

**WELS Missions in Holland, Michigan:
Past Disappointments - Present Potential**

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This paper intends to examine the mission congregation known as: Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Holland, Michigan, hereafter to be referred to simply as "the mission." The mission was opened in September of 1972 and it closed in September of 1982. We will attempt, in human terms, to understand what caused the mission to fail. We will also try to determine, in hindsight, what could have been done to avoid this tragedy. Finally, we will look at what potentials may still exist in Holland for another WELS mission venture, and see what is being done, with respect to Holland, at the present time.

Holland, Michigan is a growing community located on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, about 65 miles north of the Michigan/Indiana border. About 17% of the area of the city of Holland is located in Allegan County with the balance in Ottawa County. Mr. Elmer VanDerKolk, a former charter member of the mission, believes Ottawa County to have one of the fastest growing populations in the state of Michigan. The portion of the city of Holland located in Ottawa County, together with the portion in Allegan County boasts a population of about 30,700 people. If we include the surrounding area known as Holland Township, the grand total population for the area is over 47,500. These figures are from the 1990 census, and are up considerably from when the mission was started in 1972. At that time the Holland area had closer to 35,000 people. Holland is a very industrious area and boasts such renown corporations as: Beechnut Corporation (the makers of Lifesavers candies), Chris Craft (the boat manufacturer), and Herman

Miller Corporation (a maker of office furniture). The majority of Holland residents, as the name of the community suggests, are from a Dutch background. In recent years this has been slowly changing, due primarily to a growing Hispanic community.

Anyone who knows anything about Holland, Michigan, could hardly escape the fact that each May Holland celebrates their annual Tulip Time festival. Tulip Time is Holland's claim to fame. People travel from all parts of the country to gaze upon the fields of different colored tulips, but that's not all that Holland has to offer in the way of tourism. Being located along side Lake Michigan, its Florida-like beaches are packed to overflowing during the hot days of the summer. There, on Lake Michigan, are the evidences of a very affluent society. The yachts, the cottages and the expensive cars are all to be seen in the Holland area. This is just an indication that Holland has a lot to attract people within its borders.

The ethnic background of Holland residents is the most likely contributing factor and best explanation why the overwhelming majority's religious affiliation is with the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America. Holland used to bear all the typical signs of being a strong Dutch Reformed community. On Sundays all the businesses in town would be closed, and of course the sale of alcoholic beverages was strictly forbidden after midnight on Saturday. In a letter dating March 31, 1972, Pastor Ronald Semro describes the Holland area:

There are [two] LC-MS churches in Holland, one old, one new. Both are reported to be moving along with liberal trends. The city also has 17 Christian Reformed, 16 Reformed, and 22 of various other denominations. ...A recent survey by a Baptist group turned up 40% unchurched in their area. ...This is a city of Hollanders. [The] area is heavily churched - although we do not really know what percentage of people there are [who are] actually church members.

In spite of the strong Christian Reformed presence in the community, Holland still had its share of unchurched individuals. What was more, there was not a WELS Lutheran church within twenty miles of the city, and therein was the rub. In the late summer of 1971, a man by the name of Merlin Walker moved to the Holland area. Mr. Walker, or "Doc" as he likes to be called, upon arriving in Holland found that there were no area WELS churches. So, on October 7, 1971, Doc Walker wrote a letter to, now retired, Pastor Daniel Gieschen, who was the chairman of the Michigan District Mission Board. His letter stated:

I have been transferred to Holland, from the Detroit area and the biggest disappointment in moving, was in not finding a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Church here in Holland. The closest church is twenty miles away and thus, I am very much interested in establishing a mission church to serve this immediate area.

I assure you that I will do whatever is necessary to make this a reality, and I anxiously await your reply.

To this Pastor Gieschen responded positively and instructed Mr. Walker in the steps that the District Mission Board (DMB) normally takes when there is an expressed interest in opening a new mission. With Gieschen's information, Doc set about to find interested WELS families in the Holland area.

By January Doc Walker had located three other interested WELS couples, and on January 9, 1972 these four families met with Pastor Herbert Kuske, the Secretary of the DMB. Those couples in attendance were: Mr. and Mrs. Merlin Walker, Mr. and Mrs. Ted Reuschel, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer VanDerKolk and Mr. and Mrs. Tom Iwisch. It was at this meeting that the momentum started to build. Pastor Ronald Semro, who was serving at Holy Trinity in Wyoming, Michigan, offered to conduct exploratory services in Holland as

soon as there was approval from the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM). On May 4, 1972 the go-ahead was given to Pastor Semro to begin exploratory services and he was advised to start looking for a location to hold the services. In the meantime the DMB continued to have preliminary meetings with the core group throughout the summer months. On September 10, 1972 the first exploratory service was held in the gymnasium of the Waukazoo Elementary School, located in the northeast part of Holland.

On February 9, 1973 an area canvass of Holland was led by Pastor Semro in which six individuals from the mission helped. Also assisting in the effort were seven people from the Lansing Chapter of the Lutheran Collegians, and Vicars Thomas Bartz and Robert Otto from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The result of the canvass of 520 homes netted 28 unchurched prospects. At the time of Pastor Semro's report to the DMB on the canvass effort, he also reported that the core group consisted of 30 members, 18 of which were communicants. This certainly was not a bad start for the young congregation. During the first half of 1973 the average attendance at the services was 24 per Sunday. The core group was also served by the two available vicars. In May of 1973 the group in Holland was granted full-fledged Mission Status.

On June 4, 1973 the DMB extended its first call, for a full-time missionary to the Holland area, to Pastor James Westendorf, who at the present is a professor at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Sighting his concern for the young congregation he was then serving in St. Charles, Michigan, and having started there "from the ground level," Pastor Westendorf felt he wasn't ready for a similar situation in Holland. Hoping and praying that a more able man could be found, he returned the call.

It was a month or so before the DMB extended its second call for

Holland, but in the meantime the mission was taking care of the necessary business at hand. On July 18, 1973, the mission adopted its name "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church" and elected temporary officers to fill the council positions. In August a second man was called and he accepted. Finally on September 30, 1973 the mission installed its first resident pastor, Pastor Arnold Ruddat.

On January 20, 1974 the mission held its first annual congregational meeting. At this meeting a constitution was adopted and permanent officers were elected: Merlin Walker - President; Donald Reuschel - Secretary; Kenneth Lamer - Treasurer; Elmer VanDerKolk - Financial Secretary; and Ted Reuschel - Head Usher. All of these men were previously elected to their respective positions, but on a temporary basis. At this time the average weekly attendance was 33.

In April of 1974 the search began for a building site where the mission could erect a chapel. A request was made by the mission to the DMB in July of the same year for the use of a modular chapel which at that time was being used in Jackson, Michigan at the time. The Jackson congregation was in the process of building a permanent structure and were looking to move the modular chapel off their site. It was a long and laborious process in getting approval from the Township of Holland, finding property to locate the chapel and finally moving the chapel on site. On August 1, 1976 the first worship service was held in the modular chapel at the Holland site. A year prior to this the mission had acquired a piece of property and a parsonage. It appears from available records that this whole ordeal, having to do with the land and the chapel, etc., occupied a great deal of Pastor Ruddat's time, as well as that of his members. The statistical reports of the mission from 1974 through 1976 rendered these figures:

	1974	1975	1976
Souls	43	48	56
Communicants	35	35	35
Sunday School Enrollment	9	9	6
Bible Information Course	1	7	5
Adult Bible Class Attendance	14	12	0
Average Weekly Attendance	35	39	40
Canvass Calls	0	291	157
Evangelism Calls	44	21	12

Perhaps it is necessary to note here that in 1975 a canvass was conducted on August 3rd. The result of that canvass was: 172 interviewed; 14 refusals; 1 vacant home; and 104 home where the residents were not at home. From this canvass 13 unchurched persons were discovered. The breakdown of calls from the 1976 canvass are not available.

The first three years of the mission's existence were very difficult years. In a letter to Pastor Ruddat, who at that time was holding a call from Friedens Lutheran Church of New Prague, Minnesota, the DMB Secretary, Edwin Frey counsels:

In discussing the matter, our attention focussed mainly on the apparently unfavorable relationship which has existed between pastor and congregation at Holland. This had surfaced already in early 1975. It perhaps is reflected in the many delays and difficulties experienced in getting property and chapel ready for use. Church attendance has remained about the same. Considering all these things, the DMB resolved... to convey to you our advice that you accept the call to New Prague. This is not a judgment of your work, but a suggestion that you might be less hindered in doing the Lord's work in a new location and a different environment.

Taking the advice to heart and being guided by the Lord's hand, Pastor Ruddat accepted the call to New Prague. He preached his farewell sermon to the mission on February 6, 1977.

In January 1977, before Pastor Ruddat had left, the congregation extended a call to Pastor Peter Berg. He however, returned the call.

It was at the end of January that the DMB received word from member Ted Reuschel that, because of space restrictions in the modular chapel, it was necessary to suspend the meetings of the Adult Bible Class on Sunday mornings. In February the divine call was extended to Pastor David Scherbarth. However, he also returned the call.

It was finally decided to call a man through the Assignment Committee and Pastoral Candidate Lloyd Fager was assigned as the new missionary to Christ Lutheran Church. Pastor Fager was installed on July 10, 1977.

At that time the mission was given approval by the Holland Township to move a modular chapel onto the property which they had acquired. The Holland City Council approved a five year lease, to allow this temporary structure to stand. At the end of the five years it would be required to be removed and replaced by a permanent church building. As the years progressed the congregation remained relatively the same size, and it became obvious that the mission would not be able to afford a permanent facility. This among other factors did not aid in the overall well-being of the congregation and their relationship to their pastor. The statistical reports from 1977 through 1980 reflect a lack of forward progress on the part of the congregation and their pastor:

	1977	1978	1979	1980
Souls	58	57	73	55
Communicants	39	41	47	35
Sunday School Enrollment	6	2	1	1
Bible Information Course	0	3	2	0
Adult Bible Class Attendance	0	6	5	3
Average Weekly Attendance	27	32	34	30
Canvass Calls	0	100	130	121
Evangelism Calls	1	10	0	0

During the nearly four years that Pastor Fager served in Holland, there was much dissention within the congregation. Following a visit by Larry Zwieg, the Associate Executive Secretary of the GBHM, Pastor Zwieg offered this suggestion to the DMB Chairman, Pastor Herbert Kuske:

All things considered, have you ever thought of joining this station with Allegan? The distance is not too bad at all. The man there is capable and would be willing, I think. We may be slowly "killing" a very able young man without enough to do in Holland. Given the area and its reformed base, we may never really have much there.

Within three months of the time of this correspondence, Pastor Fager received a call to serve a dual parish in North Dakota. He accepted that call and preached his farewell sermon in Holland on February 22, 1981. Whether the advise from Pastor Zwieg to the DMB was taken to heart, or whether that was the only logical conclusion, it is unknown. However, what Zwieg advised is exactly what happened in the long run. Dennis Valteau, the pastor at St. John's of Allegan, was asked to serve as the vacancy pastor. At their meeting of March 16, 1981 the DMB moved to ask the Holland mission to suspend their calling of another resident pastor. This was due to the recession that was binding the entire country and the budgetary cut backs with which the whole synod was suffering at that time. In a correspondence dated April 8, 1981, Pastor Herb Kuske wrote Pastors Norm Berg and Larry Zwieg of the GBHM:

How would you like a letter that will cut down on budgetary drain? Here is one. ...I met with the voters of Holland and the church council of Allegan last Monday, April 6, to propose to them a dual parish arrangement for a time. This meeting resulted as a result of an approach to us by Pastor Valteau in which he indicates his desire to work in such an arrangement.

The voters have approved, and the Allegan Church Council has

voted to recommend to the voters that such an arrangement be effected. Pastor Valteau sees the need of the mission as getting lay persons involved in outreach. He is enthusiastic about trying to do this, and for this reason approached us that he would be willing to serve on a longer basis. His friendly personality is a real contrast to the previous pastors there. This should give Holland a good chance to prove itself.

So, on May 1, 1981 a dual parish between St. John's Lutheran of Allegan and Christ Lutheran of Holland was established, and on May 17, Pastor Dennis Valteau was installed in Holland as their pastor. However, at the GBHM it was being recommended by the Priority Committee, that operating subsidy for Holland be eliminated. In a letter to Pastor Valteau from Pastor Kuske, which was sent to him nearly a year after the closing of the Holland mission, Pastor Kuske intimated the feelings that were being wrestled with by the DMB and the GBHM:

The DMB had serious reservations whether the Holland congregation had mission potential. The purpose of the course of action that began on March 16, 1981, was to give this field a thorough test without committing a new called man to determine whether there was really mission potential in the field. Mission status was not withdrawn, either by the DMB or the GBHM. However, it was the clear understanding of the DMB, the GBHM, and the congregation, that continued mission status would depend on demonstrated mission potential. During the year, the Holland congregation made a good effort to reach out into the community.

To be sure, under the leadership of Pastor Valteau, this little mission congregation made a valiant effort during the year of 1981. This fact is born out by the statistics from the 1981 annual report. Compare these figures with the three years prior:

	1978	1979	1980	1981 *
Souls	57	73	55	46
Communicants	41	47	35	33
Sunday School Enrollment	2	1	1	6
Bible Information Course	3	2	0	7
Adult Bible Class Attendance	6	5	3	0
Average Weekly Attendance	32	34	30	25
Canvass Calls	100	130	121	969
Evangelism Calls	10	0	0	212

* These figures are from March through December.

It is clear that the congregation sought to make a new start with regards to the mission of the church, but their efforts proved fruitless (from a human point of view, obviously the Lord knows what benefits took place during that year).

When looking at the above statistics, one might wonder why there wasn't a more favorable response from the community. One factor that must not be overlooked is that between the founding of the mission and the time that Pastor Valteau served its second vacancy, the mission had a number of years of internal struggles. During that time it did not have a particular mission focus. Through those difficult years it often happened that the congregation would get behind an evangelism effort, they would go out and canvass the area. They would even find out who prospects were, but they failed to consistently follow up on those prospects. During the entire life of the mission there wasn't a great deal of evangelism work that they did that was of any success. Again, this was primarily due to the fact that they did not follow it up.

During the time that Pastor Valteau served there, the mission had a very dedicated purpose. Pastor Valteau himself believes that there was very little, if any, infighting of the congregation at that time. The congregation tried to be very appreciative of ministry and were moving

forward. Speaking about the work the mission was accomplishing at that time Pastor Valteau had this to say:

We would go out and do canvassing and we did a significant amount of work during the year and a half that I was there. We were on the radio, we had direct mail going out. We did canvassing and follow up visits regularly and faithfully, we did a lot of evangelism work. What we found was this: While it was true that Holland had a lot of unchurched people as every community has, the unchurched people that it had were not raw prospects. By that I mean that the churches in the community had physically and actively and regularly been going out to those prospects. So you didn't have prospects who were unchurched, who were not already being seen by other churches. What you had left in the community were prospects who did not ^{want} to be prospects, and even after doing a great deal of work in the community we weren't doing much to make a dent into bringing anybody in.

You can put it this way: if I had to summarize the reason why the mission in Holland was not a success, and of course success is a purely earthly term, I would say that during the years that Holland was growing and bringing in people outside the community in the early 1970's, our congregation either did not have a worship facility at the time or was not doing a particularly good job in following up on those prospects, sometimes due to the internal struggles. In the early 1970's when they were worshipping in the rented school classrooms, there were always visitors in church. That just didn't happen in the late 1970's. There were visitors there who wanted to find out about the mission, but the mission didn't do a particularly good job of going after them.

By the late 1970's the worship facility was present, but the congregation continued to struggle internally, and wasn't getting out to do evangelism work. By the early 1980's the congregation was ready and willing to do evangelism work, but the community was no longer growing. Holland was not bringing in new people, and the people who were there had been contacted over and over again by other churches and they were not really prospects anymore.

Due to an increasingly sticky situation in Holland with regard to the modular chapel arrangement, on June 27, 1982 the congregation made the decision to close the mission because of financial difficulties. The five

year lease that Holland Township had given the mission had expired in 1980, and for the next two years the mission had managed to get one-year extensions. However, in 1982 the City put their foot down and would not renew the permit. Hence, the mission was given the ultimatum that either they build a new permanent structure or remodel the modular chapel according to the city's specifications, making it a permanent structure. This of course proved to be beyond the means of the congregation and since they already had amassed a large CEF loan from synod, they came to the conclusion that it was simply beyond their means to continue. In an interview with Pastor Valleau, he spoke about the Township's decision concerning the mission's worship facility:

Ultimately, I do not know what would have happened with two or three more years of faithful work on evangelism, but as the record will show, because the city stepped in on the question of the chapel, being not a permanent facility, there had to be some financial decisions made at the time to keep that mission going which our synod nor the Mission Board were ready to make. There would have had to have been some substantial improvements to the chapel to make it a proper permanent structure. It was a double wide modular chapel. The Township had given the mission a five year waiver and then for two years they said, "Yes, we'll give you another year." Then they said, "Forget it, we can't do this any more, get it off there." Their concern was understandable; we overstayed our welcome with that chapel, but by the same token the action of the city precipitated making a change. If that chapel had not been a problem, that congregation probably would still exist as a dual parish with St. John's of Allegan. So the financial decision was precipitated by the decision of the city fathers not to allow that building to remain.

Because of the shape of the U.S. economy and the financial pressures that weighed on th WELS at that time, the ability of getting further support from synod was less likely. Had the same circumstances happened today or in the early 1970's perhaps the situation would have been totally different.

However, before we jump to conclusions and blame synod or even the economy, it is necessary to consider the fact that there was a possibility that the synod would have even been willing to provide a CEF loan. The main difficulty was this: in 1982 half of the Holland congregation would reach retirement age within two years. The congregation looked at what it would cost to make the changes to the facility that were needed, and things just didn't add up. They just didn't have the numbers there to make it work. It would have been a real struggle for those people to have to support that kind of a rebuilding. There may have been other options, such as going to a rented facility, but it was felt there would have been no advantages to that kind of decision. It was a very difficult decision. Within the congregation finances were very tight and there was no real assurance that the nearly retired people would be living there in a year or two. All these factors played a part in guiding the congregation to make the decision that was made.

It is the opinion of this writer that the congregation took on too much too soon by acquiring the modular chapel. So much time and effort were expended on getting the land and all the cities requirements met that there was time for little else. Perhaps instead all who were involved in the mission should have concentrated their efforts more on evangelism and follow up, and built a broader base. If the mission was started today, with the new philosophy of how to carry out mission work, that is what we would have done, as a synod. But the mission approach at that time was to get a building as fast as possible, as if that in itself was suppose to cause the congregation to grow. Holland is the kind of place where today's mission theory or approach would be much more successful than what was done back *Perhaps* then.

When we confront the stark reality of the problems that existed in

Holland, frankly we must say that Holland did not always, in its history, have pastors who always brought to the mission what was needed at that time. One type of difficulty that was intrinsic to the Holland area was the simple fact that virtually every married couple of the mission had one partner who was a life long WELS member, and the other partner who had been brought up either Reformed or Christian Reformed. The Reformed and Christian Reformed congregations were very strong in that area and because of that fact nearly everyone came from that background. Great care needed to be exercised even when saying things like, "We are very pleased that the Lord has given us the truth of his gospel." There also needed to be great sensitivity how one might express that statement when relating it to mission work. In other words, are we (the WELS) doing mission work in Holland because we are unique? Are we doing it because the Christian Reformed Church is from Satan and represents the dark side, or what is it that we are trying to accomplish here? It was a situation that required a great deal of tact, especially with regard to the issue of fellowship. One has to stand up for the truth, and yet it is essential to have sensitivity toward the traditional beliefs of those members who had come from Reformed backgrounds. ^{Paragraph} Pastor Valteau relates that there was one member, who was raised Christian Reformed, who had been married to a WELS member for 30 years. She made the comment once that if anything happened to her husband, she probably would go back to the CRC because she would have felt more at home there. These were people who obviously struggled with the issue of fellowship. In their opinion the Christian Reformed were very conservative, Bible believing Christians, and that is certainly true. However, it is not as cut and dried as that. The members who were transplanted into the WELS didn't often see the subtle and indeed not so

subtle errors in doctrine that existed in the Reformed teaching. To some extent the whole idea that the WELS had pure doctrine that needed to be shared with others, was an affront to anybody with Reformed roots. The attitude of the Christian Reformed toward the WELS was, "If we've got churches here, why are you coming here?" Anyone who has ever worked in a Reformed community can attest to this kind of mind set. So that was the kind of issue that needed to be handled with kid gloves, and the pastors who came to the Holland congregation, for the most part, were not particularly sensitive to that issue and made some enemies as a result even within their own congregation.

One aspect of the mission which has not been mentioned so far, is the low and sometimes nonexistent Adult Bible Class attendance. Up to this point everything that has been talked about is only symptomatic of a deeper problem. If the available statistics truly reflect the Bible study habits of the congregation, then it is quite probable that therein was the main problem. As sinner/saints in a sinful world we have to constantly battle against Satan and our flesh. When we stop digging into God's word, Satan gets a foothold. As was mentioned earlier, there was a time when the Adult Bible Class was suspended because of the size of the chapel. There certainly are times when the scheduling of a congregation's programs run into conflicts. The main purpose of a Christian congregation is to teach and preach the word of God, making disciples for time and eternity. This is not to say that this fact was overlooked or forgotten in Holland, but in every situation a congregation must weigh very carefully the benefits over against the possible disaster of discontinuing its study of God's word among its members.

Ultimately it is God who gives the increase, and it is He alone who

blesses the labors of a congregation. For reasons that may remain hidden in the mind of God until eternity, the Holland mission was not granted a long and fruitful existence. Yet, we still can praise God for His goodness, even concerning the closure of this congregation. God's timing is perfect and it the closing of the mission did not happen a bit too soon or a moment too late. We can rejoice that at the time when the congregation folded, a period of healing had preceded this action. As far the members were concerned, the vast majority were retained as members of the WELS and even now continue to be faithful members in their respective congregations.

Just as sure as there was hope and anticipation at the prospect of beginning a new mission congregation back in 1972, today the hopes of many are being renewed. In fact, there is potential that another mission endeavor will be undertaken as early as the Spring of this year, 1993. At present there are four WELS pastors in the three counties of Allegan, Kent and Ottawa who have been seriously considering doing some exploratory work in the Holland area. Presently there are from 20-25 known prospects that are WELS members living in the area. A meeting is planned ⁱⁿ for the foreseeable future, within a month or two, to see what potential there is in getting something started. The four pastors are: Pastor Frederick Adrian of Wyoming, Pastor Stephen Otto of Dorr, Pastor Rodney Schwab of Allegan and Pastor William Balza of South Haven.

This matter will probably be brought before the DMB in March or April. Pastor Adrian, formerly the DMB Chairman, stated that he hinted to the BHM that he was looking at Holland as a possible new field, and he confided that he didn't receive any negative responses from the BHM. In fact they thought that it might be a good idea. Those who were serving on the BHM when the mission was closed, are no longer on the Mission Board. So, at this stage

there is no one at the BHM who needs to worry about getting heat for trying to repeat a mistake of the past, but seriously it is possible to proceed on a place like Holland, even though it closed in the past. Yet, while the BHM is aware that there is interest in starting a mission in Holland, they have not as yet been officially contacted.

As far as the four pastors are concerned, they are still debating which is the best way to go with Holland. There are basically two possibilities. One way would be to approach and convince the Mission Board to go with Holland on a full-fledged basis. This would mean placing a full-time man in Holland and giving the nucleus exploratory status. This approach would require asking synod to sink in \$30,000 - \$40,000 for a year and see if it would possibly go. If that is the course of action that is taken, those who are involved would basically have to compare Holland with every other city in the United States and show Holland to be the best field for starting a new mission. Now, that may be something that is possible. The other way is that the Mission Board could be asked to grant Holland exploratory status and the existing manpower, of the four area pastors, could serve it and see what they could do. Obviously those who have high hopes for Holland would like to see the Mission Board place a full-time missionary there, because normally that is the most effective way to go.

Mr. Jim Dowling a member of St. Paul's in South Haven, who lives and works in Holland, has been doing a lot of the initial foot work. He had talked to Pastor Balza about starting a mission in Holland. There are about a half dozen families from Holland who hold their membership in South Haven, and, in fact, each of the four pastors who are interested in doing some work in Holland have members in their congregations who live in the Holland area. Mr. Dowling did some of the initial work of contacting people in Holland.

The initial reaction of most people seems to be positive. There has even been talk of starting services in Holland at the end of this school year, which would be June of 1993. These services would probably be held in a motel room or something similar, in an accessible location. A meeting of representatives from the congregations of the four pastors, is being planned with the probability of inviting representatives of other area congregations. Although the congregations, other than the four, have no members living in the Holland area, contacts of other prospects may be generated. It is unknown, whether or not there is a strong interest in Holland at this stage.

As yet an area canvass has not been planned. The nucleus of interested persons consists solely of WELS members. It is thought that once a mission is started, they will reach out into the community. Pastor Balza gave a guarded statement by saying:

We are going to take it very low key, because we don't want to raise anyones hopes, and then find out that what we would like to see as far as potential just isn't there, and then not pursue it any further. So, we're not making any guarantees, but we want to see if there is any interest there and see if the people would be willing to go along with us if we decide to start something up there.

Certainly, the Holland area has to be in need of a WELS mission and an interest on the part of those who live there is essential. It is believed that Holland itself is a fertile field, but it is unlikely that one can rely on the Holland community itself for a mission. To begin a mission in Holland there must be new people in the community whom we, as a synod, are going to seek. That is not to say that the WELS will never get anybody out of the traditional Holland community, but it is very difficult. It has been reported that in the past when members of the mission were canvassing, canvassers from one of the other Holland churches would be going down the opposite

side of the street. In the early 1980's Holland was not a raw area. It was an area where the area churches were doing the work of evangelism. The Holland churches had large evangelism committees that met regularly to get out there and go into the community. As a result, the prospects who were found by the members of our mission, were those who had been regularly badgered by the other area churches and yet remained unchurched. That is the way it was at that time. What the situation is like today, remains to be seen. Perhaps in the past ten years the complexion of Holland has changed enough to make a difference in this regard. At any rate Holland will be "a tough nut to crack," and should be approached with prayer and great thoughtfulness.

In preparing this paper, it was not the intention of its writer to drudge up old and painful memories. Neither is this paper intended to speak ill of anyone or to judge the motives of anyone's ministry. Seven years ago, as a pre-seminary student on Summer vacation, I worked in Holland for several weeks. Because of the course of study I was undertaking, on several occasions I was approached by individuals who had many questions with regard to spiritual matters. At that time it was discouraging that they could not be directed to a local WELS church. If the small cross section of Holland, that I worked with, is any indication of the spiritual condition of the community at large, there is room for a WELS mission in Holland, Michigan.

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Pastor William Balza

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Bibliography

Population statistics from U.S. Census, 1971, 1980, 1990