

Thomas J. Barthel

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Professor James F. Korthals

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*Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries:*

*The Birth of a Confessional Lutheran Church Body in India*

This paper will take a brief look at what challenges and blessings have been faced by WELS as it witnesses the birth and nurtured growth of a young confessional Lutheran Church body in India. Workers have struggled with challenges and yet stood by to witness the Lord of the church acting as the real midwife. Blessings have abounded as the Lord quickly brings forth his church. "Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things?"(Isaiah 66:8)

### **Brief Summary of Lutheranism in India**

India is by no means a new mission field. In fact, tradition places the Apostle Thomas' work in India. Not a few would follow in this direction. There are records of Christians who came to India in the early centuries. Their work lasted for varying amounts of years and met with varied success in sharing the gospel message to India.

Lutheranism is not new to India either. Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg began working in India in 1706 at the Danish colony Tranquebar. He learned Tamil, and emphasized the translation of Scripture into the indigenous language. For over a century this mission received men who had spiritual connections to the Missionary Training School at Halle, Germany.

Mission work has been conducted in India by numerous modern church bodies, including Lutherans. The Missouri Lutheran Synod was directly active in supporting a mission in southern India from 1895 to 1958.<sup>1</sup> Starting in 1842 Johann Christian Friedrich Heyer worked in Guntur, India. He was a Lutheran missionary of the General Synod in the United States. Over the course of thirty years he made three trips to India. This same missionary also helped found the Minnesota Synod, which later became the Minnesota District of the WELS. This would not be the last time Guntur, India saw a confessional Lutheran that had ties with the Wisconsin Synod.

### **1960-1995**

#### **Early Developments and Indian Connections Made With WELS**

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<sup>1</sup> This year was when the General Synod of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church became entirely independent from LCMS.

WELS mission work in India has a history different from most other WELS missions. To begin with, the synod itself did not initiate mission exploration in India. Contact with WELS was first initiated by Pastor T. Paul Mitra of Madras. Mitra came across a New Testament Bible sent to India in a care package by the wife of WELS Pastor Edward Zacharias. Through an address stamped on the flyleaf Mitra was able to make contact with Pastor Zacharias. Mitra then came in contact with Edgar Hoenecke, the Executive Secretary of the World Mission Board. The first synod wide notice of Mitra appeared in the 1969 book of Reports and Memorials. In November 1969 Pastor M. Schroeder and Pastor L. Koeniger met with Mitra and found him to be in confessional agreement with the WELS. In May 1971 after five months of intensive private tutoring at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mitra was ordained. Mitra, the first to initiate contact with the WELS, was the sole contact person for the WELS in India for many years.

Eventually other contacts were pursued. Pastor Kaki Devabhusanam had several groups north of Madras in the Nayadupeta area. These people spoke Telugu and were converts from Hinduism. Before contacting WELS, Devabhusanam had a loose affiliation with the South Andhra Lutheran Church. When support for this Indian church body was withdrawn by the American Lutheran Conference (ALC) of the United States, Devabhusanam sought the support of WELS. He declared that he agreed with WELS' doctrinal statement "This We Believe." After several months of contact, WELS extended support to Devabhusanam. Both Mitra and Devabhusanam trained men to serve after them. Devabhusanam died in 1998, but to this day two of his sons continue to serve as pastors of the CELM in the Nayadupeta area.

Yet another contact was made. In 1984 Pastor Rao Dasari requested a meeting with the Board for World Missions. Dasari had arrived in the United States in 1973 to study. He spent the 1976-1977 academic year at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis. In 1977 Dasari made a

mission visit to India. The mission field worked by Dasari experienced growth. However, along with growth Dasari met loss. Some leaders in the mission field left fellowship and took large numbers of congregations with them. This mission field was reorganized by Dasari in 1980 and 1986. In 1995 the church which Dasari helped oversee was known as the Bible Faith Lutheran Church (BFLC). It is evident that despite the challenges he faced, Dasari desired to nurture a confessional Lutheran church body in India. He wrote "Bible Faith Lutheran Church is (a) fully confessional Church. It fully agrees to the inerrancy of the Scriptures and believes it as the only source for doctrine and life. It upholds all the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>2</sup>

After ten years of contact, Dasari was invited to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. At this time Dasari was helping oversee the work of twenty different congregations in Guntur, which lies along the Southeastern coastline of India about two hundred miles north of Madras. These were the congregations which formed the BFLC. After he completed his colloquy training in 1995, Dasari accepted a call to serve as the first WELS missionary in India. He served churches of the BFLC which consisted of about three thousand souls within a seventy mile radius of Guntur.

Finally, it should be pointed out that during this time a forth major mission field started to seek support from the WELS. In the 1970s, about three hundred miles north of Madras in Rajahmudry a tract ministry was started. J. Einar Bach, a retired LCMS minister, gathered congregational support in the Missouri synod for the publication and distribution of a pamphlet intended for evangelism use in the United States. These pamphlets were requested by a man in India and published by a mission in Kesevaram that became known as "The Rev. J. Einar Bach Memorial Bible Center," later renamed "The Little Bible of Salvation Center." This mission,

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<sup>2</sup> Rao Dasari. *The Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper: (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 1995), 5

Bach claimed, had a membership of 250,000 members.<sup>3</sup> Later it was renamed the Lutheran Mission of Salvation India (LMSI).

After the LCMS declined to take on responsibility for this mission Bach turned to the WELS. He did this through contact with Pastor Eugene Kauffeld, a WELS pastor at Saint John's Lutheran Church in Watertown. Eugene Kauffeld, who left the LCMS for doctrinal reasons, grew up as the son of a LCMS missionary in India. In 1994, after Kauffeld made a visit to India, he committed himself to the work started by Bach. In April of 1994, Bach returned to the LMSI mission field with a visitation team from WELS, namely, Professor David Valleskey from the WELS Committee for Mission Expansion (CME) and Pastor Dasari. After this visit the Committee for Mission Expansion recommended against immediate involvement with LMSI due to the pressing need for reform.<sup>4</sup> Pastor Kauffeld began working independently from the WELS Board for World Missions and received support from the Schwan foundation.

The churches that were supported by WELS mission work in India faced many challenges in the mid 1990s. One of these challenges came as an indirect result of the way the mission work originated. The WELS India mission fields were far different from the Africa model and other mission fields begun by the WELS. In most cases, WELS found itself supporting and working with a previously existing national church body. As Pastor Kauffeld and others experienced in the mission fields, a process of determining legitimate ministries needed to

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<sup>3</sup> William A. Finn. *Our continuing mission to India: the Lutheran Mission of Salvation*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper: (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 1998), 4

<sup>4</sup> In his WLS essay paper Finn gives a good account of the background and formation of LMSI. He cites a February 1994 letter by Kauffeld which was printed in the Message of Peace, the newsletter for LMSI "We have some difficult problems to face...some workers have been receiving support who are not worthy of support. Some have shown themselves to be pastors, who are not pastors and who do not have a congregation. Some have shown orphan homes under the Lutheran Mission of Salvation who do not have orphan homes. We have been very disappointed and upset to find that we have "bogus" workers in our midst. This cannot and will not continue. As we find out about the bogus work, the support will be removed... there have been problems of bribes being asked, bribes being taken." William A. Finn. *Our continuing mission to India: the Lutheran Mission of Salvation*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper: (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 1998), 17

be carried out. Sincere and faithful ministries needed oversight to protect the missions from those who sought to feed off of them.

Another challenge the mission fields faced was the struggle against ecumenical surroundings. In 1995 Dasari described the struggle he met in forming a confessional Lutheran Church body in India. The church had difficulties in knowing and maintaining a firm grasp on the Lutheran Confessions and was surrounded by ecumenical practices.

Even though we are so unfamiliar with the content of our Lutheran confessions, in principle we believe that they are the right expression of the understanding of scripture. The two main reasons to start Bible Faith Lutheran Church in the heart of Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (LCA mission) are 1) To obey the great commission of our Lord and reach the mainstream of Hindus. 2) To establish a Bible believing fully confessional Lutheran Church. The LCA mission field is fully ecumenical and a true daughter of LCA. It can fellowship with all the Reformed, Anglican groups without any pain in their conscience. The BFLC is not a part in any of the organizations of National Council of Churches. It doesn't train its workers in the union or liberal Seminaries.<sup>5</sup>

There were many men who had received limited training at a Bible Institute. Yet these men and members of the churches which they served did not always have organized training programs.

Dasari noted the need for an improved systematic program of Christian education.

Our Christian educational program is not structurally planned. We are not teaching catechism for our people. The believers in BFLC are adult converts, we are not concentrating on the confirmation. We have Sunday Schools for children, we teach Bible, Christian Hymns etc. and not catechism. We have to begin to teach the Christian education systematically.<sup>6</sup>

Pastor Dasari was well aware of the need for Confessional Lutheran Literature. Basic materials in the Telugu language were either out of print or non existent. He translated basic materials such as the catechism with visual aids prepared by Professor David Kuske. He also translated basic materials used in WELS African mission work. "My desire is to make this

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<sup>5</sup> Rao Dasari. *The Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper: (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 1995), 5

<sup>6</sup> Rao Dasari. *The Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper: (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 1995), 9

literature available to people at very low cost so that people who are from other groups of people and non-Christians also understand what Christianity means."<sup>7</sup>

In addition many men were already serving congregations by the time WELS officially started supporting the scattered mission fields in India. These men all had different training backgrounds and levels of understanding of Scripture. This inevitably led to a lack of uniformity in doctrine and practice.

On top of all these challenges was an overriding lack of joint interaction and work among the various mission fields supported by the WELS. This was due to several factors including: language barriers, social barriers, caste differences, geographical separation, and loyalty to different leaderships.

Nonetheless, God's blessings continued to grow the mission fields through the faithful proclamation and teaching of his Word. The Lord of the church would not carry this scattered confessional Lutheran Church into the pains of labor without brining forth fruit. One hand of these believers had a firm hold on the wonderful truths which shone so bright in the Lutheran Reformation centuries earlier in Germany. Throughout all the challenges faced, God would cause his people to take to heart his Word. "Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord. (Isaiah 66:9)

### 1995-2003

#### **The Beginnings and Birth of a Young Confessional Lutheran Church Body in India**

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod did not always enjoy the strong confessional Lutheran footing it now holds. It was organized and grew out of support from Mission Societies in Germany. Ten years would pass after its founding before WELS began to take a firm grasp on

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<sup>7</sup> Rao Dasari. *The Bible Faith Lutheran Church of India*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Senior Church History Paper: (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, 1995), 8

confessional Lutheranism. President John Bading recognized that the Wisconsin Synod would need its own seminary. It is through this seminary that the spiritual leaders of the young Wisconsin Synod were trained to appreciate the blessings of confessional Lutheranism.

In 1995, however, WELS mission work in India did not have its own synod or seminary. Due to government regulations WELS is not allowed to send its foreign workers to serve as missionaries in India. No direct evangelism can be practiced by a person coming from the United States. This fact, however, has not hindered WELS mission work done through established contacts. From the very beginning WELS mission work has always concentrated on education. The goal has always been to equip Indian nationals so they can form their own church.

In order to effectively meet these goals and face the challenging task of the large groups of people in the Indian mission fields, the WELS Administrative Committee for Southeast Asian Missions decided to form a special subcommittee that would focus entirely on India. In 1995 this subcommittee was created with five members, Professor John Hartwig of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary served as its first chairman. This subcommittee, later officially named and recognized as the Committee for Indian Missions (CIM), served as oversight and as a sounding board for those involved in the Indian mission fields.

To properly comply with the government and to carryout the task of equipping and supporting Indian nationals, WELS began regularly sending mission coordinators to visit the mission fields. These coordinators were assigned oversight of regional areas: Pastor Michael Hintz, Jabalpur; Pastor Walter Westphal, Hyderabad; Pastor Mark Goeglein, Madras and Nayadupeta; and Pastor John Kurth, Guntur and Rajahmundry.



At the same time WELS mission work in India experienced some additions. The WELS Committee for Mission Expansion visited the exploratory field in which Kauffeld was working. A trip was made in October 1996 in order to make a final recommendation to the Board for World Missions. This group, consisting of John Kurth, Rao Dasari, and Harold Essmann, traveled with Kauffeld to the three main geographic locations that formed the LMSI: Rajamundry, Hyderabad, Jabalpur, and Guntur. Shortly afterward LMSI became an officially recognized exploratory mission of WELS.

Unfortunately, growth in Indian missions happened to occur at the same time that WELS began experiencing financial stress. Nonetheless the four regional coordinators, and a few other men, were sent on short trips to India to offer training seminars. American pastors would travel to a regional area and conduct workshops which were attended by Indian men in the region. This limited, regional training program, however, was not ideal. Professor Hartwig noted that one goal the CIM always had in mind was figuring out the best way to establish a Seminary as a central training center.<sup>8</sup> Professor Zell, who served as a member and secretary of the CIM, described the regionally divided Indian mission field as pieces of large puzzle. He noted that "It became apparent that to conduct workshops in areas that were a day's train ride away wasn't going to work and lead to a healthy church."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, in 1998 the CIM recommended that two resident missionaries be called to serve the WELS mission field in India. These men would be full time workers from the United States living in India for the legally allowed time.<sup>10</sup> Serving as "Friendly Counselors" these men would be called to help oversee training. Pastors Mark Krueger and Lynn Wiedmann accepted

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<sup>8</sup> John Hartwig (chairman of WELS Committee for India Missions 1995-2005) interview by Thomas Barthel, November 17, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Zell (member of WELS Committee for India Missions 1998-2007), interview by Thomas Barthel, November 24, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

<sup>10</sup> The WELS Friendly Counselors cannot live in India for more than 180 consecutive days. For this reason they must periodically take trips out of the country.

the call to be Friendly Counselors in 1998. In May of 1999 Krueger, who began serving as the field coordinator, and Wiedmann arrived in India.

Krueger and Wiedmann worked with Dasari on an existing training program in Guntur and gradually took over the work done by the four regional coordinators. Professor Zell noted that one challenge facing Krueger and Wiedmann was trying to "identify 1 Timothy 3 men in India."<sup>11</sup> Some men eagerly desired to serve, but lacked the qualifications. Some men had already gathered congregations and were eager to receive WELS training subsidy. Krueger, Wiedmann, Dasari, and others were faced with the challenge of finding men who would be willing not only to receive training subsidy, but who would commit to a training program that required abilities and faithful dedication.

The strong candidates for the pastoral ministry had to be identified. Such men were invited and encouraged to come to Guntur to receive training. Eventually the Guntur Seminary became a central training spot for the scattered WELS mission fields in India. At the turn of the millennium classes at the Guntur Seminary were being taught by Krueger, Wiedmann, and a "steady stream of professors and pastors from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, and WELS parishes."<sup>12</sup>

Not only did WELS face challenges in training workers, but those who desired to train also faced challenges. If one compares the Guntur Seminary with other Christian churches started by mission societies in India it is very evident that WELS expects the subsidized student to spend a lot of his time in class. A man in India can easily get subsidized training in a much easier training institution. Men who train at the Guntur Seminary are expected to attend classes

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Zell, interview by Thomas Barthel, November 24, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

<sup>12</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *WELS 2001 Book of Reports and Memorials*. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001), 76

for two weeks each month<sup>13</sup>. As the Guntur Seminary grew a preseminary training program was also added. Preseminary training is three years and the Seminary has a four year program. This makes the total pastoral training requirement seven years. To add to the challenge of Seminary training, most men function as preaching elders in the small scattered congregations of the mission fields. These men return to conduct services in the congregations in which they already serve as lay preachers. Some men, such as those from Jabalpur, must travel 24 hours by train to attend these training sessions.

Some of these men have also faced persecution for their Christian confession. Financial stress adds further challenge. Almost every student has found it a struggle to make ends meet.<sup>14</sup>

Since it first started the Seminary has served in many ways. Pastoral candidates, preaching elders, and congregational leaders have receiving training from the Guntur Seminary. In July 2002 six men graduated from the first Seminary class. Three began serving congregations. Two began teaching duties in the preseminary and Pastor K. Vijay Kumar joined the publications staff to work on translation. Up to this time only two expatriates and Dasari, who died in 2000, were teaching at the Seminary. This same year the Seminary started renting a 6,400 square foot space for \$354 a month. Before this time students were taught at the home of the Counselors and in the dormitories. In August of 2002 the seminary had twenty-four seminarians and thirty-nine preeminarians.

Other blessings were evident in 2002. In January a third Friendly Counselor, John Hildebrant arrived in India. One year later, however, the number of expatriates returned to two

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<sup>13</sup> The training schedule runs from Monday to Friday of the next week. Most men return to their home congregations on the Sundays between and during class time.

<sup>14</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *WELS 2001 Book of Reports and Memorials*. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001), 76

men when Rev. Lynn E Wiedmann left and accepted a divine call to serve St Paul First, North Hollywood California.

As the Guntur seminary grew and matured, internal friction also formed. Yet such an occurrence is not something unique to India. Satan will always seek to divide those who carry the message of the powerful, unconditional gospel. Paul warned the Corinthian church about favoring and spurning individuals. (1 Corinthians 1) And God's warning in Galatians 5:15 against internal arguing has been needed in every body of believers since the day they were written. All believers need to take heed to these words, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2-3)

These words are spoken in the context of a church that maintains mature doctrinal purity. WELS mission work in India was growing doctrinally stronger as the Seminary trained men. And it was not doctrine that would lead to a split in the mission field. A concern for personal issues led a large portion of the LMSI to no longer be affiliated with the WELS.<sup>15</sup>

## 2003-2008

### **Recent Blessings and the Work Currently Done in CELM**

As a result of the split within the LMSI, those remaining in fellowship with the WELS formed a new synod in January 2003. This new synod is called Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) and is registered and recognized by the Indian government. This is the church body which WELS currently works with in India. Its formation achieved two things. It met a legal requirement since the property formerly used was registered with the group that separated from the WELS. In addition, the CELM was a way to unite WELS mission fields in India. Professor Hartwig noted that the CELM was "a way to bring these various groups, people

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<sup>15</sup> The LMSI currently is under the oversight and support of the ELS with help from the Schwan Foundation.

form different language, different background, a way to get us all to see we are one church body... a framework to work together."<sup>16</sup> Professor Zell observed the great blessing that God had brought about in forming a national church body.

It was amazing how tension packed some of that was, it was also amazing how eventually the Lord, through sometimes some heartache and divisions, eventually brought together a church that I think recognizes 'this is who we are, this is our Seminary, these are our leaders, this is our constitution'.<sup>17</sup>

Both Hartwig and Zell noted that they observed a growth in spiritual maturity and understanding of the leaders in what is now the CELM. Zell compared the growth of the CELM and WELS mission fields in India to the events in the book of Acts. As he observed it is "very much like the book of Acts. The church is growing. The numbers are sometimes incredible."<sup>18</sup> Yet he notes there still occurs just like in Acts some incident that threatens discouragement. Even so the church continues to grow, and the depth of the preaching increases. The devil tests what is going on, the weakness of the flesh, but God produces growth despite all this. The gospel is preached in increasing depth and maturity.<sup>19</sup>

God's blessings of both inward and outward growth were evident for the early years of CELM. This young confessional Lutheran church body continually and faithfully shared the gospel and reaped a harvest of those whom God has called. Rev. Daniel Koelpin reported for the Board for World Missions in 2006 that many mission fields of WELS were forced into cutbacks. He interjected, however, the Board hoped to "bolster areas of the world where the blessings of

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<sup>16</sup> John Hartwig, interview by Thomas Barthel, November 17, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Zell, interview by Thomas Barthel, November 24, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Zell, interview by Thomas Barthel, November 24, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Zell, interview by Thomas Barthel, November 24, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

the Lord were evident." This included India. In January 2007 Pastor David Beckman arrived in India as a third Friendly Counselor.

CELM has experienced numerous blessings of strong spiritual growth as its membership has increased. Since 2003 the membership has grown from 3,777 to 7457 souls<sup>20</sup>. This number does not include over 1400 people directly served and who for various reasons are prohibited by pressure from joining the church.<sup>21</sup> Professor Hartwig noted that while he served as chairman of the CIM, church attendance in India exceeded that of any stateside congregation or WELS mission field. The 2007 statistics report seventy-eight percent of members attending on the average week. Counselor Beckman related how dedicated CELM congregations are to attending worship:

The other day in class we were discussing the worship schedules in the students' congregations. We were quite surprised to find out that several of the churches have a two-hour Communion service at 10:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. That is followed by a meal and fireworks! Then there is another Communion service on Christmas morning at 2:00 a.m.! I wonder how that would go over in the U.S.! Sometimes the dedication of the Christians here makes us feel a bit ashamed.<sup>22</sup>

He also noted an outstanding example of fellowship seen during other worship festival occasions:

These Christians ended the Old Year and began the New Year by spending nearly 15 hours in church with their fellow believers! Together they heard the Word, received the Holy Supper, sang, prayed, ate, and even slept. New Year's retreat, Indian style! That's got to be great fellowship.<sup>23</sup>

CELM's workers teach over two thousand children in Sunday school. An amazing 589 adults and 439 children were baptized in 2007. Currently CELM is served by fifteen national

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<sup>20</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *2008 Report to the Twelve Districts*. (Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House 2008), 46

<sup>21</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *2008 Report to the Twelve Districts*. (Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House 2008), 46

<sup>22</sup> David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. December 19, 2007 (a CD with these personal updates is attached to this essay as a digital appendix)

<sup>23</sup> David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. January 19, 2008

pastors, about ninety evangelists, and fifteen Bible women. In 2007 it was reported that the CELM workers serve 128 congregations and forty-two preaching stations. Orphanages serve to train children in God's Word who otherwise might only be exposed to Hinduism. These children are often not orphans, but have parents who cannot afford to provide for their needs. Two schools with about four hundred children also instruct children in God's Word. Gentle Shepherd Lutheran School in Guntur is located only a few blocks from the Seminary. In addition to all of this, according to the WELS 2008 Report to the Twelve Districts a forth WELS Counselor may be called if funding is made available.<sup>24</sup>

The Seminary has produced fifteen national pastors who serve CELM. Four of these men are from the 2002 graduating class and eleven men graduated in 2007. Currently the preseminary program has forty men in their first year. The Seminary has twenty-two men in their first year and fourteen men in their third year.

A continuing education program for CELM pastors was recently initiated. This program is done by four two-day Pastors' Institutes each year and an online course offered by e-mail.

In March 2007 Friendly Counselor Beckman related the blessings seen by the children of an orphanage in Jabalpur. He was impressed on how eager they were to know and share their Savior.

The pastor and his family operate and live in a home for 20 orphan children that range in age from 5 to 16. They need more space and have plans to add another level to the home to accommodate the children more comfortably. They also have two small children of their own, so this home is quite an active place! The orphans were so eager to share with us their knowledge of Bible stories and verses they have memorized, and very enthusiastically sang for us many Christian songs, all from memory. They truly find great joy in praising their Savior!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *2008 Report to the Twelve Districts*. (Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House 2008), 46

<sup>25</sup> David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. March 24, 2007

The need for sharing the freedom we have in the gospel is highlighted by the Hindu beliefs that surround Christians in India. Beckman notes how he quickly learned this to be true.

On this trip (to Guntur from Chennai) I had the opportunity to sit in on the pastors' conference for the Indian pastors. The discussion was fascinating, and I learned a lot about Indian culture and some of the unique difficulties that the men face in doing the Lord's work. That was especially true in our discussion of the end of all things, death, heaven, and hell. The men told us that the Christians here face death with a confidence that baffles the average Hindu. Hindu people are afraid to even mention the word, because they think that if they talk about death, it's going to strike close in their lives. Or, if some untimely death strikes in their lives (i.e., the death of a young person), they think that some spirit is getting even with them for some wrong they have done. How desperately they need the sweet gospel of our Lord, who forgave all sin and conquered death! Pray for these Christians!<sup>26</sup>

Pastor Mark Krueger described the testimony that CELM holds before a culture which has such a fear of death. He describes how a church celebrates Easter with a procession to the cemetery and symbolically dispels the darkness as they move forward with candles. "Their worship in a place of the dead also testifies that the graves they visited will be empty when the Lord Jesus returns, just like his tomb on the first Easter morning."<sup>27</sup>

The work done by WELS in India is not only connected to worker training. Some of the work done by WELS includes physical relief. By the time the CELM was formed, WELS Humanitarian Aid Committee had done much work. Because of the response of God's people, by 2003 WELS had "dug 450 wells, provided equipment for a hospital, granted flood relief, repaired homes damaged by raging waters, built a school, provided toilets for 65 schools, and given assistance to victims of a house fire."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. March 3, 2007

<sup>27</sup>This Story from Krueger was shared by David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. April 5, 2007

<sup>28</sup> Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. 2003 *Book of Reports and Memorials*. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 56



Beckman describes the frequent power outages and contrasting living conditions of Guntur. "The absence of zoning regulations means that between the concrete buildings three to four stories high, you will find thatch huts and grazing water buffalo."<sup>29</sup>

The buildings we use here in Guntur are near the edge of town in what we might call a middle-class neighborhood. Yet in spite of some of the substantial buildings that are here, between them or next to them you will find thatch-roofed huts or tents. They are the very poor who live a life that might be similar to endless camping. So as I walk over to school, they are out next to road cooking over a fire or washing dishes, or fetching water from the road-side pump, or just sitting on a chair or cot that they've placed under a shade tree.<sup>30</sup>

Professor Zell's comparison of the CELM with the churches experiences in Acts is not unfounded. God is indeed working for his church. One Seminary Student related events that demonstrate this truth:

In "Paul's Letters" class two weeks ago the students were drawing parallels between Paul's experiences in Acts and their own experiences in modern ministry. They took turns giving oral reports. One student named Moshe (Moses) related how he had taken over the congregation from his father, who had served the village church long before its connection to our church body. His father would eagerly share with anyone who would listen to the good news of Jesus' forgiveness. Many Hindus became angry with his witnessing. Moshe reported that he remembers seeing Hindu men often beating his father with sticks, trying to get him to stop preaching. But he never stopped. Now Moshe has taken over the village congregation since his father's death. WELS mission dollars have recently helped Moshe's congregation move from a run-down rented village hall to their own worship facility. The Hindus still do not like his Christian message, but the beatings have stopped for now. In fact, four men who used to beat Moshe's father are now members of the Christian congregation.<sup>31</sup>

Although CELM is new in its Reformation heritage, it continues each day to have a firmer grasp on confessional Lutheranism. The uncompromising declaration of God's salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, as found in Scripture alone continues to grow as the glory is given to God alone. The Seminary carefully selects qualified candidates who will faithfully

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<sup>29</sup> David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. August 17, 2007

<sup>30</sup> David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. April 14, 2007

<sup>31</sup> Moshe reported his story in English. Beckman notes that the students' English is seeing improvement thanks to classes taught by the wives of the Friendly Counselors. David Beckman, *India Update*. Personal electronic newsletter. September 20, 2008

carryout out their work. Before they are even enrolled, students must pass an entrance exam, work with a pastor in a congregation for a year, and have their district president's recommendation.

CELM has had to grow in its confessional Lutheran understanding. Appreciation for the blessings of one's Lutheran heritage builds as one sees the great need in a dying world to unwaveringly confess the amazing truths and comforts of Scripture. The Lord has established CELM in the second most populated nation on earth. In the over 1.1 billion people of India there are over 1.1 billion for whom Christ has died.

As more and more men continue to graduate from the Seminary, bonds will be created. As more and more people are trained and taught in churches and schools, ties will grow. This young confessional Lutheran church body "will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:15-16). Jesus Christ will continue to guide his church. The Lord has brought forth this young church body and through his Word he will continue to cause rejoicing as Zion gives birth to her children. (Isaiah 66:7-11)

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### Summary of Interview with Professor John Hartwig<sup>1</sup>

Professor Hartwig provided helpful information in respect to the time frame which I was investigating. In 1995 he began serving as first chairman of India sub committee formed by the Administrative Committee Southeast Asian Missions. This latter became the Committee for India Missions. He was involved with periodic visits to India to work with Pastor Rao Dasari in administrative affairs, to help with oversight of mission work, and to teach short instruction courses. Professor Hartwig gave helpful insights into the challenges facing the formation of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) and the reasons for its formation.

While he served as chairman, the committee came to the conclusion that WELS could integrate expatriate missionaries into the Bible Faith Lutheran Church as resident workers. He spoke of the challenges that these men and leaders in the Indian churches faced in determining legitimate ministries. Both the orphanages and congregations needed evaluation and a careful process of evaluation was done over a period of several years.

Insight was given to the situation that the Committee for India Missions faced in the years leading up to the formation of CELM. The formation of a central worker training program had always been the goal. However this posed many challenges. As the process of evaluation of programs such as the orphanages led to the cut of funding, a vying for dollars led to internal strife. He pointed out that there has also been strife within the churches of different leaders and locations. For these and various other reasons a large part of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India (LMSI) chose to break away from the WELS.

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<sup>1</sup> John Hartwig (chairman of WELS Committee for India Missions 1995-2005?) interview by Thomas Barthel, November 17, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

Professor Hartwig mentioned the need for organized worker training. There were problems of men who served as pastors and received subsidy yet had very little Bible knowledge. A gradual process followed in which worker training was devolved.

He mentioned that the formation of CELM and operation of the Guntur Seminary has been a great blessing. It has served to unite the many different churches. The seminary has been overwhelmed with men interested in training in God's Word. Hartwig spoke of the process for a congregation becoming a part of the CELM through its leaders and the training of its pastor. He noted the great blessing of the percentage of members who regularly attend worship to hear God's Word from these trained leaders.

Professor Hartwig also addressed the orphanage programs. One challenge of this program is providing funding. He spoke of the evaluation of these orphanages and the removal of illegitimate use of orphanage subsidy. The orphanages were carefully evaluated, and those determined legitimate have proved to be a great blessing. God's Word is being taught to these children. The Guntur Seminary is currently served by a man who benefited from one of these orphanages.

Professor Hartwig noted the big challenge involved in providing publications. While English is a language that most understand and which can be used for communication, the translations of publications into Telugu and Hindi have been a constant goal of the worker training program.

Finally, Professor Hartwig spoke of the many blessings that have been seen in the past decade. Clearly the statistics and numbers display one side of the growth in India. And the growth in an understanding of Scripture, an increase in unity of practice, and mature leadership are all said to have occurred and increased. This has all occurred as God has blessed the growth of a young confessional Lutheran church body in India. The CELM, Professor Hartwig said, was

"a way to bring these various groups, people from different language, different background, a way to get us all to see we are one church body.. a framework to work together."

### Summary of Interview with Professor Paul Zell<sup>2</sup>

Professor Zell gave an informative perspective of what a member of the Committee for India Missions (CIM) has experienced in the past decade. In 1998 Professor Zell was appointed as member of the committee and served until June 2007. He was Committee Secretary for the later half of these years.

Professor Zell spoke about the situation facing those who worked with the groups associated with the WELS in India. He noted that these groups remained very separate from each other in 1998 and were trained at various regions. American Missionaries who functioned as "regional supervisors" would travel to India periodically to instruct men in workshops.

He noted the challenge faced by these workshops. Some men had contact with the WELS for over a decade, while some were receiving their first formal training in the Catechism. In addition "It became apparent that to conduct workshops in areas that that were a day's train ride away wasn't going to work and lead to a healthy church." When the aspect of regional supervisor work was taken over by resident "friendly counselors" Krueger and Weidman, there was a gradual push toward a consistent and central training program. Men were identified by Krueger and Weidman who would be good candidates for further training in the ministry. These men were encouraged to attend two week training sessions each month at the Guntur Seminary.

Zell noted that the work done by WELS in India was different from the Africa model. In contrast to a starting from scratch ministry, there were already men who had congregations and were interested in receiving training. This posed many unique challenges. A gradual process of formal training grew as the challenge of "trying to identify 1 Timothy 3 men in India" was

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<sup>2</sup> Paul E. Zell (member of WELS Committee for India Missions 1998-2007), interview by Thomas Barthel, November 24, 2008, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Audio CD & partial DVD video, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library.

addressed. Sometimes this led to difficulty, since some had received Bible training with what appeared to be a somewhat Baptist background. It took some time before unity in practice was seen in some of these men. He pointed out that one can rejoice in the clear gospel message now proclaimed and practiced in many of these churches.

Zell noted that in India there is opportunity for easier pastoral training. The men who opt to train under the WELS subsidy are asked to attend seven years of classes. The men who train display great dedication and have shown that God has blessed them with gifts though their training in his Word. Zell described the great blessing of the spiritual growth and maturity of these men that has come with their training which continually allows for more in depth study at the Seminary.

Zell humbly pointed out that he was only a committee member observing these events. He said the counselors Krueger, Hildebrandt, and Beckman are faced with an amazing situation "very much like the book of Acts, the church is growing, the numbers are sometimes incredible." And yet he noted there still does occur, just like in Acts, some incident that threatens discouragement. He touched base on the LMSI split and the issues it currently raises. He said it is amazing how tension packed things sometimes were, but amazing how the LORD eventually brought together a church that could say, "This is who we are, this is our Seminary, these are our leaders."