to sing songs. . .One place stands out in our minds—six hours they had waited until we arrived shortly before midnight. How thankful we were that we had not turned back because of the lateness of the hour.²¹

It was slow going but by God's grace they accomplished what they set out to do. Preliminary observations during this visit led to the conclusion to begin exploration soon.

The following year, another CME visitation team was sent to follow up on things, to see more of the mission areas, and to make a final recommendation to the BWM. Travelling in October 1996 to Rajamundry, Hyderabad, Jabalpur and Guntur were Pastors John Kurth,



Rice straw being laid on the road to be crushed by passing autos.

²¹ The Observer, Report of the October 13-November 2 Visit, 1995.

Rao Dasari, Harold Essmann and the Kauffelds. The need for tightening and development was most evident in the Rajamundry area (approx. 7,000 members on the east coast of India). This happens to be the poorest area of the mission; most are laborers in rice fields and live hand to mouth. This area has the largest numbers and the members are widely spread out among the villages. The city of Hyderabad (1000 members here - central India) is a 10-hour train ride away from Rajahmundry. People are somewhat better off in this area as well as in Jabalpur (approx. 800 members in central India). The Hyderabad area is more manageable with fewer workers, and offers better weather and a good building for a headquarters. In addition, the leadership here is more scripturally educated. Journeying north in India, the team came to Jabalpur, a city of similar size to Hyderabad. The work here is considerably separated by distance from the rest of the other areas of the mission, not to mention from any of the work we are presently conducting in India. However, there is no other Lutheran church in the area. The national average for Christianity is officially 2.7%. According to a 1991 census, the Christian population of North India was determined to be at 0.5% of the total population. This area, known as the "heartland of Hinduism", is a wide-open mission field!

What kind of interaction is there among these different areas? With the distance involved between areas and the difficulty of travel it is hard to imagine there ever being alot of interaction and joint work among the areas within LMSI as a whole. This is even more the case in respect to other areas of WELS work such as in Madras or Nayadupeta. In such cases, there are the added barriers of language in addition to social barriers posed by caste differences. A publication entitled "Message of Peace" facilitates communication for LMSI by offering sermons, doctrinal segments and news from

congregations and leaders. It is printed monthly and mailed and distributed to 800 to 1,000 people. By and large, these different areas operate independently. They each have their own leadership and budget. There are conventions held once a year for leaders and delegates. Some elders and laymen also attend the Guntur seminary for training. Pastor Dasari works together with the leadership of areas nearest him, but has more than enough to work in the Guntur with the newly developing seminary and therefore would find it difficult to offer extensive, on-going help. But overall, the CME visitation team was encouraged by what they saw. Their final recommendation in October of 1996, was to continue visits to LMSI on a two-year exploratory basis to see if the mission was something we could take on in the future as a permanent field.

What Does the Future Hold?

Many people in India have reason to fear the future. Their gods can be capricious, cruel, and demanding. Hunger, poverty and disease commonly breed suffering and uncertainty. Praise God that he intervenes into the dark, repressed corners of the world through his gospel. The future of our "Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India" is tied to the gospel. The report of the CME visitation team mentioned above, listed some areas that needed to be focussed on during future visitations. The report outlines challenges in these areas: **1) the workers, 2) the congregations and 3) the schools.**

The future of any mission begins with the development of a **sound worker-training program.** There are 8,000 to 10,000 members in LMSI. Each beating heart needs to be served with the gospel by trained called workers. Training nationals to serve as pastors is the biggest challenge in LMSI. How does one go about the work of the mission when

foreign missionaries are not allowed to do work in the country. As was mentioned earlier, there were well-meaning "pastors" with different levels of training and varied theological backgrounds.²² As a result, definite criteria need to be established for the pastor. At present the WELS has developed a model and strategy for achieving specific goals in the area of ministry and worker training. This strategy involves on-going instruction and nurture through the creation of four, full-time "mission coordinator" positions. The four coordinators are assigned to four different areas of our work in India:

Jabalpur:	Pastor Michael Hintz
Hyderabad:	Pastor Walter Westphal
Madras/Nayadupeta	Pastor Mark Goeglein
Guntur/Rajahmundry	Pastor John Kurth, pro tem ²³

These coordinators serve our brothers in LMSI and other Indian Lutheran bodies. The men listed above remain stateside and visit at least twice a year to teach workshops in India. For each trip, the coordinator chooses a different teacher to accompany him, and together they train elders for ministry in their respective assigned area. These twice-a-year courses are similar in content to our training at our seminary stateside. When not directly involved this way, the coordinator works at a distance by providing monthly "short-courses" for LMSI workers abroad. These "short-courses" are four-day programs lead by elders and provide monthly helps for sermon studies, Sunday School lessons, and usually

²² Many years ago, when different church bodies were allowed to do mission work in India, they would try to locate themselves where other churches were not present. The area around Rajahmundry was originally influenced by Lutheranism. For this reason many in the area are "Lutheran" by birth. However, when many mission societies deserted their missions later, hundreds were eventually without qualified pastors and teachers. This left hundreds of men calling themselves "pastors" in little villages without affiliation. Later too, Methodist and Pentecostal groups made their way into the area and there is evidence of the influence of their theology and worship.

²³ Recently Pastor Kurth has requested that the May 1998 visit be his last overseas visit. Pastor Kurth, first called to serve as Coordinator for Mission Training back in 1985, has served faithfully for many years. He was one of the most frequent visitors to Cameroon in the late 1980's. Pastor Kurth was instrumental in setting up a system for worker training in Nigeria. Both he and Pastor Hintz, mentioned earlier, worked together in that field before serving in India installing the same type of worker training program there.

involve some follow-up on other subjects taught by the coordinator at the last visitation. In some cases these courses also serve as pre-seminary training courses for individuals who show promise as future candidates for the seminary. After a November 1997 visitation, Pastor Michael Hintz, the coordinator for the Jabalpur area made the following comments which help to describe the situation and his work there:

There are eighteen congregations in the LMSI – Jabalpur. Fourteen are in or near the city. The remaining four are located at Bilaspur, an area 500 kilometers to the east of Jabalpur. The congregations are presently served by laymen who are appointed as elders of the congregation. They come from various Christian backgrounds. Every ‘elder’ there was asked to fill out an information form on which they were asked for family and background information. When asked about training for their work as preaching elders, not one indicated that they had any theological training other than the very brief workshops that were held in this area previously. Wondering what was being preached and taught in the congregations, I left sermons to be translated and distributed to the elders for them to use. I plan to continue to supply sermons. Perhaps when all the coordinators are in position, this work could be organized so that the elders who do not have the training to write sermons can have a supply of sermons to use. . . To become a preaching elder they are only asked to sign a 10-point statement of basic faith and study the Catechism. This underscores the great need to give the elders sound biblical training. And any new elders should complete a course of instruction before they are appointed to serve. For this purpose I am planning a curriculum for all elders to finish with the intention that all elders who were previously appointed to serve congregations be “certified” upon completion of the course. New applicants would be required to finish the courses before they are eligible for appointment as elders. I also initiated a reporting procedure. The elders have been given forms to submit a monthly report regarding attendance, ministrations, visits and offerings. The congregations need an Adult Information Course for those desiring to learn more about our church and seeking membership. Right now little instruction is given to new members; there is a lack of understanding of “confirmation.”²⁴

As was mentioned earlier, the coordinators listed above reside stateside and coordinate from afar. They see to it that the workers receive their pay, Lutheran teaching materials²⁵, and offer whatever help and advice is needed between visits. But these "mission coordinators" are only allowed in the country under the understanding that they

²⁴ “Report on Mission Trip to Jabalpur” – Pastor Michael Hintz, October 1-19, 1997.p.2. Pastor Hintz presently is serving full time at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Granger, IN.

²⁵ Materials translated for the nationals include: the Bible, a liturgy and hymns from the hymnal (CW), Luther’s Catechism, God’s Great Exchange. The latest project is a translation of “The Book of Concord.” Other works include “The Promise”, “What the Bible and Lutherans Teach”, as well as church history and doctrinal materials. The nationals are trained in English at the seminaries so that gradually they may benefit from more materials in English.

are not to be "missionaries" in the strict sense. Even though the government of India stopped giving visas to new missionaries in 1968, these men are granted visas with the understanding that they are taking the role of "advisors" only, and not missionaries. They may educate the elders to be pastors, but may not be involved actively in church planting or with mission work. Currently, the WELS plans to call two men to coordinate the work in India with the help of Pastor Dasari.

It follows that with the establishment of a solid ministerium, the **congregations** will reap the blessings. When the Word and sacraments are properly administered, congregations tighten and develop around the means of grace. Because most of the services attended by the visitation teams were dedication services, and since at all of them the American visitors were the featured speakers, the team did not get a chance to witness the type of worship and preaching being conducted in congregations. The report of the team did indicate that there was evidence of a strong emphasis on prayer. At times there was a lack of knowledge of the Lord's Prayer and especially the Apostle's Creed. Through the mission coordinators, training for a more participatory style of worship has been introduced.

Another emphasis in the area of congregational life is simply an understanding of church polity. Each person needs to have a feel for how everyone works and moves together as a body of believers. With each visitation to India there seems to be more and more progress in this area. The Board of Directors, which is the governing body for the mission, is progressing in its awareness of its main task of overseeing the ministry of the gospel. The leaders and members continue to learn how to better interact and communicate with each other. Through continued growth in the faith, they will spur each

other on in Christian love putting into practice things like church discipline, stewardship (some congregations are gathering offerings already), and the practice of church fellowship.

LMSI has a great number of children it is currently serving in **schools** of some type. For example, in the Rajahmundry area, the schools range from thirty students to several hundred, the only schools in that locality for the Hindu people of that village or area.

Pastor Kauffeld noted that:

It has become very obvious and clear to us that the open door to mission work in India is through the children in our schools and orphan homes. The Hindus want the children cared for and they want education. They are willing for their children to come to schools under our private control. They come to see and hear the programs presented by the children. Again and again we are told that through this means the Hindus are being reached and converted to Christianity.²⁶

It is recognized by people on all sides, that not all of the present institutions are carrying out their intended purpose. Some of the schools focus more on secular studies with only opening prayer. At present the BWM has no official strategy for schools, the last area of concern from above. In the past the BWM has seen schools become more of a drain on missions than serving them—similar to what was experienced in Home Missions not too long ago. However, in view of the fact that within the next decade, India will grow by adding 250,000,000 boys and girls, ten and under, to its population, schools are something the Board is exploring. 250,000,000 children! That's the equivalent of a nation of children the size of the United States. Usually mission strategy is an "adult" strategy. But an outreach strategy that has children in mind is something the BWM is re-evaluating of late. The stress will be on finding the proper balance and control so that the school will be something that supports church work.

²⁶ The Observer, Report of the October, 1996.

What does the future hold for LMSI? One thing is certain. The Wisconsin Synod and the "Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India" will be facing the future together under God. After two years of careful consideration and exploration of the field, the WELS Board for World Missions voted unanimously on January 27, 1998, to accept LMSI as a full-fledged mission field of the WELS. It is anticipated that LMSI, in combination with the rest of the India field which already does nurturing work with approximately 15,000 souls, will soon require the supervision of a newly formed administrative committee.

Guided by God's hand, LMSI and the WELS will move into the future and ever closer toward constructive and mutually agreed upon goals in the areas discussed above. Certainly this will call for a good measure of **sacrifice, love and understanding**. The WELS philosophy in all of our fields, has these things in mind. It is an approach we have learned throughout the many years we have been doing mission work. We learned that the synod-to-mission relationship has to be a partnership. The synod cannot attempt to act in a dictatorial fashion to bring about quick results in the field. Nor can the synod pour in money indiscriminately in an attempt to "finance" the Great Commission if you will. Both of these approaches have been tried by many in the past (and still today) and the result is a mission that is here today, and gone tomorrow.

The picture on the cover page of this paper illustrates the way the Lord continues to gather his own through the gospel in the country of India. The picture on the front page of this paper is a visual reminder of this. It is a picture of the people at the village of Koyyalaguden. They are all joined together in procession to dedicate their church. Notice the fanfare involved. It is truly something rare to behold. Our mission continues in India because the Lord of the Church is still active in the history of his Church through the

gospel message of peace. The procession of our brothers and sisters in the picture calls to mind the words of St. Paul who said:

Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are perishing. (2 Corinthians 2:14)

Within 20 years India will be the world's most populous nation. There are more people in India than South and North America combined. India contains the largest block of people who have not been reached with the gospel in the world. With the Lord's continued blessing on our efforts in India, this field has the potential to become our largest overseas WELS mission. By God's grace our mission will continue to be blessed in India. The door remains open to India; pray for workers who will go out into the harvest!!

Resources consulted

Two other senior Church History papers have been written on the history of the WELS in India. They are in order:

“Our India connection: A Brief History of the Wisconsin Synod’s Mission Involvement in India,” written in 1984 by Michael P. Bartsch.

“Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India,” written by Pastor Rao Dasari in 1995.

Primary resources pertaining to India were obtained from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Archives and the WELS Book of Reports and Memorials. Background and information were also gained from the following:

Bach, Einar, Rev. Mission to Kesavaram: How the Little Bible of Salvation Brought the Good News to India. Fullerton, California: R.C. Law Co., Inc., 1990.

Dolbeer, Martin Luther, Jr. A History of Lutheranism in the Andhra Desa, the Telegu Territory of India, 1842-1920. Printed by Board of Foreign Missions, United Lutheran Church in America, New York, N.Y., 1959

Johne, Harold R. and Wendland, Ernst H., editors. To Every Nation, Tribe, Language and People. A Century of World Missions. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992.

Ideas and information for the paper were also the result of personal interviews conducted in April 1998 with:

Pastor and Mrs. Eugene Kauffeld

Mr. James Haag

Mr. and Mrs. Krupavaram Pudi

Pastor John Kurth