

The Door is Still Open

A Congregational History

of

Sola Scriptura Evangelical Lutheran Church

Decatur, GA

Organized 1970

"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

Revelation 3:8

Presented to: Prof. J. Brenner
May 14, 1997
Rick Tuttle

An Open Door...

Many things mark the life of a congregation. The most obvious way to gauge the life of a congregation is according to the calendar. At regular intervals, a family of believers will gather to give thanks for the evidence of God's grace in their midst. Some congregations may be marked, molded and otherwise distorted by controversy and conflict. Other congregations measure their fellowship by the numbers. The history of our Synod is rich with a variety of examples of these kinds of congregations. Every one of these has its own character and its own story to tell. Behind every set of church doors in our fellowship is a fascinating story about the character of the congregation within.

Each congregation is unique. The reader can readily look at his or her own congregation and with but a few thoughts can summarize its' character. The character of the congregation whose history will follow here is not just unique, but it even seems uncommon among our churches. One could say that Sola Scriptura Evangelical Lutheran Church of Decatur, GA can measure their fellowship by the numbers. But if one were looking for impressive growth, one might be a little surprised by the numbers. It should be said from the beginning that Sola Scriptura does not have impressive numbers. Sola Scriptura has actually very little that would impress the casual reader. Yet there is something indeed impressive about the character of this smallish, twenty-seven years young congregation. For in its short history, Sola Scriptura has daughtered three congregations in the Atlanta area: Sola Fide of Lawrenceville, Beautiful Savior of Marietta and Sola Gratia of Perry (now closed). Sola Scriptura has witnessed its love for the Gospel by periodically paring down its membership in order to further the kingdom. This willingness to "keep starting over" truly characterizes Sola Scriptura congregation.

In the late 1950's, the Michigan District of the Wisconsin Synod began to realize the need for someone to serve WELS retirees in Florida. Florida was growing quickly. That growth continued steadily into the early 1970's. In 1974, the Mission Board of the newly formed South Atlantic District cited Revelation 3:8 as they presented their report at the convention that year: *"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."* The Mission Board wrote:

These words of the Lord to the church in Philadelphia have often been used in connection with the growth and efforts of our entire Wisconsin Synod, but we feel that if ever they applied anywhere, they most certainly apply to our South Atlantic District and to this Board which administers and oversees the mission work which is done within our district.

Ours is the fastest growing area of our nation, not only Florida itself, but the entire Southeastern United States, which makes up our District. The "open door" is certainly before us. We can ignore it possibly, but we cannot shut it.¹

The Beginnings

In the summer of 1970, the open door in the Atlanta, GA area was officially recognized by the Wisconsin Synod. Several WELS families lived in the area. George and Celestine Thompson moved to Atlanta from Baltimore, MD on Memorial Day weekend of 1970. They carried with them a list of WELS people living in the Atlanta area from their pastor (Carl Pagel, Atonement in Baltimore, MD). He had obtained the list from the Synod's Office of Soul Conservation. When they

¹Proceedings of 1st Biennial Convention of South Atlantic District of WELS, June 11-12, 1974, p. 23.

arrived, they quickly contacted as many of the names as they could reach and discovered a core of families that was ready to establish a congregation. Frank and Verna Ratter, living in Mableton, GA, were among those contacted by the Thompson's.

The work begun that summer predates the South Atlantic District. At this time, Georgia fell into the Gulf-Atlantic Conference of the Michigan District. Rev. Karl Peterson (Birmingham, AL) became the first contact Pastor for the scattered WELS Christians in the Atlanta area. He held the first information meeting in Atlanta on Sunday, July 12, 1970.² The Michigan District had also requested a summer Vicar from the Seminary that year for the purpose of canvassing an area in Atlanta. Carl Henkel accepted the call to be the summer Vicar working with the small nucleus there.

The first worship service in the Atlanta area was held in June of 1970 in the Ratter's home. Pastor Peterson would fly in at least twice a month and taped services were used on the other Sundays. But home services would not be required for long. In the course of canvassing that summer, Vicar Henkel found a temporary worship facility in the Clayton County Civic Center. The price was right for the time...it was free! The location in College Park was central to those who were attending. The first service there was held in August of 1970. Though it was temporary, the Civic Center continued to be used for many years. Taped services continued with Pastor Peterson conducting services twice a month until January of 1971.³

In the earliest stages of their existence, there was some confusion because of a contact made with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). The contact with the CLC had been made by

²Letter to Rev. Ray I. Weichmann, Rev. Karl S. Peterson, July 1, 1970.

³20 Years at Sola Scriptura, George and Celestine Thompson (produced for 20th Anniversary of Sola Scriptura), 1990.

a family who had begun worshipping with the WELS members in Atlanta already in June of 1970. They had been attending church in South Carolina but readily joined with the nucleus in Atlanta when it began to meet. Pastor Peterson happened to be on vacation in June and so the Thompson's (newly arrived) wrote back to Pastor Pagel seeking information about the CLC. It should be noted that the CLC family whose name is now lost to us, had already contacted their Pastor in South Carolina. This pastor had offered to come and serve the nucleus in Atlanta.⁴ Pastor Pagel advised the Thompson's not to seek the services of the man from South Carolina and forwarded the correspondence to Pastor Ray Weichmann, who was then serving as Chairman of the Gulf-Atlantic Mission District.⁵ It is one of those interesting footnotes in history that had it perhaps not been for Pastor Pagel's quick and confessional response, the Atlanta churches today might be CLC entities. The matter was all but settled when another situation cropped up.

The Lutheran Church of America (LCA) called a man to begin exploring the Atlanta area around Mableton, GA (where the Ratter's lived). Pastor R. Lee Mull arrived that summer and began canvassing virtually the same areas as Vicar Henkel. Apparently, the Vicar was not well received in a few instances because he happened to be following close on the heels of Pastor Mull. Pastor Mull even went so far as to contact the members. When the members expressed concern to Pastor Weichmann, he wrote back:

We are sorry that you had to be subjected to the "visit" by Rev. Mull. Mr. Stageman had no business giving him your name. If they have anything to say, let them say it to us. We have no comity agreement with them, nor do we want one. Our fellowship

⁴Letter to Pastor Carl Pagel, George and Celestine Thompson, June 21, 1970.

⁵Letter to George and Celestine Thompson, Rev. Carl Pagel, June 27, 1970.

principles do not permit it. Their coming into the area does not change our thinking in the least. We feel the Lord has called us into Atlanta, and until he shows us otherwise, we shall proceed as planned. We think Pastor Peterson put it well when he said: "If Atlanta is pastored by such, it would seem that the need for a truly Lutheran church is greater than we might have thought."⁶

The next few months were to be a time of generous growth for the Christians in Atlanta. God graciously blessed the fledgling congregation with generous support from the Synod. November 28 of 1970 was a banner day for these Christians. They met to establish a name for themselves; they met to elect their first officers (President - Mr. George Thompson; Secretary - Mr. Richard Ehlert; Treasurer - Mr. Frank Ratter); and they met to call their first full-time Pastor. They called Pastor John P. Meyer of Hillsboro, WI who was 33 at the time.⁷ Pastor Peterson wrote the following to Pastor Meyer as he considered the call:

I have been serving the congregation twice a month and have very much enjoyed working in their midst. We have 6 dedicated families who are giving 100% of their time, talents and energy to establish a confessional Lutheran church in Atlanta. It is by far the Southeast's largest and most active city, and one with literally thousands of blood-bought souls who have not been brought to a knowledge of Christ as their Savior and Lord.⁸

⁶Letter to the Congregation, Rev. Raymond L. Weichmann, July 1, 1970.

⁷Letter to Rev. R. Weichmann, Sola Scriptura Congregation, November 28, 1970.

⁸Letter to John P. Meyer, Rev. Karl S. Peterson, November 27, 1970.

The Name

Something needs to be said about the history of the name Sola Scriptura. Any good Lutheran readily recognizes this phrase as one of Luther's three founding principles of the Reformation. Translated, the words mean "by Scripture alone."

The story goes that during those first months, when the subject of a name came up, everyone was given an opportunity to submit one name. Verna Ratter had wanted the name to be original and different. It was her suggestion to name the congregation Sola Scriptura. All the names were voted upon and Sola Scriptura was the name that was chosen.⁹ On November 28, 1970, the congregation penned a letter to Chairman Weichmann announcing the new name. They wrote: "Thus a most important name has been added to our number and the Atlanta mission is well underway with God's blessings. The above name was chosen because of its distinctiveness, many will ask, "What does that mean?" and the members will be able to witness concerning the Scriptural doctrine of, by the Word alone."¹⁰

There were times when the choosing of the name did seem a hindrance, however, there were other times when God used it to bless. Pastor Meyer tells this story in a letter to the Mission Board:

I hate to bring up the "Name" Sola Scriptura again, after Wicke's writeup in the Northwestern Lutheran, but it has played a part. In the Atlanta papers, we are allowed to put the name of the church, the name of the Pastor, and the topic of the sermon, for free...but no more,...no address, no phone number, no synodical affiliation. We put in a small block ad once, to include all that...the cost per week:

⁹Personal Interview, George and Celestine Thompson, March 31, 1997.

¹⁰Letter to Rev. R. Weichmann, Sola Scriptura Congregation, November 28, 1970.

\$31.00. A bit out of reach for us. So Saturday night about 9:30 my phone rings...man's voice asks if I'm Pastor Meyer of Sola Scriptura...then: "What Synod?" So I proudly told him, and he said: "I thought so from the name. At least I knew you would be a confessional church." Turned out he was Missouri, and very much concerned. He was in church the next morning, with his family, and when leaving told me that we would be seeing more of them. So the Lord can guide people even in choosing the name for the church.¹¹

There was one Latin name that was changed. Mrs. Ratter was consistent in wanting original names. She led the Ladies Group in the church in the decision to adopt the name "Feminae Ecclesiae," however this name was later changed to "Women of the Church."

Early Growth

The first years were exciting. The growth was steady and appreciable. George Thompson relates that within a few years of startup, they seemed to be fully staffed in the sense that they had a well structured organization with people who were willing to serve.¹² Three acres of land was purchased in Decatur, GA for \$9,000 in 1972. The current parsonage was purchased in May of 1973 for \$31,700. The ground was broken for the chapel on March 3, 1974. The present church was completed for \$163,419 and was ready for dedication on September 1, 1974.¹³

One issue that arose as they prepared to settle on the land purchased in Decatur was the changing racial makeup of the area. The area had been a predominantly white neighborhood and was

¹¹Letter to the Gulf-Atlantic Mission Board, Rev. John P. Meyer, March 30, 1971.

¹²Personal Interview, George and Celestine Thompson, March 31, 1997.

¹³20 Years at Sola Scriptura, George and Celestine Thompson, 1990.

quickly changing to a predominately black neighborhood. There followed some very emotional discussions regarding whether they should remain at the Flat Shoals Road site or find another. Pastor Meyer wrote “that if the congregation wanted to sell the Flat Shoals property because they felt the land was not suited for building, I would go along, but if the congregation was ‘moving out’ purely because of the racial change in the neighborhood, I could not in good conscience go along. The congregation voted, by secret ballot, in favor of remaining at the Flat Shoals site.”¹⁴

This early commitment to the neighborhood would be renewed many times in years to come. Sola Scriptura would be included in studies indicating it as an “inner-city” congregation. Indeed, there was and is a commitment to the community. But Sola Scriptura has never considered itself to be a neighborhood church. From the beginning it was a “drive-in” church which attempted to establish itself in the community. Members drove in to College Park or drove into Decatur, while faithfully canvassing the neighborhood around the church. It was always hoped that the church would firmly establish itself in the neighborhood, but to this day, though there are those in the neighborhood who are members, the church is still largely a drive-in church. The efforts do not change. Sola Scriptura would still like to be a neighborhood church.

Even with a variety of challenges facing them, the growth was still surprising. In a letter to Pastor Zwieg who was serving as Mission Board Chairman at the time, Pastor Meyer remarked of the relative ease of the progress that was being made. He wrote:

Somewhere someone expressed a lot of confidence in us and let us operate and I still think that’s what made it all work out. My personal feeling is that the following story

¹⁴Questions posed by Mr. E. Borgschatz, Answers given by Pastor J. Meyer, August 1, 1974.

makes the few difficulties pale by comparison. In early February [1974] I took the blueprints to the Chief Building Inspector, a gruff appearing old man. He began to review the prints, noted they were for a church, and quickly stamped them “approved”. My immediate reaction was to exclaim that I thought it would take longer than that. The Inspector’s faced turned into a smile; he quickly handed the prints back to me, and said, “Just lead someone else to Christ, Son”.¹⁵

The growth was not only evident in the physical blessings in those early years. It was also very evident in the spiritual blessings. The numbers were good.¹⁶ It did prove to be a difficult ministry. In April of 1972, The Milwaukee Journal printed an article detailing some of the hardships and successes of Pastor Meyer’s ministry. They ^{It stated} wrote: “Like an old time circuit riding pastor, the Rev. John P. Meyer has a parish that includes two states and he drives up to 500 miles, round trip, to carry out his ministry.”¹⁷ Three and a half years later, the pace had not lessened any. Pastor Meyer wrote in September of 1975 of the extensive traveling which was still a part of his daily routine. At the time he was serving an ELS vacancy in Savannah, military folk in South Carolina and at Fort Benning, GA, college students in Athens and displaced WELS members in Perry and McRae.¹⁸ The correspondence that exists portrays a man who is stretched to his limit. In November, the DMB had received some lay complaints about the demands which were being made of Pastor Meyer. The DMB responded by addressing a letter to the General Board for Home Missions of the WELS. They

¹⁵Letter to Larry Zwieg, Rev. John P. Meyer, October 24, 1974.

¹⁶See Appendix 1 and 2. Note the steady increases from 1970-1976.

¹⁷See Appendix 3.

¹⁸Letter to South-Atlantic District Mission Board, Rev. J. P. Meyer, September 17, 1975.

suggested in this letter some alternatives to ministry in a field like Atlanta, i.e. team ministry. They also encouraged the Board to study the issue.¹⁹ That same month, Pastor Meyer wrote only one comment on his monthly report to the DMB: "Gettin' too old to be a missionary."²⁰ That next month, December 1975, Pastor Meyer received a call to serve in Holiday, FL.

1976 would be a time of great change for Sola Scriptura. In January, Pastor Meyer accepted that call. Already deliberating the call at the close of 1975, he wrote these words in the Pastor's Annual Report:

Now, having completed five years in the service of Sola Scriptura Congregation, having seen it grow from a small group meeting in rented quarters to a well organized and established congregation, owning its own property; having served five years on the frontier of our Synod's work, which is often more difficult than any imagine, who have not done it, I am tired, suffering from battle fatigue, if you will. I request that Sola Scriptura congregation release me from the call I willingly accepted back in 1970, so that I may accept the call extended to me by Peace Lutheran Church of Holiday, FL, so that I may still serve my Lord, but perhaps with a little less strain. I shall continue to remember the work of Sola Scriptura in my prayers, and am confident that the Lord already has in mind a man who may come new, and with fresh vigor do the work that yet remains to be done here.²¹

¹⁹Letter to the General Board for Home Missions, South Atlantic District Mission Board, Re: Manpower for Frontier Metropolitan Areas, November 2, 1975.

²⁰Monthly Report to the DMB for the Month of November, 1975, Pastor J. P. Meyer, filed December 2, 1975.

²¹Pastor's Annual Report for the year 1975, Rev. John P. Meyer.

However there was another great change coming. Sola Scriptura was about to give birth to her first daughter.

A Daughter is Born

From its beginning, the members of Sola Scriptura were mission-minded. The goal was to spread the gospel, plain and simple. The membership was willing to make sacrifices as needed in order to achieve that goal. This motive drove the congregation in 1976 to a difficult decision. Just as the church was growing, so was the Atlanta metropolitan area. The northwest suburbs seemed to be the focus of this growth. The 1977 Statistical Report shows about a 40 person drop (baptized members) from 1976.²² This drop is largely accounted for by the departure of a block of the membership in order to form Sola Fide congregation of Lawrenceville, GA.

The plans for a church in Lawrenceville had been in the minds of some for quite a while. Pastor Meyer wrote in his monthly report to the DMB in July of 1974: "In years to come I could well see another daughter church in Gwinnett County, near Lawrenceville."²³ Actually, the idea of a team ministry was about to be realized in part in the organizing of this second mission. The Pastor of the second mission would help to serve the wide area of responsibility that had developed in Georgia. Sola Scriptura called Rev. Richard Winters in February of 1976. President Weichmann handily described the situation to Pastor Winters and included these thoughts on organizing a new mission: "It is too large an area for one man or one congregation to cover and we therefore are thinking of a team-ministry in starting a second mission there. If our concept is accepted by the GBHM we would

²²See Appendix 1 and 2.

²³Monthly Report to the DMB for the month of June 1974, Pastor J. P. Meyer, filed July 18, 1974.

probably start the second mission with two men, there being then three of you in the area.”²⁴ Pastor Zwieg, in a similar letter, adds these thoughts for Pastor Winters consideration:

Atlanta is big enough, both in population and area to support any number of WELS congregations. Our experience has been that starting additional churches in such a city soon proves a benefit to both in many ways. They feed each other to a degree and provide fellowship for the workers, which is very important in itself. That is where the Team Ministry concept comes in. Areas like Atlanta tend to exhaust a man in many ways. Besides trying to serve the city itself you end up covering the whole state, since you are the only WELS church there. Plus that, there is the military work. This wide coverage tends to wear a man down plus cut deeply into his work at home. This has happened to a degree in Atlanta which can be shown by statistics - no net growth in 74 or 75. The people are there, what is needed is time to work on them.²⁵

In a letter dated March 1, 1976, Pastor Winters returned the call to Sola Scriptura. Rev. John A. Braun was the next man called. He had also appeared on that first call list. He also returned the call in a letter dated April 7, 1976. Meeting on Maunday Thursday, a third man, David Witte was called. He too would return it. The next call was extended through the Assignment Committee at the Seminary. Pastor Wayne L. Fischer was assigned to serve Sola Scriptura.

It was not long before Pastor Fischer and the congregation began to work together toward organizing activity on the growing north side of the city. On behalf of the DMB and in response to

²⁴Letter to Rev. Richard A. Winters, President R. L. Wiechmann, South Atlantic District, WELS, February 10, 1976.

²⁵Letter to Rev. Richard A, Winters, Rev. L. G. Zwieg, South Atlantic District Mission Board, February 12, 1976.

a letter from Sola Scriptura, Pastor John Guse wrote: "...our board will do whatever it can to assist you in conducting information meetings in the greater Gwinnett County and greater Marietta areas."²⁶ Those information meetings took place early in 1977. Pastor Guse cautioned Pastor Fischer though not to make any promises to prospects. He said that "it must be made clear at every meeting that the decision on whether to hold exploratory services in Gwinnett County and whether we are to call a man will be made in May. It is possible that we will not hold services in Gwinnett County."²⁷ History tells us that May did bring a Seminary graduate to Gwinnett County, GA in the person of Rev. Larry Zahn. Together with Pastor Zahn, Sola Fide was organized that year. Although the pair were not the team ministry which had been envisioned, they were now better equipped to handle the demands of the ministry in Georgia.

Daughtering congregations is a concept that has been much discussed and encouraged in recent years. But has anyone ever encouraged such dramatic measures? Sola Scriptura offered nearly one third of its membership to found this daughter. As such it cannot be said that Sola Fide is a true daughter. A true daughter would be supported by the mother congregation. Sola Scriptura was never able to sustain any of her 'daughters.'

It is interesting to note that Verna and Frank Ratter were part of the group that helped to organize Sola Fide. One can little doubt that Mrs. Ratter's voice was again heard in the naming of the congregation.

²⁶Letter to Sola Scriptura, Rev. John Guse, South Atlantic DMB, December 17, 1976.

²⁷Letter to Rev. Wayne Fischer, Rev. John Guse, South Atlantic DMB, March 9, 1977.

An Uncommon Character

There are some who have wondered over the years at how wise it has been for Sola Scriptura to keep putting itself in harms way by continually multiplying and then dividing itself.²⁸ It happened more than once that financially they seemed to be flirting with disaster. The membership is well aware that they would never have existed for the time that they have without the support of the Synod. And certainly, it has not been easy to see large portions of the church disappear from worship. The Sundays following the departures of daughter groups were always difficult. Yet, when it seemed time to organize new churches, the conversation never centered around comments such as, "But what about our church?" George Thompson says, "I don't think we have ever heard those words. We might say we'll miss you, but we'll see you sometime."²⁹ When you consider the history of Sola Scriptura and the frantic pace which had to be kept, not only to nurture those Christians scattered across the metro area and the state, but also to reach out to others, the 'uncommon character' seems to make sense. Sola Scriptura only wanted to do what was best to serve the needs of the people. There were times when members were finally lost because they 'gave up' driving long distances to church. They would turn to the Reformed or to another Lutheran church body. Sola Scriptura only meant to preserve and extend the Church as God gave them strength to do so.

The School

Part of the plan to preserve the Church involved starting a Lutheran Elementary School. Already in October of 1976, Pastor Fischer was gathering information regarding an LES for

²⁸Personal Interview, Rev. Wayne Fischer and Mary, May 7, 1997.

²⁹Personal Interview, George and Celestine Thompson, March 31, 1997.

distribution within the congregation.³⁰ After careful research and much discussion among members and the DMB as well, the school was finally established in September of 1980. The school was subsidized by the Synod and remains so to this day.

The school has really struggled at some times more than others. The first principal/teacher was David O. Ewerdt. There developed what seemed to be personality clashes between ^{him} ~~he~~ and Pastor Fischer. There were some glaring problems developing within the school. It turned out that Mr. Ewerdt's call was terminated for cause. One of his students admitted his responsibility for a pregnancy and a subsequent abortion. Mr. Ewerdt was ultimately incarcerated by the State of GA and divorced by his wife. It proved to be one of the darker chapters in Sola Scriptura's history.³¹

Then in December of 1982, a special council meeting was called to discuss a letter received from the DMB. They were recommending that Sola Scriptura close its school. "Pastor Guse then explained the reasons for the letter which pertained to the cross-culture subsidy to the school and the success or failure of the school in general."³² After some discussion it was decided that President Thompson would attend the next District Mission Board meeting in Florida and defend Sola Scriptura's position to keep the school open. Apparently there was some question as to how likely it would be that Sola Scriptura would receive the subsidy it would need.

Pastor Guse responded on behalf of the DMB in January of 1983 that the congregation's appeal had worked. He had no conclusive evidence but wrote that he had a "feeling" that the DMB

³⁰Letter to Wisconsin Synod Board for Parish Education, Rev. Wayne L. Fischer, October 12, 1976.

³¹Personal Interview, George and Celestine Thompson, March 31, 1997.

³²Minutes of Special Council Meeting, Sola Scriptura, December 5, 1982.

and the GBHM would go along with Sola Scriptura's recommendation.³³ By the grace of God, his "feeling" was right.

"In July, 1983, Daniel D. Schultz was assigned to be the principal/teacher. Later, as the school grew to two and three classrooms, they were served by Kim (Krause) Mittelstaedt, Monica Schultz, Amy Schultz, Patti (Ebel) Appold, and Jane Haefner. The Schultz's, Dan and Monica, accepted a call to Livonia, MI in 1994. In July of 1994, they welcomed a new principal/teacher and his wife, Scott and Shannon Gostchock."³⁴

A Pattern Develops

The pattern of multiplying and dividing repeated itself in 1977 when Sola Scriptura daughtered Sola Gratia congregation in Perry, GA. This time the suggestion for the name came from Pastor Fischer in an attempt to round out the Sola's in Georgia. In May of 1982, Seminarian Joel Leyrer was called to serve the small group in Perry. The following year saw the organization of Beautiful Savior in Marietta, GA. This had been a target for a long time and a goal finally achieved. Whereas Perry had not had so large an impact upon Sola Scriptura's numbers, the organization of Beautiful Savior did. Once again, Sola Scriptura was headed into some difficult times.³⁵

In July of 1984, Pastor Fischer accepted a call to serve Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee and following a nine month vacancy, the congregation welcomed its current shepherd, Mark A. Haefner.

³³Letter to Rev. Wayne L. Fischer, John Guse, South Atlantic DMB, January 3, 1983.

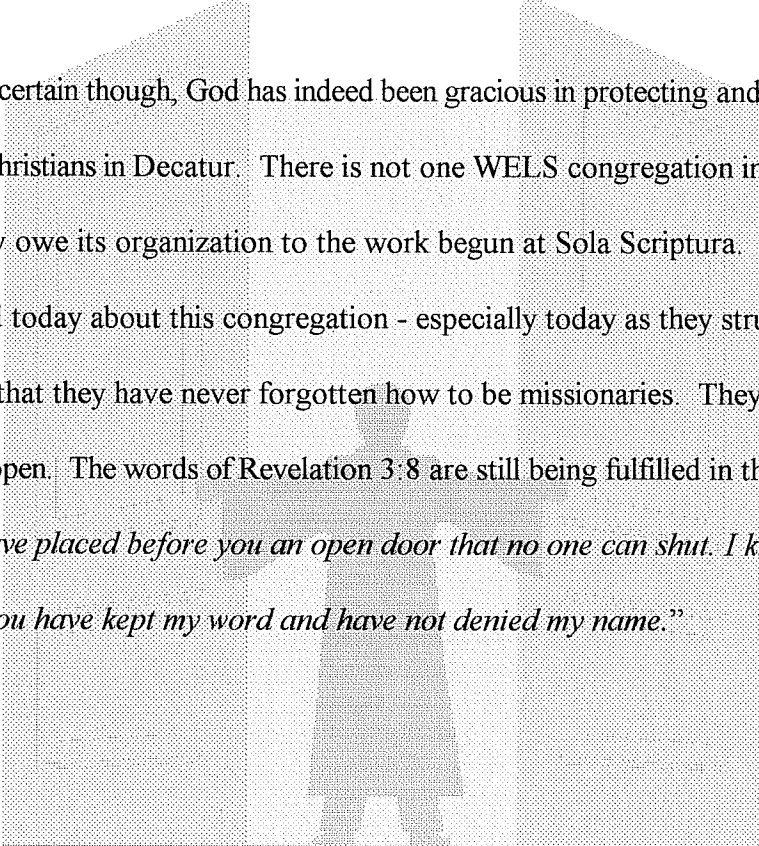
³⁴25 Years of God's Amazing Grace, Cel Thompson, prepared for the 25th Anniversary of Sola Scriptura, 1995.

³⁵See Appendix 1 and 2.

The Present

It is not surprising then that at the present time, Sola Scriptura is once again looking at how it might expand. Appendix 4 and 5 present statistics and suggestions, respectively, for future options at Sola Scriptura. The numbers in Appendix 1 and 2 demonstrate the likelihood of some action in the very near future. If its short history is any indication, then perhaps Sola Scriptura is past due for a division.

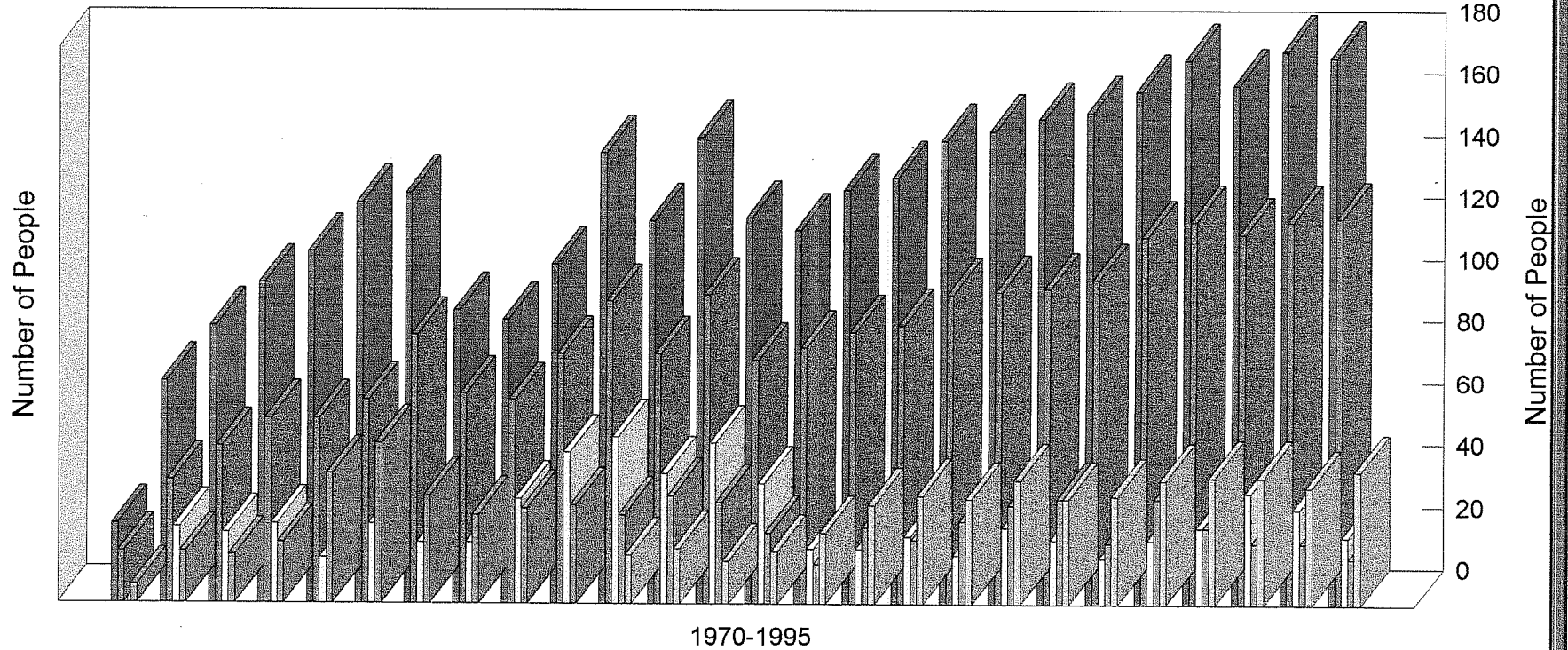
One thing is certain though, God has indeed been gracious in protecting and blessing the work in and through the Christians in Decatur. There is not one WELS congregation in GA that does not directly or indirectly owe its organization to the work begun at Sola Scriptura. But the wonderful thing that can be said today about this congregation - especially today as they struggle with what to do at the present, is that they have never forgotten how to be missionaries. They will acknowledge that the door is still open. The words of Revelation 3:8 are still being fulfilled in their midst: *"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."*



APPENDIX 1

Statistical History of Sola Scriptura

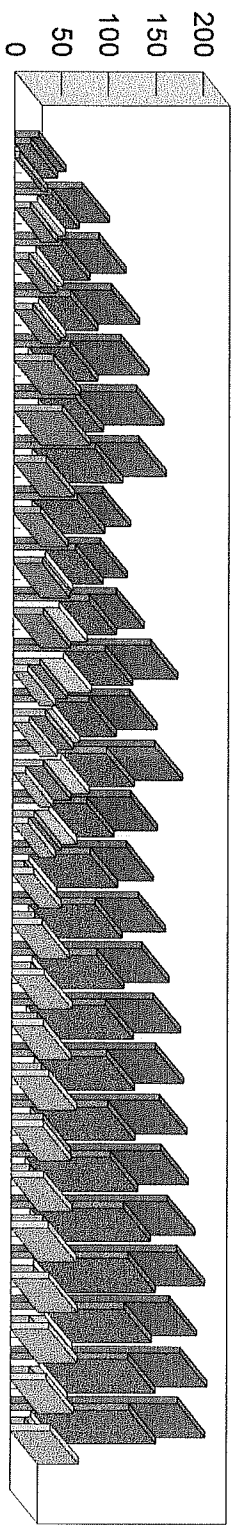
- Baptized Members
- Communicant Members
- Bible Class Enrollment
- Sunday School Enrollment
- LES Enrollment



APPENDIX 2

Statistical History of Sola Scriptura

Number of People



1970-1995	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Baptized	26	72	90	104	114	130	133	95	92	110	146	124	151	125	121	134	138	150	153	157	159	166	176	168	179	177
Com Mmbrs	17	40	51	60	60	66	87	68	66	81	98	81	100	79	83	88	90	100	101	102	105	119	124	120	124	125
BC Enrollmnt		25	23	26	15	26	20	20	34	49	54	42	52	39	18	18	22	16	25	21	15	21	25	36	31	22
SS Enrollmnt	6	17	16	20	42	52	35	29	31	32	29	35	33	23	13	25	21	27	32	34	20	34	25	20	20	15
LES Enrollmnt											16	18	14	17	23	32	35	34	40	34	35	40	41	41	38	43

Compare chart with Appendix 1

Appendix 3

Saturday, April 22, 1972

THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL

His Parish Covers 2 States and He Drives 500 Miles

By David A. Runge
of The Journal Staff

Atlanta, Ga. — Like an old time circuit riding pastor, the Rev. John P. Meyer has a parish that includes two states and he drives up to 500 miles, round trip, to carry out his ministry.

Meyer, born in Milwaukee, came here early in 1971 to be the first pastor of Sola Scriptura Lutheran Church, a mission congregation of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Previously he was the pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Hillsboro, Wis.

His longest trip takes him to Columbia, S. C., to conduct services once or twice a month for a congregation without a regular pastor. On other occasions he celebrates Holy Communion for three servicemen at Ft. Gordon, Ga., about 200 miles from Atlanta. He does the same for a woman 175 miles away in McRae, Ga.

Platteville Request

Once a member of a Wisconsin Synod congregation in Platteville, the woman got in touch with Meyer about joining his congregation.

Sola Scriptura was organized through the initiative of lay members of the Wisconsin Synod who found each other far from their former homes. It all began when George Thompson, a Delta Airlines pilot who had lived in Baltimore, wrote to the Soul Conservation Com-

mission in Detroit, which maintains a record of addresses when members move from one place to another. With the agency's help, Thompson got the names of six families, including 13 adult church members, who were interested in organizing a congregation. They established the first Wisconsin Synod church in this state.

1st Adult Confirmed

The first adult confirmed by Meyer was a Southern Airways pilot who has since gone on duty in South Vietnam as an Army major and liaison officer between the Saigon government POW camps, the American command and the Red Cross. His wife and daughter remained in Augusta, Ga., and are still members of the congregation.

The congregation has grown to 80 baptized members, including 45 confirmed. The oldest member is 41 and the average age is under 20. Many are heads of families who were transferred here by the firms that employ them. They come from 18 states and no two families were members of the same congregation before.

Area Canvassed

About 70 persons, on the average, now attend services being held temporarily in the North Clayton Civic Center, south of the city and about a mile from the Atlanta airport.

Seven members of the Lu-

theran Collegians, a Wisconsin Synod student auxiliary, spent a week here last summer, canvassing areas to ascertain the ratio of church members and those who belong to no church. The immediate area of the civic center has been ruled out as a site for a future building because it is almost solidly Baptist and Methodist.

"We are not interested in stealing Southern Baptists," Meyer said.

The survey has concentrated on several areas on the east side of perimeter Highway 285, a four to six lane road circling the city. Ideally, the congregation would like to find property close to the belt road and an exit ramp to make it convenient for the members, some of whom drive up to 30 or 40 miles to get to church.

\$25,000 an Acre

Such land brings up to \$25,000 or \$30,000 an acre, Meyer reported, but the members hope to spend less than that.

Many in the congregation would like to build a school as well as a church, Meyer said. He said that although possibly two-thirds of the members consider Atlanta only a temporary home, they have been willing to put time, money and effort into the plans for a church.

The congregation hopes to have its own church and to be self-supporting by the end of 1974. The synod now provides almost half of the \$16,000 annual budget.

Appendix 4

WELS Churches in Georgia - 1995 Statistics

	Souls	Communicants	Atn:	Giving/communicant	School
Sola Fide, Lawrenceville:	446	330	235	1000.00	30
Messiah, Alpharetta	87	61	63	1634.00	
Beautiful Savior, Marietta	319	230	185	1136.00	
Faith, Sharpsburg	30	21	27	780.00	
Sola Scriptura, Decatur	177	125	80	619.00	39
Prince of Peace, Augusta	243	147	96	655.00	

Plans:

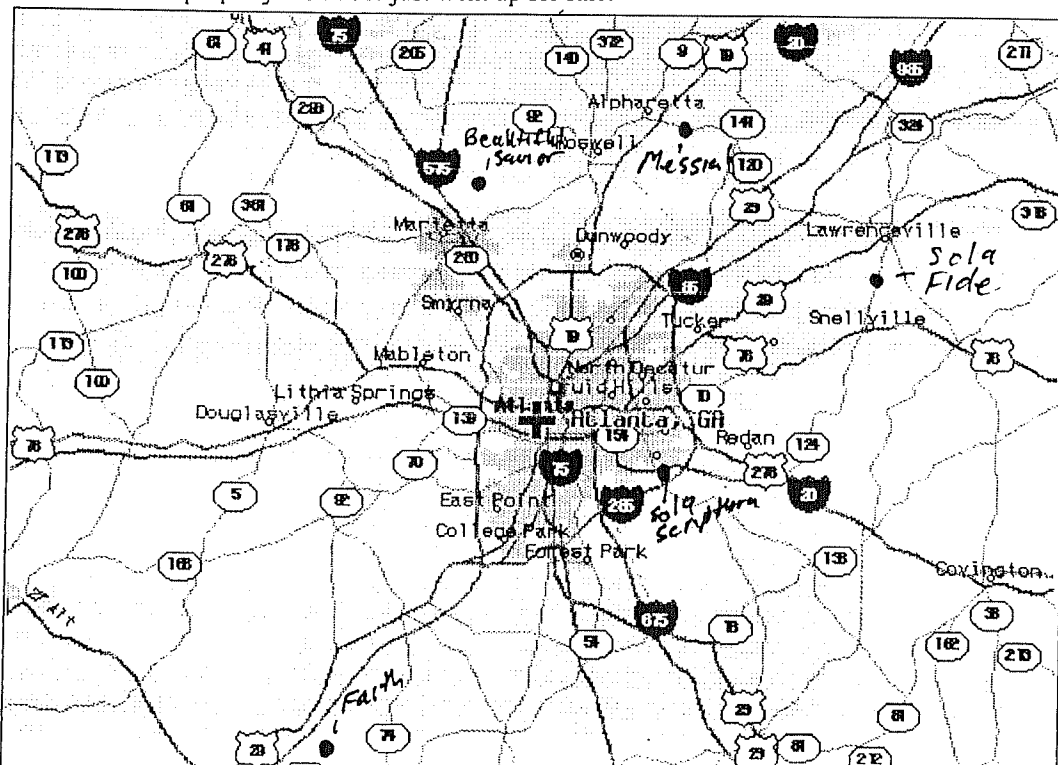
Sola Fide has just purchased 22 acres about 5 miles SE of their current site. They plan to build an auditorium/gym and classrooms within a year, sell all current holdings and move to the new building within a year. Their long-range planning committee has projections out to 50 yrs. These projections include a high school and a seminary on that new site.

Messiah is talking with the Synod about the special offer made to churches with WEF buildings such as there's. They have had drawings of their future chapel for years and are in the process of firming up plans.

Beautiful Savior has been raising funds for their building project for about 3 years. They ran into some snags first with zoning, and then with cost. The plans have been completely re-drawn and they hope to break ground in the near future.

Faith is meeting in a public school building. They have their eye on a church building that is for sale, but they are not big enough yet to be able to purchase it. Only one family from the original group still lives in Georgia. They have had a lot of turn over with steady growth.

Prince of Peace has a brand new pastor. They are in the process of raising money to add classroom and fellowship space. The church on the property next door just went up for sale.



Appendix 5

February 23, 1997

Dear Members of Sola Scriptura,

I am sure that most if not all of our you are wondering why we have put together an expansion committee or why we are even thinking about expanding in our current financial situation. Well, as you may or may not be aware, the Synod has been given a large endowment for the purpose of spreading the Word of God. The Expansion Committee has been formed because we have been asked by Synod for an expansion plan or proposal by the end of May for which some of the funds may be used. We are soliciting your input for this project. If you have any further comments, concerns or questions, please contact either Scott Buth, Todd Schneider or Geoff Grossman or be in attendance for our next meeting at Church on Saturday, March 1 at 9AM.

The purpose of our first meeting was to solicit ideas or options for expansion. Immediate needs and concerns that have been identified are the lack of space for school, and fellowship. The Georgia School Association recommends that each child have a 30X30 space to work. Other needs are the lack of space for an office for Pastor or the Principal to council people without being disturbed. A Library and a Computer Lab are also ideas that were discussed as needs for the school. What follows is a recap of the meeting that took place on Saturday, February 15.

In attendance for the meeting were Pastor, Scott Gostchock, Scott Buth, Joel Appold, Fred Schoenfeld, Barb Lass, Todd Schneider, and Geoff Grossman

Options:

1. Stay Here and Do Nothing

Pros

- It's Easy
- No Additional costs incurred

Cons

- Lack of Current Space
- Called worker morale
- Limits future growth

2. Stay and Expand the Building

- "L" shaped addition off Narthex
- Addition off kitchen area into playground

Pros

- Give us space we need
- Stay in Community
- Less complicated than a move
- Still close to Teacherage and Parsonage

Cons

- Disruptions during construction
- Lack of flexibility
- Take away parking spaces
- Still have to bring building up to code when remodeling

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