

Living Word

*The History
of
Living Word Lutheran Church
Johnson City, TN*

By
David Scharf

CH3031

Professor James Korthals

12-6-04
Lutheran Church

Living Word Lutheran Church

“Call me Ishmael” – no, this is not to be an indication of the epic length of this history, but rather a suggested slogan for the members of Living Word Lutheran Church in Johnson City, TN. “Ishmael” means “God hears.” And God certainly heard the prayers of his people who were travelling over a 100 miles one way to worship in Knoxville, TN. It all started with five or six families who lived in the Tri-Cities area (Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol) in the mid-eighties. God heard the petitions of His people. But why Johnson City, TN – a city in the heart of the “Bible belt;” a city that boasts of over 300 churches for its 56,000 inhabitants?

Johnson City is located in the extreme northeast portion of Tennessee. It is arguably one of the most beautiful spots in America. Virginia and North Carolina surround it, with the Appalachian Mountains gracing its many scenic views. The mild climate matches the scenery for an ideal living location. It is a spot rich in history and recreation.

As with every area of the country, northeast Tennessee has its own culture. As you drive past the Kentucky boarder from “up north,” you might notice a bumper sticker that reads, *“American by birth; Southern by the grace of God.”* For every American flag that you see, you will see almost as many Confederate flags. If you were to go to the grocery store you might be offered a *buggy* (i.e. grocery cart to the Yankee). In short, if you are from the south you are proud to be “from the south.”

However, Living Word in Johnson City, TN was not founded because of the area’s beauty, history, or pride. Rather it was founded because there are people in Johnson City. A member of Living Word put it well in answer to the question of “Why”: “My best understanding of this is that it is based on the Great Commission...‘go and make disciples of all

nations'...Tennessee is considered part of that Commission ☺!"¹ These are people who need to hear the message of their Savior from sin. Living Word was founded because God in His wisdom was pleased to build a group of Christians at this place. God was pleased to bless this group with persistence and faith. God was pleased to hear the prayers of His people and answer them with a resounding "yes!" The rest of this history will be devoted to showing how God answered those prayers.

The outline of the paper will be as follows: Part I: **Just the Facts** – A brief history of the congregation based on the events with an occasional **After the Fact** – commentary on the history of the congregation through the mouths of members and those associated with Living Word's history. Part II: **What makes Living Word, Living Word?** Pastorally and congregationally speaking.

Just the Facts (and after the fact)!

It all began in the mid-eighties when a group ranging from five to six families from the Tri-Cities area began to meet in the living rooms of different private residences. The families were members at *Shepherd of the Hills* in Knoxville, TN, which was over 100 miles from Johnson City, TN. Among the core group were: Dick and Jane Conger, Scott and Janeice George, Bob and Donna Wall, Ken and Gretchen Bassett and their three children, Christina Skogen and her three children, and Tim Riley. Pastor Tim P. Henning of *Shepherd of the Hills* served them with the Word once or twice a month until Pastor Ken Engdahl took the call to *Shepherd of the Hills* in 1990.²

¹ Blackwell, Randy and Cathy. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

After the fact:

“Living in Jonesborough, a tightly knit community (comprised of mostly Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Christian churches), I was once asked: ‘What sect was it you belong to?’”³

This group continued to meet once or twice a month in private residences until the summer of 1991. The group had outgrown living rooms and began to rent out a room twice a month at the Jonesborough Visitor’s Center (about eight miles from Johnson City). Pastor Engdahl gave the reason for the change: “1. Our group now averaged about twenty at worship, which was an uncomfortable amount for many of members’ homes, 2. We had decided to petition the DMB for exploratory status and wished to take the first step towards that goal, and 3. We all realized that true mission work is outreach – not just serving ourselves.”⁴

In addition to those listed above, the “Visitor’s Center group” included: the Mundstocks (five), Meisels (four) [The Meisels, Bassets and Walls had moved out of the area and were no longer with the group by the time Pastor Kock arrived in July, 1992], Al and Carol Sonnenburg, Mark and Susan Rollof, and the Williams (four).⁵

At this point, under the direction of Pastor Ken Engdahl, Pastor John Guse (District President), Pastor Larry Zahn (South Atlantic District Mission Board Chairman), and Pastor Jim Radloff (Mission Counselor), the group set up a small steering committee (Bob Wall, Dick Conger, and Scott George) and began to do a demographic survey of the Tri-Cities area. The steering committee found that North Johnson City seemed to be the best place to establish a

² George, Scott and Janeice, Personal interview, 30 July, 2004.

³ Conger, Dick. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁴ Engdahl, Pastor Ken. Call letter from the Tri-Cities exploratory group, October, 1991. Pastor Engdahl was the 2nd Pastor from *Shepherd of the Hills* in Knoxville to serve the Tri-Cities group.

⁵ George, Scott and Janeice, Personal interview, 30 July, 2004.

mission in the Tri-Cities. The Committee also found that most of the existing churches had no active Evangelism program. This boded well for this small group trying to make a start.⁶

After the fact:

“When I (Pastor Kock) first got here, the plan was to try to start three groups – one in each of the three Tri-Cities. It became clear that the three cities were three very separate cities. But, the congregation had rented a place for us in Johnson City. Because of that, and because Johnson City was the biggest of the three cities and was growing the most, it made sense to get started here, even though at that point we only had one family actually located in Johnson City!”⁷

The committee submitted their results to the Board for Home Missions and mission status was approved! Pastor Zahn offered some interesting insights about the decision to grant mission status:

I have felt that the people were always mission minded. The nucleus of people who formed the church originally were driving regularly to Knoxville and showed their dedication to mission work. If they drove that far to go to church, it was easy to assume that they would work hard if a church were in the area...The cities of Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol seemed to form a pretty good population base to start a congregation (sic. 400,000)...Jim Radloff, the mission counselor for the South Atlantic District, and I toured the area and went to the different places in the three cities to gather information that the nucleus didn't already give to us. We also knew that Tennessee is a popular place for people to go to retire...I always asked the question of myself, “Is this an area that we are going to be sorry we didn't enter ten years from now?” I felt that way about the Tri-Cities.⁸

After the fact:

I always enjoyed traveling with Jim Radloff on trips like this. We started thirty churches in our district in the 1990's so we did it often. We got to be a pretty good team. When we didn't know something we used to be able to say something funny to get us through. The thing I remember most about the trip there was when we went to the Building and Zoning commission. We were looking at

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Kock, Pastor Tom. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁸ Zahn, Pastor Larry. Personal Interview, 30 July, 2004. (District Mission Board Chairman at that time)

maps. We didn't do that at the Seminary. We were looking at a certain map that projected new growth. The engineer was southern and very patient with the two men from the church body from Wisconsin, not only were we inexperienced about these kinds of maps but we were also Yankees. When we asked why there was no building going on in a certain area, the man replied in slow southern drawl, "Because there's a mountain there and it's hard to move them."⁹

After the Board for Home Missions approved exploratory status, the Tri-Cities group began to call for an experienced pastor from the field. Among those called were Pastors Jim Werner and Ken Kratz. The Lord led all of the men who were called from the field to return the call. Finally, in May of 1992, the group's prayers were answered when Pastor Tom Kock was assigned from the seminary to the Johnson City exploratory.

Before Pastor Kock arrived in Johnson City, the new exploratory rented a parsonage for him at 1200 High Street, in Johnson City, TN. The group renovated the basement of the rented parsonage and set it up for worship services and Bible classes (Pastor Kock conducted two services at the Visitor's Center in Jonesborough before the group moved services to the rented parsonage). When Pastor Kock arrived in Johnson City, he and the group hit the ground running by canvassing neighborhoods. By September 23rd, 1992, they had organized themselves enough to have a chairman (Al Sonnenburg), a treasurer (Scott George), and a financial secretary (Mark Rollof). They also chose the name "Living Word" for the church. They established that the group would meet every Sunday for Bible Study in the basement of Pastor's rented parsonage. Once a month the group held a worship service. In an update letter to Pastor's Larry Zahn and Jim Radloff, Pastor Kock quipped, "My first service had eleven people, my second service had twenty-three. I'm expecting to keep growing at that rate – we'll probably look to start our Christian Day School in time for next school year ☺!"¹⁰ Living Word was off and running!

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Kock, Pastor Tom. Letter to Pastors Jim Radloff and Larry Zahn. 1 September, 1992.

Among those taking the first Bible Information Course offered by Pastor Kock in the late fall of 1992 were Craig and Monica Shepherd and Ron Williams – all of whom became very active members in the congregation. In addition to those listed previously, the exploratory group by the end of 1993, now included: Joyce Albaugh, Mark and Darcy Dorsett (six), Mike and Nola Schwarz (three), Jim and Cathy Dugan (eight),¹¹ Kevin and Diane McElyea (four), ~~John and Denise Underwood (five), and Howard Simon.~~¹¹

Worship services in the basement of Pastor Kock's house didn't last long. Living Word wanted to worship in a recognizable location to the people of the Tri-Cities. So in the fall of 1992, Living Word decided to secure the fellowship hall of the local Seventh Day Adventist building on Oakland Avenue in Johnson City for \$300 per month.¹² They began to rent the hall and worship there in March of 1993. Since the Seventh Day Adventists worship on Saturdays, the building was open on Sundays. The Sonnenburgs commented about this time: "There were times when we were very short of money, but we kept saying, 'the Lord will provide.'"¹³ The Lord did provide! At the end of 1992, Living Word had thirteen communicant members (twenty souls) and at the end of 1993, Living Word had twenty-four communicant members (thirty-four souls)! The Lord had provided an increase of eleven members in one year!¹⁴

¹¹ George, Scott and Janeice, Personal interview, 30 July, 2004.

¹² Pastor Kock tells the story that when he first got to town, he needed a desk. He looked in the *Trading Post* (i.e. want ads) and ended up buying a desk from Kem and Sheryl Tilly through an advertisement in the *Trading Post*. Kem was a board member of the 7th Day Adventist Church in town. Pastor decided to canvass the area because he knew where it was now and also knew the couple from whom he bought the desk. The Shepherd's lived a few doors down from the Tilly's. Pastor made multiple visits to both homes. The Shepherd's became active members at Living Word – Craig is currently on the board of Elders. When Living Word was looking for a place to rent, it helped that Pastor had developed a relationship with Kem Tilly, a member of the 7th Day Adventist board. In hindsight, we can see the gracious hand of God. (And Pastor Kock just thought he was getting a desk! ©)

¹³ Sonnenburg, Al and Carol. Personal Interview. 30 July, 2004.

¹⁴ This information was taken from the "Basic Information and Request Form" to the Board for Home Missions, dated 8-31-94. 1993 was the first year that the Living Word exploratory appeared in the Synod's Statistical Reports. Confer the addenda 1 for a summary of key statistics to present. This paper will not religiously track the statistics in the body of the document.

After the fact:

Pastor asked me to build a lectern (the same one we still use each Sunday) and he said to make it plenty tall enough. Well, after I brought it in on Sunday morning he said it was a little taller than he thought it would be. So I took out the Sawzall and zipped off the bottom to make it instantly shorter. I guess you had to be there to see Pastor's reaction to such an operation. Oh, the charm of informality.¹⁵

In January/February of 1993, Living Word embarked on a large-scale telephone survey. This survey was done out of Joyce Albaugh's office who worked for Nationwide Insurance. The members called c. 4,000 homes; the OWLS group from St. Mark's in Watertown, WI called an additional 5,000 homes. Living Word located about 500 unchurched folks, to whom they sent a series of mailings leading up to their opening service. Included on this mailing list was the Snapp family who would years later become very active members at Living Word.

By March 21, 1993, Living Word was ready to hold their Grand Opening service at the Seventh Day Adventist building. On March 21, 1993, "seventy-two people came for worship, a few were from *Shepherd of the Hills* in Knoxville, some were simply curious and some were interested in becoming more involved. Our Sunday School program began several weeks later, and from that time on we've held worship and Sunday School each week."¹⁶

After the fact:

One that I remember...has to do with our opening service, March 1993. I had decided to preach on Isaiah 49...and it includes the phrase: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." So, for my children's message, I decided to write the names of my kids (at that time, Daniel and Carissa) onto my hand with a ballpoint pen. Well, it was opening service, I was excited, nervous, etc., and my hands got sweaty. So, when I went to try to write the names onto my hands, the ballpoint pen wouldn't write on my sweaty palms! (Application: "Imagine that I had been able to write their names onto my hands"...☺).¹⁷

¹⁵ George, Scott and Janeice, Personal interview, 30 July, 2004.

¹⁶ www.livingwordlutheran.com (About us/our history)

¹⁷ Kock, Pastor Tom. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

It should be noted that Living Word's Sunday School program (along with Evangelism) is of first importance to the pastor and to the congregation. There is a decided focus in the congregation to "grow in the Word" (through Sunday School, Bible study, Worship, etc.) and to "go with the Word" (i.e. Evangelism). The pastor and people put the church's mission at the forefront of every member's mind – this is not "someone else's" job – It's *my* job. This is motivated by growing in the Word and seeing the Savior's love for the world. A big part of seeing that love is through Sunday School. In his reports, Pastor Kock lists the numbers for the year in the order of Sunday School attendance for adults and children, then worship attendance, and finally offerings. Pastor Kock comments in his Pastor's report to the Board for Home Missions:

The statistics above are given in order of importance. A congregation that isn't growing in the Word will also fail to go with the Word. On the other hand, a congregation that is growing in the Word will also go with that Word. The most important statistic is the Adult Sunday School attendance figure. If we grow in that category, we will do well! Notice that the offering statistics are given last. They are least important in this sense – they are a fruit of the statistics that come before them – i.e. Sunday School and Worship attendance.¹⁸

On May 20, 1994, the congregation was approved for a loan from the Church Extension Fund to buy a split-foyer parsonage for Pastor Kock at 3422 Linkwood Drive in Johnson City. The CEF purchased the parsonage for Living Word and the Board for Home Missions made mortgage payments on the parsonage in lieu of rent.¹⁹ From that time until present, various mid-week Bible studies, Catechism instruction, and Bible Information Courses have been held in the basement of the parsonage.

¹⁸ Kock, Pastor Tom. "Basic Information and Request Form" to the Board for Home Missions: Pastor's Report for 1995.

¹⁹ Behmke, Patti (WELS Asset Management Specialist – WELS Church Extension Fund). Personal Interview. 30 July, 2004.

1996 was a landmark year for Living Word. From the beginning, the Living Word exploratory had been “hitting the streets,” making thousands of phone calls, distributing tens of thousands of flyers, doing mass mailings and Evangelism calls. Living Word had gone from forty souls at the end of 1994, to sixty-one souls at the end of 1995, to seventy-one souls at the end of 1996. In July of 1996, Living Word was granted “mission status!”

Effective July 1, 1996, Mission status was achieved. Mission Status is the point at which a congregation has grown enough to support the finances of the church without the assistance of the Board for Home Missions. At that time ownership of the parsonage is transferred to the congregation and they begin making mortgage payments on that parsonage.²⁰

Due to the increasing numbers, Living Word needed to expand its Sunday morning accommodations. In 1996, Living Word began renting two rooms in the basement of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (used for children’s Sunday School) in addition to the fellowship hall. Rent went from \$300 per month to \$380 per month. The steering committee at that time consisted of: ^{Glen Stecker} ~~Kevin McElyea~~ (Chairman), Jim Porzig (Financial Secretary), John Reightler (Evangelism Chairman), and ^{Randy Blackwell} ~~John Underwood~~ (Treasurer). This committee oversaw the newly established “Facility Committee” (Tom Church, Janeice George, Kevin McElyea, and Craig Shepherd) which was responsible for looking into buying land for Living Word’s first permanent facility.²¹

After the fact:

We were still meeting in the fellowship hall area (where we now do adult Sunday School – in those days we did adult SS, then we’d tear down the tables, reset all the chairs into a worship format, and worship in there, too). It was Pentecost Sunday, and my theme was, “The Holy Spirit is calling you.” I was nearing the end of the sermon, and was into a very gospel-flavored, good news flavored, getting near to the end of the section, so I said, “The Holy Spirit is calling you...the Holy Spirit is calling you...the Holy Spirit is calling you.” Each time

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Kock, Pastor Tom. Congregational report, 1996. And: “Basic Information and Request Form” to BHM, 1996. In 1997, Kevin McElyea became chairman and John Underwood became treasurer after Glen Stecker and Randy Blackwell had completed their two-year terms.

my voice got a little quieter, a little more personal/good-news-passionate. And, just as I finished saying it the third time, allowing for a nice, juicy pause, the phone rang! At first I was mad, but then I did some real quick thinking and realized that being mad would give exactly the wrong flavor to the whole thing. So, I made some crack about the Holy Spirit having a direct line or using AT&T or something like that.²²

Now that Living Word was “officially” a congregation, a Constitution committee was established (Joyce Albaugh, Pastor Kock, Kevin McElyea, Glen Stecker, and Gail Williams) to draw up a proposed congregational constitution to be presented to the synod at the district convention. Along with the added congregational responsibilities that came with mission status, Living Word also took on some new financial responsibilities. The synod subsidy would continue to operate on a sliding scale. Generally these sliding subsidy plans were made over five years, but Living Word made an aggressive attempt at four years: \$28,800 in 96-97; \$21,600 in 97-98; \$14,400 in 98-99; \$7,200 in 99-00. In 1996, Living Word also received their first Travel Canvass Witness team to help out with flyer distribution.²³ Living Word continued to receive a TCW team in subsequent years from either Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN or Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, WI.

After the fact:

(Describing one of Pastor Kock’s children’s messages) One day pastor was using an illustration of sin and how heavy a sinful load is...to help illustrate, he used a rubber tote full of bricks and asked Amy Shepherd (she must have been all of seven) to pick it up...the intent of the illustration was to show her that sin’s burdens were so heavy she could not lift up the container with her own efforts. Pastor, of course, was going to be Jesus and carry the burden of sin for her. When Amy was asked to lift the container, she did it easily with no effort. Moral of that story: always check out your illustration for a Children’s sermon before you use it!²⁴

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Kock, Pastor Tom. “Basic Information and Request Form” to the Board for Home Missions: Pastor’s Report for 1995.

²⁴ Blackwell, Cathy and Randy. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

In 1997, Living Word implemented their current form of “church government.” They established the “Board of Elders.” The Board of Elders consists of the “Adult Ministry” Elder, the “Outreach Ministry” Elder, the “Youth Ministry” Elder, the “Worship Ministry” Elder, and the Pastor.²⁵ This was now the group that would lead Living Word. The terms last two years and are set up to expire on alternating years.

In 1998, Living Word continued to experience growth. The congregation had gone from eighty-eight souls in 1997 to 103 souls in 1998. Space was running out to continue worshipping in the fellowship hall. So in 1998 Living Word began to rent the sanctuary of the Seventh Day Adventist building (along with two side classrooms) in addition to the fellowship hall and Sunday School rooms in the basement. The rent went from \$350 per month to \$650 per month. In addition to canvassing, flyer distribution and evangelism calls, Living Word also put two television commercials on cable stations.²⁶

After the fact:

One of our former members led children’s activities and even put out a cassette of campground songs called “Rooted”. Well, part of the tape was a Christian rap. We tried this in Sunday School! Give some of our members credit: Sunday clothes - \$50, the tape “Rooted” - \$10, the sight of Al Sonnenburg and Scott George rapping – priceless!²⁷

In 1998, Living Word also received their first Vicar – Vicar Stephen Meyer (now Pastor in Rochester, MN). The Board for Home Missions subsidizes the Vicar’s salary and the congregation pays for the Vicar’s mileage and moving costs. As for subsequent Vicars, Living Word received their next Vicars in 2001 – Jon Bergemann (now Pastor in Woodbridge, VA);

²⁵ Kock, Pastor Tom. “Basic Information and Request Form” to the Board for Home Missions: Pastor’s Report for 1997. Cf. Addenda 2 for a fuller description of these offices.

²⁶ Kock, Pastor Tom. Congregational report, 1998-99.

²⁷ George, Scott and Janeice. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

2002 – David Olson (now Pastor in Greeley, CO); 2003 – David Scharf (now a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary); 2004 – John Stelljes (currently serving).

After the fact:

When we picked up Vicar Meyer at the seminary (to move him down to TN) – Casey became Pastor and Pastor became Casey. That lasted about fifteen minutes. So the kids then decided to play, “Where’s Walter?” Walter was a fictitious teen the kids made up. They kept this going for several days even getting Vicar’s parents involved. We arrived back home with Vicar driving alone. He had been driving with one teen at a time until then. We called Denise Underwood from our last stop and explained everything to her and told her to play along. We arrived home and Denise was looking for “her son, Walter.” All the teens pointed at Vicar, saying that Walter was to have ridden with him at the last stop. We told him the truth at that point. We had to, the look on his face!²⁸

1999 brought new challenges and exciting rewards to Living Word. An experience that proved to be both challenging and rewarding happened when Pastor Kock began to serve a vacancy in Hendersonville, NC. With nearly 100 miles to drive one way, it was helpful to have Vicar Meyer on board with whom he could alternate Sundays. Pastor Kock served this vacancy from April to December of 1999 (four months with the help of Vicar Meyer and four months on his own).

After the fact:

(Choir experience) One Easter, I was directing, “This Little Light of Mine” and noticed that the entire choir looked as if they could let out a huge belly laugh at any time. Being the naïve person I am, I thought, “Wow! They are especially full of the spirit today...the joy of the Resurrection is just all over their faces!” Of course, while this could have been true, I found out later the real reason for their smiling faces was that one our ushers, Joel Van Ryn, was so moved by our music that he was doing “Blues Brothers” moves in the back of the Church! Got to love it!²⁹

²⁸ Albaugh, Joyce. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004. Also receiving credit for this story is Ben Wiles and John and Denise Underwood. Cf. Addenda 3.

²⁹ Blackwell, Cathy and Randy. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

One of the challenges of 1999 was that Living Word had experienced its first dip in membership, going from 103 souls in 1998 to ninety-nine souls in 1999. In general, throughout its history Living Word's growth has been steady. However there have been some years in which there have been few adult confirmations. In the three-year period from 1999-2001 Living Word had only twelve adult confirmations. While in 2002 the congregation confirmed sixteen adults! Though the same work was being done, perhaps it serves as a good reminder that God works faith when and where He pleases – God is the Lord of His Church. We simply spread the seed and God makes it grow! 1999 was also the last year of the sliding scale of subsidy from the synod. One of the exciting developments of 1999 was that, with a building fund of \$75,000, Living Word decided to sign a contract on five acres of land for \$350,000 in a growing part of North Johnson City. As a result of these developments, Living Word decided to propose to the District Mission Board a three-year subsidy program (2000-01 = \$18,000; 2001-02 = \$12,000; 2002-03 = \$6,000). From records, it seems that the DMB even approved the subsidy. This subsidy would have allowed the congregation to proceed with ministry without having to deplete the building fund or run “skeleton” evangelism.³⁰

However, with the looming financial challenges for the synod, Living Word decided to try to make it without the subsidy. By God's grace, the congregation pulled through, but these were very challenging financial times for Living Word. At one point, the congregation had to borrow almost \$20,000 from their own building fund to stay above water. Eventually, the congregation was able to pay itself back for the loan.³¹

On July 21, 2000, Living Word officially purchased the nearly five-acre plot of land on the corner of the Kingsport Highway (a.k.a. Hwy. 36 or Roan St.) and Rockingham Rd. for

³⁰ Kock, Pastor Tom. “Basic Information and Request Form” to the Board for Home Missions: Pastor's Report for 1999.

\$350,000.³² At that time, the Board for Home Mission's policy was that the BHM would match up to twenty percent of the cost of the land up to five acres. Living Word took advantage of these matching funds. Living Word put up \$72,000 that was matched by the BHM. The rest of the cost was financed through a CEF loan of \$206,000.³³ The property was ideal because it is located on one of the major thoroughfares of the region. Though only a two-lane road, Johnson City is currently planning on widening it to a four-lane road. This will take 20-30 feet off of Living Word's property running the length of the Kingsport Highway, but will serve as an advantage with the projected increase of traffic. After the purchase of the land, the congregation then set out to find a contractor and an architect by November 1, 2001.³⁴

After the fact:

(Comments on the inability to do anything at the land without a roof) "It never made any difference when we would plan to have services and a picnic on our land. It would rain buckets or it would be so hot that it was almost unbearable. We finally rented a tent to get rid of the problem."³⁵

In 2001, along with the regular ministry (e.g. canvassing, evangelism calls, youth ministry, etc.) the Lord opened a door for Living Word at the Outlook Pointe Assisted Living Center (now known as Broadmore Assisted Living Center). Pastor had been holding a weekly Tuesday-morning Bible study and elder Joe Hicks conducted worship there once a month. Starting in September 2001 the congregation began to hold worship there twice a month, with Joe Hicks, Vicar Bergemann, and Pastor sharing responsibilities (1st and 3rd Sundays of the

³¹ Kock, Pastor Tom. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

³² Behmke, Patti (WELS Asset Management Specialist – WELS Church Extension Fund). Personal Interview. 30 July, 2004.

³³ Kock, Pastor Tom. "Application for Mortgage Loan on Church Property with the WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc." 1 May, 2000.

³⁴ Cf. Addenda 4.

³⁵ Sonnenburg, Al and Carol. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

month).³⁶ The worship services at Broadmore are now conducted by a rotation of about six men from the congregation, who revise and shorten one of the pastor or vicar's sermons.

After the fact:

(On assisting at an assisted living service) On one of my first services, a piano player was not available and I needed to provide music accompaniment with my guitar. Emily, our two-year-old, was potty training and had wet her pull-up prior to starting the service. Suzanne had left the diaper bag in the car and decided not to retrieve it. She took Emily's pull up off and decided to let her do without until the end of the service. Emily had the habit of wandering around the room during the service. During one of the hymns, as I was playing my guitar, Emily was doing her usual walking around and decided to lie down in the floor at the front of the room and extend her legs straight up into the air. Needless to say everyone noticed Emily was not wearing a diaper. As my wide eyes made contact with Suzanne (sitting at the back of the room), I noticed she was laughing and all I could do was watch as Suzanne took her time to retrieve our child and take her to the back of the room and attempt to keep her modest for the rest of the service.³⁷

As with any year, Living Word experienced ups and downs in 2002. Two members, Casey Payne (college student) and Joe Hicks (Elder of the congregation), died within one week of each other. This proved to be a challenging time for the loved ones, as well as for the congregation. Though emotionally draining for all involved, the experience pulled the members together as a church family to support one another and especially the families (the George's and Jennifer Hicks) of those who died during this difficult time.

An exciting program started up in 2002 called the "Evangelist Program". This program is run through Martin Luther College and is taught by the pastor of the congregation (in this case – Pastor Kock). The Evangelist class gives members an opportunity to "dig deeper" into the doctrinal teachings of the Bible. After a person completes a section of the course, he/she gets credit for that course on the way to being an official "evangelist." This program has had up to fifteen people enrolled in the class at one time! But let's get back to the building.

³⁶ Snapp, Mike. "Annual Report for July, 2000 to June, 2001"

By 2002, the congregation had hired an architect, Thomas Weems, and was receiving quotes from various contractors. Eventually, Living Word hired Rick and Larry Sangid. The construction company is called *L&R Properties*. Living Word set up their building project in three stages. Stage one will provide Living Word with a sanctuary/gymnasium, classrooms, offices, a kitchen, and bathrooms. When the congregation is ready to expand, the second stage will begin. The second stage is an adjoining facility that reduplicates the footprint of stage one. The original sanctuary of stage one would either become a gymnasium or be renovated into a dedicated sanctuary area, with the large area in the second phase serving whichever purpose is not served by the original facility. Stage two will add more classrooms and bathrooms as well. The facility is being built to accommodate a preschool and/or daycare center, and possibly a Christian day school in the future. Stage three-construction will add more classrooms and/or fellowship space.

Living Word is a “mission” congregation, as is any congregation that grows and goes with God’s Word. One way that the congregation wanted to go with the Word was through a new facility. This building would help to “facilitate” worship. Another way that Living Word decided to go with the Word was in the spring of 2003. After months of instruction (beginning in the spring of 2003), Living Word decided to change one of its practices. The congregation would now celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a separate service from the regular worship hour (i.e. On the second Sunday of the month, the schedule is: 9:30 a.m. – Communion Service; 10:00 a.m. – Sunday School; 10:45 a.m. – Worship Service). They made the move because visitors (who presumably saw the practice as “unloving”) were leaving before anyone could instruct them about close(d) communion. Living Word does not apologize for a single doctrine of Scripture. However, they felt a need to try and maintain visitors until they could be properly

³⁷ Rogers, Phil and Suzanne. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

instructed to see the beauty of *all* of God's truth. This issue was challenging and the members struggled with this decision. In the interests of going with the Word and keeping that door open for the Gospel, they separated the Lord's Supper from the regular worship hour. Living Word has not lost a single family to close(d) communion since the change and they continue to go with God's Word through a new facility.

Living Word decided that it was time to apply for a loan from the Church Extension Fund. The congregation requested and was granted approval to borrow \$550,000 in a two-stage process. Living Word put up twenty percent of the \$550,000 (i.e. \$110,000) and that amount was matched by the CEF. This gave Living Word \$770,000 to apply towards stages one and two of the project. In summary, the CEF pledged a total of \$660,000 (\$550,000 in loans, \$110,000 in grants), while the congregation pledged \$110,000 of their own.³⁸

After years of planning and hard work, ground was finally broken for the new facility on June 29, 2003.³⁹ The past year and a half have delivered quite a few ups and downs as far as construction goes. There have been delays due to weather, deaths, etc. The congregation is still worshipping in the Seventh Day Adventist's building, but Living Word hopes to be in the new facility by January of 2005.

God has certainly heard the prayers of His people and has blessed this congregation immensely. From small beginnings of just a handful of families to having over 140 souls under their care, Living Word has been truly blessed. From worshipping out of living rooms to a visitor's center to a basement to a Seventh Day Adventist rental facility to their soon-to-be first facility. The Lord of the harvest has answered prayer. Call me "Ishmael," for God has certainly

³⁸ Kock, Pastor Tom. Letter to Pastor Harry Hagedorn (Chairman of the Board for Home Missions). 2002.

³⁹ Behmke, Patti (WELS Asset Management Specialist – WELS Church Extension Fund). Personal Interview. 30 July, 2004.

heard the prayers of His people. And God will continue to bless the people of Living Word and hear their prayers for the future!

After the fact: “The Lord’s good humor is so evident that he enables any of our feeble efforts to serve as his witnesses to bear fruit.”⁴⁰ How true! Soli Deo Gloria!

What Makes Living Word, Living Word?

This is perhaps not part of the “History of Living Word” proper, but I thought it appropriate to include it here as more than just an addenda. There is more to any congregation than “just the facts.” Lord willing, I was able to show you in the first portion of this history how alive the people of Living Word are – their humor, their love, and their dedication. I wanted to try and demonstrate what makes Living Word, Living Word.

As I spent my year in Johnson City, TN, there were a couple of unique (and no, not just to Living Word in Johnson City!) things about Living Word that kept coming up. One of the advantages that the Living Word congregation had was that they have had the same pastor for the entire history of the congregation.⁴¹ What a blessing! The other distinct thing that I and other people noticed as they visited or were taking classes to join church was that Living Word was “different” – good different!

Instead of explaining what I’m talking about in my own words, I’ll let those who are members and those who have had contact with the congregation tell you what I mean. I interviewed over 30 people and asked them all these two questions (among others): 1. What has it meant to you to have had one pastor (that is the same pastor) for all twelve years of Living

⁴⁰ Hagedorn, Pastor Harry. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004. (Chairman of the Board for Home Missions)

⁴¹ I am speaking here of the congregation under the name of Living Word. I am not taking anything away from the wonderful and hard work that Pastor Tim P. Henning and Pastor Ken Engdahl put in to serve this group that would be Living Word.

Word's existence? 2. How is Living Word different from your previous church experiences (WELS or not)?

When Pastor Kock was growing up, for some reason, he always thought the state of Tennessee looked “cool.”⁴² Then, when he got the call to Johnson City, TN right out of the Seminary, he thought, “Yeah, that makes sense.” Though he had never heard of Johnson City before, Pastor set out from Wisconsin ready to get his feet wet. On his way down he remembers seeing a bumper sticker that said, “American by birth, Southern by the grace of God!”

Pastor Kock fell in love with the South immediately. He always liked the accent. In fact, after being there for the past 12 years, he says that the Midwestern accent sounds strange. Pastor always liked the slower pace in the South and what seemed like less rules and regulations. For example, to get licensed to perform marriages in the Midwest sometimes you need to go through hoops. In the South Pastor called the county clerk and asked what he needed to do to be licensed to perform marriages. The clerk asked, “Are you a preacher?” Pastor responded, “Yup!” The clerk said, “Well, that’s all we need.”

Pastor has always said that you can never completely become what you weren’t when you were born (e.g. Pastor was born in the Midwest – he’ll never truly be “southern”). But he also stresses that it’s important to make the decision to strive to be part of the culture, lest obstacles be put in the way of the Gospel. For Pastor Kock, that was easy – he loves the South! But more importantly he loves the people that he’s been called to serve. He’s spent his entire ministry with this congregation – what has it meant? Here’s what those who know him best said:

It has brought about a pastoral bond with the congregation:

“I believe that it has helped the church become a tighter and stronger body because we have not had to go through transitions...The members would be fine if we did transition because

they know that the pastor doesn't make the church, but I have appreciated coming home to the same person who taught me confirmation. There is a strong bond that I feel."⁴³

It has provided stability to the congregation:

"Pastor Kock's presence at Living Word has provided a stable environment for the church to grow and develop its mission goals. His 'can do' optimistic leadership has helped develop a supportive leadership structure for the congregation."⁴⁴

It has provided continuity for the congregation:

"Having the same pastor provides a continuity of following our mission. Being at Living Word for twelve years also gives him the advantage of knowing the parishioners, our strengths and our weaknesses as well as our needs."⁴⁵

It has allowed for an identity in the community:

"This is the best thing that can happen. In the South churches are often known for the pastor who is there. People will call a church by, 'That's Pastor Kock's church' and not Living Word Lutheran Church. When a pastor is working hard and being faithful, that says the church is stable. Needless to say, that is what people want."⁴⁶

"I think it's been a huge plus simply because of all the contacts he's made with the community. Everyone knows Living Word as 'Tom's church.' I think if a new person came, Living Word would lose a lot of that."⁴⁷

It has helped establish a unified focus and "spirit":

"I have great respect for his gifts and his spirit. It seems that much of that 'spirit' has been caught by the flock that God privileges him to serve. It has also been my perception that

⁴² Cf. Addenda 5 for a fuller biography of the Kock family. This information was gleaned from conversations.

⁴³ Wiles, Ben. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁴⁴ Underwood, John and Denise. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁴⁵ Rogers, Phil and Suzanne. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

Pastor Kock has led the congregation to a clear focus on the mission of the church...God has set his banquet table through his servant.”⁴⁸

It has allowed for closer relationships:

“He (Pastor Kock) is our pastor and our friend. More like part of the family. I think the church is closer because of this.”⁴⁹

“We are more inclined to go to Pastor and Beth with our troubles, problems and joys...the close and personal rapport with Pastor Kock has been most effective, reassuring and beneficial to this flock.”⁵⁰

It has been vital:

“From my perspective of viewing many different outreach efforts in many different fields, the most critical factor, after the efficacy of the Gospel, is the tenure of the “establishing pastor.”⁵¹

It can't be done without a caring and supportive wife:

“In my humble opinion, one of the human keys to success in a new mission start is the sacrificial spirit of a wife. Tom, in my opinion, married above himself and Beth has filled her role as wife, mother and Mrs. Pastor exceptionally well.”⁵²

What an incredible blessing God has bestowed on Living Word Lutheran by allowing Pastor Kock and his family to serve in Johnson City right from the start – continuity, community presence, closeness, etc. But aside from the blessings of a long pastorate, what makes Living Word different (i.e. What makes Living Word, Living Word)?

⁴⁶ Zahn, Pastor Larry. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁴⁷ Olson, Pastor Dave. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁴⁸ Westra, Chuck. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁴⁹ Shepherd, Craig, Monica, and Amy. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵⁰ Hicks, Jennifer. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵¹ Hagedorn, Pastor Harry. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵² Radloff, Pastor Jim. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004. (Mission Board Counselor)

Living Word focuses on the Bible - Christ crucified!

“It was like coming home! Jesus’ life, death and resurrection – all the Bible is taught, preached and lived in it’s truth and purity!”⁵³

“It is grounded more in the Word of God and less on man’s interpretations of that Word.”⁵⁴

“Even though small in numbers, as the church in Philadelphia, ‘they kept my Word and did not deny my name.’” (Rev. 3:8)⁵⁵

I finally “came home” to the WELS two and a half years ago. WELS is different in that, first and foremost, it’s Biblically sound. It’s theology and doctrine are based on Scripture. Therefore, it’s not constantly attempting to be “relevant,” man pleasing, politically correct, or “tolerant.” Having lived without that in other churches for so many years. I deeply value and appreciate that in Living Word.⁵⁶

Living Word focuses on Outreach (Going with the Word)!

“(What Living Word does well) Outreach and leadership training. They have done a great job at nurturing their members. Outreach has remained a high priority.”⁵⁷

“Living Word has done a good job of reaching out to others. The people are very aware of visitors; they welcome them and seek to make them comfortable. When there are congregational canvasses, a lot of the members show up. They do a good job getting as many people as possible involved in the congregational life of Living Word.”⁵⁸

Living Word focuses on the “life” of the Word!

They preach and teach the Word emphasizing what GREAT things God has done for us. One criticism I had of the CLC was it was doctrinally sound but had seemed to lose the joy of the Gospel. At the CLC we tended to concentrate all our

⁵³ Hicks, Jennifer. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵⁴ McElyea, Kevin. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵⁵ Zahn, Pastor Larry. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵⁶ Ensminger, Terry. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁵⁷ Schuppe, Pastor Ed. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004. (Mission Board)

⁵⁸ Olson, Pastor Dave. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

efforts on the importance of church fellowship, “marking and avoiding” instead of spreading the good news of God’s gift of eternal life through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.⁵⁹

Living Word focuses on Teaching (“Growing in the Word!”)

“Living Word conducts excellent Sunday School and Bible Study classes.”⁶⁰

“One thing I like about our church is that they teach the young people, telling them what the church doctrine is and giving them Biblical reasons for believing what is taught. I didn’t have that when I was growing up.”⁶¹

(Living Word has done well...) “Teaching! It is vital that adults as well as children continue to study God’s Word in order to be prepared to meet any situation in life: to be a responsible parent; for successful marriages; to be a daily teacher of God’s Word to their children, families, friends and community. We have many such study opportunities!”⁶²

Living Word is “home” and “family.”

“Since becoming reaffiliated with the WELS and its people, we feel ‘at home’ again.”⁶³

“We have been WELS members since 1980. Our WELS membership spans mission congregations from FL, NE, and TN. Living Word is a very warm and inviting group of believers. They reflect the love of the Lord in their words and actions. We felt ‘part of the family’ during our time there (and still do!).”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Blackwell, Randy and Cathy. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁶⁰ Stecker, Glen and Norma. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁶¹ Porzig, Jim and Bernice. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁶² Hicks, Jennifer. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁶³ Wogsland, Bill and Lorna. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

⁶⁴ Underwood, John and Denise. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

“They live the New Testament church in this day! They are looking for ways to go out and usually return with neighbors, friends, and relatives. This was the first congregation I had ever been a part of that I felt like all (I do mean ‘all’) became family.”⁶⁵

Having been blessed with one year in Johnson City, I would say that the biggest factor in making Living Word what it is this: Christocentric theology (i.e. Biblical theology) – Jesus lived for you, Jesus died for you, Jesus rose for you, and now Jesus is ruling for you. God’s Word is preached and taught in all its truth and purity. From that, people are motivated to share that precious message of Jesus with others. The members have a love for the Savior and a love for people – they reflect the love of Jesus to everyone they meet. There are many different personalities at Living Word, but the same Spirit wrought love for the Savior and a love for those he gave His life for (i.e. all people).

The real personality of Living Word is comprised of all of the gifts that God pours out on a congregation faithful to His Word! May God continue to answer the prayers of His people at Living Word and continue to pour out His blessings as He has since its beginning!

⁶⁵ Albaugh, Joyce. Personal interview. 30 July, 2004.

Bibliography

*The following are the personal interviews given divided into four groups
– Every interview was mailed out or given by July 30th, 2004 at the latest.*

Members:

1. Blackwell, Randy and Cathy
2. Blevins, Dave and Lisa
3. Budahn, Jenny
4. Conger, Dick
5. Ensminger, Terry and Dave
6. George, Scott and Janeice
7. Hicks, Jennifer
8. Kock, Tom and Beth
9. Miller, Gary and Grace
10. Payne, Tiffany
11. Pieper, Jerry and Janice
12. Porzig, Jim and Bernice
13. Reightler, John
14. Rogers, Phil and Suzanne
15. Shepherd, Craig and Monica
16. Snapp, Mike and Debbie
17. Sonnenburg, Al and Carol
18. Van Ryn, Joel and Wilma
19. Wiles, Ben
20. Williams, Ron and Gail
21. Wogsland, Bill and Lorna

* Two members were interviewed who wished to remain anonymous.

Other:

1. Behmke, Patti (WELS Asset Management Specialist – WELS Church Extension Fund)
2. Engdahl, Pastor Ken (2nd Pastor from Knoxville to serve Tri-Cities)
3. Hagedorn, Pastor Harry (Chairman of Board for Home Missions)
4. Henning, Pastor Tim P. (1st Pastor from Knoxville to serve Tri-Cities)
5. Kock, Joel (CEF Representative)
6. Radloff, Pastor Jim (Mission Board Counselor)
7. Schuppe, Pastor Ed (Mission Board)
8. Westra, Pastor Chuck (Current District Mission Board Chairman)
9. Zahn, Pastor Larry (District Mission Board Chairman [then])

Former Members, etc.

1. Albaugh, Joyce
2. McElyea, Kevin
3. Mundstock, Mike and Cathy
4. Underwood, John and Denise

* One former member was interviewed who wished to remain anonymous.

Former Vicars:

1. Bergemann, Pastor Jon
2. Meyer, Pastor Steve
3. Olson, Pastor Dave

Bibliography (Continued)

Engdahl, Pastor Ken. Call letter from the Tri-Cities exploratory group, October 1991.

Kock, Pastor Tom. Letter to Jim Radloff and Larry Zahn. 1 September 1992.

Kock, Pastor Tom. "Basic Information and Request Form" to the Board for Home Missions, dated 8-31-94, 95, 97, and 99.

Kock, Pastor Tom. "Congregational Report" (Living Word, Johnson City) for 1996, 98-99,

Kock, Pastor Tom. "Application for Mortgage Loan on Church Property with the WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc." 1 May, 2000.

Kock, Pastor Tom. Letter to Harry Hagedorn. 2002.

Skeels, Charles D. (Statistician). "Statistical Report of the WELS for 1993" (Repeat through 2003)

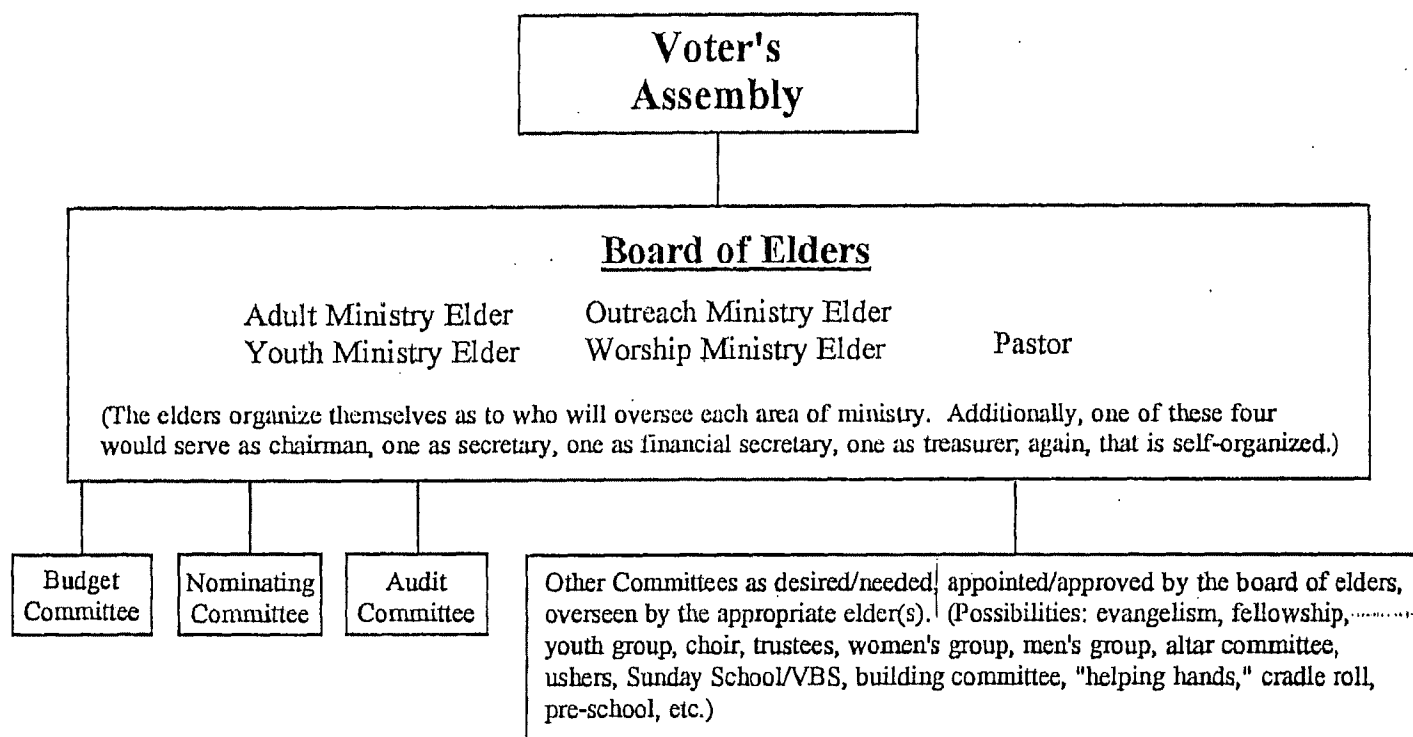
Snapp, Mike. "Annual Report for July, 2000 to June, 2001" (Living Word, Johnson City)

www.livingwordlutheran.com (About us/our history)

Addenda 1

Living Word Lutheran	Status	Members		Baptisms		Confirmations		Average Sunday Attendance	Bible Class	
		Baptized	Communicant	Children	Adult	Children	Adult		Teens	Adults
1993	Exploratory	34	24	4	0	0	9	35	0	16
1994	Exploratory	40	27	5	1	0	4	37	6	15
1995	Exploratory	61	43	6	2	4	8	46	8	18
1996	Member (subsidized)	70	53	4	0	3	5	56	0	23
1997	Member (subsidized)	88	66	3	1	3	8	62	6	22
1998	Member (subsidized)	103	76	1	0	0	11	68	6	27
1999	Member (subsidized)	99	74	2	2	0	2	63	4	23
2000	Member (subsidized)	107	80	4	0	0	6	63	2	22
2001	Member	111	83	1	1	0	4	66	2	30
2002	Member	135	97	5	1	0	16	76	2	36
2003	Member	138	98	5	0	0	2	79	1	38

Addenda 2



Youth Ministry Elder

The youth ministry elder has responsibility and oversight for all youth instruction, including areas such as Cradle Roll, children's Sunday School, VBS, youth Confirmation Instruction, Teen Group, etc. He is responsible for recruiting teachers and selecting curricula. He would remember the youth in his prayers, and be responsible for telephone calls and home visits to encourage parents and children to be actively involved in instruction. He is responsible for encouraging and instructing families to conduct family devotions.

Outreach Ministry Elder

The outreach ministry elder has responsibility and oversight for all the formal outreach efforts of the congregation. He would pray for God's blessings on our outreach efforts. He is responsible for recruiting and training evangelism team members, keeping the congregation informed of outreach opportunities and efforts, and making sure that church prospects are visited in a timely manner.

Adult Ministry Elder

The adult ministry elder has responsibility and oversight for all adult spiritual growth. His responsibilities would include setting the adult Sunday School curriculum, arranging special Bible study classes and speakers to assist in the spiritual growth of the adults. He would pray for the adults in the congregation, and is responsible for telephone calls and home visits to encourage adults to attend Sunday School, to attend special Bible study classes, and to have home Bible study. He is responsible for ministering to special needs of the congregation's married and single adults. He is responsible for arranging adult fellowship events, for stewardship training, and for instructing and motivating the congregation concerning our work as a Synod. He would visit new members and any who may become inactive.

Worship Ministry Elder

The worship ministry elder has responsibility and oversight for all matters connected to our public worship. He would pray for the pastor and any who are assisting in worship. He would have oversight for church musicians, choirs, youth choirs, soloists, etc. He is responsible for apportioning space for various church activities such as worship, Sunday school, adult education, youth work, etc. He has oversight for acquisition and maintenance of all church facilities, including the parsonage. He would make sure that proper maintenance is performed, that proper improvements are made, that the proper utensils and instruments are in place for worship, etc.

Each elder may recruit/appoint individual church members or form committees of church members to help conduct tasks of his office and/or help formulate policies and strategies for his area of responsibility. All appointees, committees, or committee members must first be approved by the entire board of elders.

Addenda 3



Living Word Lutheran Buys Land!

Outdoor Celebration Service on Sunday, August 20th!

On Friday, July 21st Living Word Lutheran Church concluded the purchase of the property on which they'll locate their first permanent facility. The parcel – nearly five acres – is located on the Kingsport Highway (Hwy. 36) about a mile north of Zak's furniture, at the corner of the Kingsport Highway and Rockingham Road. Living Word will now begin to explore site plans, determining how best to use the land to facilitate future ministry.

Additionally, the nation-wide church body to which Living Word belongs is celebrating its 150th anniversary.

Sensing the unique opportunity to celebrate both a major anniversary and a major step forward, Living Word determined to hold an outdoor service of thanks to God.



Bill Wogsland, Craig Shepherd and Dick Conger having just put up the sign in front of Living Word's new land.

It will be held on the newly-acquired property on Sunday, August 20th, starting at 10:00 a.m. (In case of rain, worship will be held at 10:00 at the 7th-Day Adventist building.) A brief worship service will be followed by games and a meal. We would be honored to have you join us for our day of celebration!

When? Sunday, August 20th, 10:00 a.m.

Where? Living Word's new land – just north of Zak's, at the corner of the Kingsport Hwy and Rockingham Rd.

What to wear? Dress very casually! (Shorts, tee-shirts, etc.)

Meal? Hamburgers and hot dogs provided – bring chips or beans or utensils. (For suggestions, call worship ministry elder Mike Snapp: 283-4408.)

What to bring? Lawn chairs, card tables, lots of water/tea/other beverages, sun block, outdoor games (badminton, croquet, frisbees), etc.

**We're Johnson City's New Church:
Come! Grow with us!**

Biography (Tom and Beth Kock)

Thomas David Kock is the oldest of five sons. His parents, Rev. Eugene and Sylvia Kock, live in Minocqua, Wisconsin, a small town in North Central Wisconsin. Thomas lived most of his life in Minocqua.

After attending one year of public high school in Minocqua, Pastor Kock enrolled in Martin Luther Preparatory School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, graduating in 1984. He then attended Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, and concluded his preparations for the ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. Pastor Kock's vicar year was spent at Benton Harbor, Michigan, serving St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. He worked his first year at the seminary at Betty Johnson Interiors. In his final two years at the Seminary, Pastor Kock was employed by the Board for Home Missions to do mission work in the inner city of Milwaukee for Northside Lutheran Ministries.

Pastor Kock married Beth Louise Vogt of Johnson, Minnesota, on June 17, 1989. Beth is the youngest of the three children of Robert and Shirley Vogt. Beth's father is a grain farmer. Johnson is located in far west central Minnesota. Beth also attended Martin Luther Preparatory School, where the couple met. She then attended Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, graduating in 1988. She taught 1st and 2nd grades at Immanuel Lutheran School in Waupaca for one year before the couple was married. While Pastor Kock finished his schooling at Mequon, Beth taught Kindergarten for two years at Redemption Lutheran School in Milwaukee.

On July 12, 1990 the Pastor and Mrs. Kock were blessed with their first child, Daniel Thomas. Carissa Beth was born on November 12, 1992, Jonathan David on September 30, 1994, and Adam Michael on October 8, 1997.

In May of 1992, Pastor Kock graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and received his first call to start an exploratory mission in the Tri-Cities (Johnson City, Bristol, and Kingsport) of TN. From the time that he arrived in July of 1992, Pastor Kock has served as Pastor of Living Word in Johnson City, TN. In addition to his pastoral duties, Pastor Kock has also served the synod at large in the area of adult discipleship, the School of Outreach, and the Spiritual Growth Project.