

WELS CONGREGATIONS

IN

CANADA:

THE WORK HAS JUST

BEGUN

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## WELS CONGREGATIONS IN CANADA: THE WORK HAS JUST BEGUN

As a person looks at the vast area of Canada and the rapid growth of a population that already numbers close to 30 million, it is hard to believe that WELS has only nine congregations to offer our northern neighbors, and those nine congregations located in only two general areas of two provinces that are quite distant from one another. Why has WELS been so diligent in neglecting the souls of Canada until the 1970's? I am afraid I didn't find any suitable answers. Perhaps it could have been a lack of manpower and funds, or perhaps it was just a general case of nearsightedness.

Nonetheless, WELS has a foot in Canada's door and, God willing, our Synod will take further steps in the near future. As this paper points out, mission work in Canada does have some challenging obstacles, but it also has some obvious advantages and it has brought some positive results. What are some of the challenges and some of the blessings?

Most Canadians are of European descent and continue to carry on much of the apathy towards the church which stems from the European heritage. Almost everyone belongs to a church which they can be married and buried in, but most 'members' rarely attend church with any regularity. Over half of the population claims to be affiliated with one of three major church bodies in Canada. There are approximately 10 million claiming to be Roman Catholic, four million in the United Church of Canada, and three million in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Canadians are very mobile people, especially in Alberta and British Columbia. They are not at all like most Americans who find a city and settle. Because of this it is hard to indoctrinate converts and get them involved in one particular church for any period of time. However, this mobility can also serve as an advantage. Many of our Canadian missions were started

by WELS members who moved to a new area of Canada. There are now WELS members spread all throughout Canada and they provide many more possibilities for starting other missions.

Canadians, in general, are seeking their own identity and independence from their big neighbor to the south. Many dislike the fact that many American Multi-National Corporations hold such controlling interest in Canada and because of that, Canadians don't always trust Americans. It takes a while even for a pastor to gain the trust of the people because he is an American. It has been calculated by the Mission Board that it takes about a year for an American pastor to adjust to the surroundings and people of an area to which he is called. Pastor Beyer and other pastors that served in Canada all agree that it takes about 2 years for an American pastor to adjust in Canada.

Although there are a number of very small townships, the majority of the Canadian population isn't in the 'backwoods', as some imagine, but in the major cities. Here we see a real possible advantage for mission work in Canada. At least WELS could be available to about one-third of the people in Canada if churches could be started in nine major metropolises. Such as--Vancouver, B.C.; Calgary, Edmonton, Alberta; Saskatoon, Regina, Saskatchewan;; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Ottawa, Toronto, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec. WELS now has churches in five of those cities, and if WELS could become involved in the other four cities it would be spread conveniently across Canada.

As of now the religious background in Canada is really a mixing-pot of different religions. Roman Catholicism, the Anglican, and the United Church of Canada are the big ones which most claim to belong to. The great majority of the churches are caught up in an ecumenical movement. There are very few conservative churches even among Lutherans. In many ways, the

religious scene in Canada seems very similar to the religious scene in the U.S.A. In a book called Religion In Canadian Society edited by Crysedale and Wheatcroft it is observed,

Since 1965 many of the relatively liberal Protestant denominations in the United States and Canada have actually reported net losses in membership. In Canada, for example, losses have been reported by the United Church, the Anglicans, and the Presbyterians. In the same period, however, the more conservative or sect-like Protestant denominations have reported increase in membership. Bodies such as Jehovah's Witness, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, Southern Baptists, Nazarenes, and the various Pentecostal denominations, have all reported impressive numerical gains. In a recent book, Dean Kelly (1972) attributed much of the relative success of the conservative churches to their ability to provide a religion which furnishes people with answers to the questions of ultimate meaning, places demands on them, and calls forth personal commitment. 1

The ultimate meaning, demands, and personal commitment those "conservative or sect-like Protestant denominations" offer are many times far from God's Word. As Pastor Heiges (St. Paul's-Calgary) put it, "It's about time the people of Canada heard some grassroots law and gospel instead of ecumenical garbage." Because God has graciously preserved His Word in its truth and purity through the WELS, WELS offers a Christocentric meaning to life and opposes synergistic demands and commitments. Some of the Canadian people reached by WELS said they appreciated WELS because "it clearly shows what God has done for us instead of what we are expected to do for God." I hope this aspect of WELS continues to be attractive to Canadians and all people.

This paper deals with a history of WELS congregations in Canada. It covers some of the challenges, obstacles, successes, failures, the end results, and the promising future of WELS efforts in parts of Canada. I have divided it into three parts for the sake of order and convenience.

- 1) The Congregation in Eastern Canada;
- 2) The Congregations in Western Canada;
- and 3) Canadian WELS Congregations That No Longer Exist.

## I. WELS CONGREGATIONS IN EASTERN CANADA.

There are presently six congregations in eastern Canada. Two of them, St. Paul's-Ottawa and Our Shepherd-Poltimore, have been established for some time. Three others are of mission status, Abiding Word- Orleans; Redeemer-Pembroke; and Divine Word- Nepean. And there is presently one congregation regarded as exploratory, Divine Peace-Toronto.

ST. Paul's Luth. Church---Ottawa, Ontario (Organized 1874)

To see the beginnings of WELS in eastern Canada, we have to go to Canada's capital; Ottawa, Ontario, located 120 miles west of Montreal and 350 miles northeast of Toronto. This huge city is the home of the only 'established' **self-supporting congregation** WELS has in Canada. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul could certainly be considered the 'mother church' from which our WELS congregations evolved in the Canadian province of Ontario. This is especially significant since St Paul's congregation itself did not originate as a WELS congregation. In fact, St. Paul's first became a member of the WELS in 1970 after it resigned its membership from LCMS.

The First Evangelical Lutheran St. Paul's church was constituted on November 14, 1874. It had its beginnings when a small group of devout, confessional Lutherans emigrated to Ottawa from the province of Pomerania in Prussia after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. After organization and direction from Pastor H.W. Schroeder of Grace Lutheran Church in Locksley, Ontario, who acted as St. Paul's spiritual adviser, a call was sent to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for a candidate. Candidate August Senne accepted the call and one month later, in August of 1875, he began serving the congregation. On his advice, St. Paul's joined the Missouri Synod in 1878.

Although conflicts between St. Paul's and LCMS concerning confessional

Lutheranism had been building for several years, they came to a climax in 1969. In May of 1969 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul passed two resolutions; The first being that if the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod entered into fellowship relations with the American Lutheran Church, the congregation would resign its membership from LCMS. The second resolution stated that no small meetings or private meetings were to be held by groups of members to discuss the matter without the express knowledge of the voters' assembly.

In July of 1969, at the LCMS Convention held in Denver, Missouri Synod decided to enter into fellowship with the ALC. The Sunday following the action in Denver, Pastor Thomas Pfotenhauer read the congregation's resolution from the lectern and also that same July 19, 1969 read his resignation as secretary of the Ontario District LCMS. The Ontario District at first did not take seriously the resignation of the congregation and refused to act upon it. Efforts were made by district officials to change the congregation's mind concerning its resignation. Pastor Clemens Neuhaus offered to meet privately with Pastor Pfotenhauer at a designated place in Hull, Quebec. At that time it was made very clear that St. Paul's was in search of another orthodox Lutheran Synod.

The WELS was virtually unknown to these Canadian Lutherans, but upon receiving WELS material they desired to become better acquainted with WELS. On October 26, 1969 St. Paul's conducted a WELS Day at which time the congregation was visited by Prof. Carl Lawrenz and President W. Zarling who answered questions about the doctrine and practices of the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor Thomas C. Pfotenhauer was colloquized in Milwaukee in January of 1970. The congregation was received into Synodical membership in the June Convention held in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1970. Pastor Pfotenhauer

has continued to serve St. Paul's ever since his installation there on August 16, 1964. According to the Annual Synodical Statistics of 1980, St. Paul's has 539 baptized members and 443 communicant members. As we look at the other WELS churches in Ontario and Quebec we will see what an important role Pastor Pfotenhauer and St. Paul's had in bringing WELS into this part of Canada.

Our Shepherd--- Poltimore, Quebec (Organized 1970)

Poltimore is approximately 35 miles north of Ottawa and is a very small, rural town. Our Shepherd is also served by Pastor T. C. Pfotenhauer ever since it joined WELS in 1970. Before the members of this congregation severed fellowship with LCMS they were members of a larger body, called St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

St. Paul's, Poltimore was from the same stock as St. Paul's Ottawa. The congregation dates back to 1875 when Pastor August Senne, the first resident pastor of St. Paul, Ottawa, led them in their first service. St. Paul's, Poltimore received its own Missouri Synod pastor and besides having close ties with St. Paul's, Ottawa, they were a very closely united congregation. However, things changed in the 1960's when some members became aware of the liberalism in LCMS. About 30 communicants were raising question as to why LCMS had entered into fellowship with ALC. The pastor of the Poltimore congregation did not do anything to satiate the concerns of these members but rather ignored the problem. The concerns grew until a break in the congregation was inevitable. At one of the congregational meetings, well attended and sometimes boisterous, Oscar Mallon, a leader of the 'concerned 30', stepped forward and read the resolution of the group to resign from the LCMS. Of the 100 or so members of St. Paul's, Poltimore, 39 left and subsequently called Pastor Pfotenhauer to be their shepherd.

The Call to Pastor Pfotenhauer was handwritten and very brief. This

small group started meeting in May, 1970 in members' homes. They decided to call themselves Our Shepherd Lutheran Church and they have been WELS since 1970. The congregation presently worships in the St. Andrew's United Church of Canada building in Poltimore, Quebec. Pastor Pfotenhauser served the congregation with weekly worship services and a monthly Bible class. He says the Bible class, attended by almost the entire congregation, meets in the homes of the members and continues to be a high point in his ministry.

According to the 1980 Statistical Report of the WELS, the congregation has diminished to 29 souls. Without knowing very much about the situation, (merely depending on the insight of a vicar that served in that area) one would assume that this congregation does not promise alot of growth since it is located in a small rural town. But we can only thank God for His grace in preserving orthodox Lutheranism in a town that may seem insignificant to us.

#### Abiding Word--- Orleans, Ontario (Organized 1974)

Abiding Word is located in Orleans, an eastern suburb of Ottawa, and proves to be a fuitful mission area. This church was the first daughter congregation of St. Paul's, Ottawa.

During the vicarship of Allen Zahn (At St. Paul's Ottawa) in 1970-71, while Allen and Pastor Pfotenhauer were returning from a pastoral conference in the United States and crossing the International Bridge at Gakananoke, Vicar Zahn suggested that St. Paul congregation set up a mission research and development committee. This idea was set into motion with the happy result of purchasing 8.5 acres of land on Belcourt Blvd. in Orleans on April 17, 1972. The land was purchased for \$45,000. After several years of negotiating, approximately 2 acres were donated to Abiding Word Lutheran Church and the remaining 6.5 acres were sold for the sum of \$100,000. Waldemar Bruer, chairman of the St. Paul MRD Committee



In August, 1974, Candidate David Priebe was ordained and installed as the first pastor of Abiding Word by Pastor Pfotenhauer. September 29, 1974 the first service was held at Garneau High School in Orleans with 32 in attendance. In June, 1977 plans were made to start building a church. On October 2, 1977 the deed for the 2 acres of land was given to the Orleans congregation at a special afternoon service at Garneau High School. Another 2 acres was purchased by the members of Abiding Word and in July, 1978 actual construction began. By December 24, 1978 the first worship services were held in the new church. In 1980 Pastor David Priebe took a Call to St. John's Juneau, Wi., and Pastor Edward Spreeman was called to Abiding Word and is presently serving the congregation. In eight years the congregation has grown from 12 communicants to about 75. That is truly a blessing since the majority are converts and not transfers.

Divine Word--- Nepean, Ontario (Organized 1978)

This congregation is the second daughter congregation of the St. Paul's, Ottawa congregation. Nepean is also a suburb of Ottawa located on the southwest side. It was also the St. Paul MRD Committee that got things going here. Of the \$100,000 St. Paul's MRD Committee received from the 6.5 acres it sold, \$50,000 was given to Divine Word to purchase a 1.3 acre lot on Greenbank Rd. Candidate Al Lindke was sent in 1978 and is still serving this congregation. They have been worshipping in a WEF building, but construction of their new church is presently underway with the hope to dedicate the new worship facility this spring of 1982. They also started with only 12 communicants and are now about 40 strong.

Redeemer Lutheran--- Pembroke, Ont. (Organized 1978)

In the early 70's a member family of St. Paul's moved to the town of Pembroke, located 100 miles northwest of Ottawa. When they could not find

a congregation of their liking, they requested monthly services from Ottawa. A layman, Carl Noffke, and his wife, Norma, drove Pastor Pfothenhauer to Pembroke for almost a year to conduct experimental services. There seemed to be enough interest and, subsequently, a Pentecostal church was purchased and refurbished mainly with the money and volunteer labor of St. Paul's congregation. Redeemer Lutheran Church was organized in 1978 with 6 communicant members and David Prieb from Orleans served as the first pastor. In 1979, Rev. Fred Zarling and his wife moved from Wisconsin to Canada and came out of retirement to serve this small flock for about two years. The congregation grew to about 20 communicant members. Pastor Zarling has now returned to Wisconsin and the Pembroke congregation is being served by Pastor Lindke and Spreeman.

Divine Peace--- Toronto, Ontario (Organized 1979)

Actually this congregation is located in Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto. The work in Toronto began on a snowy December day with Pastor Walter Beckman and other mission minded people conducting a one-day survey in the mission area. As prospects seemed promising, a preaching station was set up which Pastor Pfothenhauer and the St. Paul vicars served for several years. Since that time a resident pastor, Roy Hefti, has been called to serve, and the congregation Divine Peace is continuing to make a bridgehead in a city of two million plus. The present congregation is eagerly awaiting the day when it will receive mission status.

It should also be noted that an attempt has been made to get things going in Montreal. For a short period of time Pastor Spreeman of Abiding Word, Orleans drove to Montreal and held services for a handful of people in a private home. However, when the host family moved back to the U.S. these services were discontinued. Hopefully another good opportunity will present itself so that WELS can also get started in this large Canadian

## II. WELS Congregations in Western Canada.

At the present time we only have three WELS mission congregations in Alberta; St. Peter in St. Albert, St. John in Wetaskiwin, and St. Paul in Calgary. There is also an exploratory station in Red Deer. Another area that look very promising is Lethbridge, a city of approximately 50,000, since a few WELS families moved there from Edmonton and Calgary. And we also have people in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan who are looking for a WELS pastor.

### St. Peter's--- St. Albert, Alberta (Organized 1966)

St. Albert is a northern suburb of Edmonton, one of the largest cities in Western Canada and still growing. St. Albert is a Catholic community, having received its name from Father Albert Lacombe who established a Catholic Church and Seminary there. Though the community is Catholic by its origins many other denominations are represented. And, once again, it was only by God's grace that the WELS ever found a place in St. Alberts.

None of the members of St. Peter's were WELS members originally. They had confessional and doctrinal questions about LCMS in 1965. Liking the orthodox, conservative Lutheranism of the WELS, they approached the Dakota-Montana Mission Board for a WELS pastor. In April of 1965 Pastor Earnest Klaszus, son-in-law of Dr. Peters, a former professor of our Seminary, was called to this area to do exploratory work. At the time there were about 12 communicants who requested we hold services there. Pastor Klaszus secured the property on which St. Peter's is located for \$22,000. Since Edmonton is a very rich, industrious, and fast growing area, that was a small price considering it is now worth an excess of \$700,000. Unfortunately, Pastor Klaszus seemed to run into some difficulties serving as shepherd of the congregation and so he resigned in 1968.

There was some concern as to whether it was wise to keep St. Peter's

(which at the time was called Pilgrim Lutheran Church) operational. President Schultz, who was Mission Board Chairman at the time, and the late Pastor A.P.C. Kell came to St. Albert to meet a handful of Christians, most of whom were women. Because of the pleading of one woman, Mrs. Joanna Bender, it was decided to keep St. Peter's open. In June of 1970, after being served by various vacancy pastors, Pastor Dan Deutschlander was called to serve St. Peter's. A building program was begun, with Pastor and members designing their own pyramid shaped church. "The only one of its kind in the Synod--- and sometimes I can see why it is the only one," comments it present Pastor, Roy Beyer. The unique chapel was dedicated June 20, 1971. In August of 1971 the name of the congregation was changed from Pilgrim to St. Peter's and at the next Synod Convention St. Peter's Lutheran Church was formally received by the WELS.

In 1975, Pastor Daniel Deutschlander took a Call to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School. John Engel temporarily served as Vacancy Pastor until Pastor Roy Beyer arrived in 1976. The congregation has about 70 communicant members and their long range goal is to have a Christian Day School. However, Pastor Beyer feels St. Peter's is not growing very fast and the problem is attributed to the fact that the members are always on the move. "But one can't complain because they do begin Churches where they move." Such was the case with Calgary and Red Deer. Since there are no transfers into St. Peter's the members that have come into St. Peter's are all converts, thus the growth is slow but precious. Pastor Deutschlander pointed out that Canada, especially Alberta, is made up of a very transient society and many times just when you have completed adult instructions with a family they pick up and move to another city, very often a city that doesn't have a WELS church within miles. St. Peter's may not have grown by leaps and bounds, but the people are very mission minded. It was because of some

St. Peter's families that moved to the Calgary area that St. Paul's in Calgary became a reality. It was also because of members from St. Peter's that Bethel Lutheran was born in Red Deer, and God willing, it will receive a Candidate from this years graduating class. Some St. Peter's members also moved to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and are working on getting a church started there, since they are over six hours away from St. Albert.

St. John's--- Wetaskiwin, Alberta (Organized 1965)

Wetaskiwin is about 45 miles south of Edmonton. St. John's was organized in 1965 about two years after a disgruntled group of Germans left the Missouri Synod because they would no longer be served in the German language. So they approached the Wisconsin Synod thinking they would give them their beloved German services. When a Synod official discussed the differences between the LCMS and WELS they listened with one ear closed. The only thing they cared about is if the services would be conducted in German.

Pastor W.O. Loescher conducted the first services in the home of one of the people interested in forming a new congregation on Nov. 22, 1964. A short time later they started meeting first in the Odd Fellows Hall, then in Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church. Pastor Loescher continued to serve this small German body until Pastor R.W. Strobel was called as the first resident Pastor. He was installed on April 23, 1967. Their first church was dedicated on September 5, 1969. From then on services were held in both German and English, but German is still by far the majority of the congregation.

In 1972 Pastor Strobel took a Call to Rapid City and Pastor Paul Schliesser was the next pastor to serve St. John's until he retired in 1976. Candidate Richard Scheicher served the congregation for about a year and then took a Call to Indiana. Pastor Roy Beyer served as Vacancy

Pastor until Pastor John Sullivan took the Call in 1978. The Congregation has grown to about 90 communicant members. Pastor Sullivan's efforts are working against opposition. There has been some difficulty getting English families to join because of the feeling in the community that this is a "German church". It may be a long slow process because peoples' opinions change often only a generation at a time. Yet God has proven His grace by the progress St. John's has made.

St. Paul's ---Calgary, Alberta (Organized 1980)

St. Paul's got its start when Jake and Fran Halldorson moved to Calgary from St. Albert. They wanted a Lutheran church that remained loyal to the Scriptures. So Pastor Roy Beyer approached the DMB about starting something in Calgary. Preliminary survey work was done and the first services were held once a month in the Halldorson home. It wasn't a very good location because they lived five miles outside of Calgary, so they moved services to the Brentwood Elementary School in N. W. Calgary. Soon other WELS families were located and they started coming to services. Pastor Beyer and Pastor Sullivan took turns coming to Calgary for the services and offering instruction to some of the new members. The founding members were Mr. and Mrs. Jake Halldorson, Mr. and Mrs. Doug Guelker, Mr. and Mrs. Grazdon Boyer, and Ben Lee.

After they were granted exploratory status and were promised a resident pastor, Candidate Bill Heiges, they moved their services to the Whitehorn Community Centre in N. E.

Calgary. This was and still is the fastest growing part of Calgary. Services were being held every Sunday with Pastors Beyer and Sullivan taking turns making the long journey down to Calgary. Pastor Beyer spearheaded the work in Calgary until Pastor Heiges arrived in October of 1980. It took Pastor Heiges four months to get his "landed immigrant status" from the government of Canada. From what I understand Canada has become somewhat more strict in granting "landed immigrant status" to U.S. clergymen since the 1960's. Evidently the Viet Nam draft dodgers often used the title of 'clergy' since it made access into Canada easier and their abuse changed the Canadian Immigration Bureau's attitude about allowing 'clergy' into their land.

Presently St. Paul's numbers 22 communicants and 41 souls. They have had their share of problems in the last year. One of the members managed to embezzle \$25,000 of the church funds, (but has since repented and promises to pay it back). Soon after that there was a fire in the Community Centre which burned the congregations organ, hymnals, paraments, etc. Yet we cannot ignore the many blessings God has brought to this congregation. It has some very faithful members dedicated to sewing Christ and it is located in one of the fastest growing cities in Canada. Calgary is 600,000 people plus and growing at the rate of around 30,000 a year. They say 3 people move into Calgary every hour. May God graciously lead some to St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

Bethel Lutheran - Red Deer, Alberta (Exploratory)

Work in Red Deer began when Mr. and Mrs. Bob Thrun, formerly members of St. Peter's, St. Albert, moved to Red Deer to start his own business. Another Lutheran family has recently been added by affirmation of faith. Red Deer has a population of approximately 50,000. Preliminary survey work was done in September with services starting in December. Services are now held every Sunday with Pastors Sullivan, Heiges, and Beyer taking turns. They are presently meeting in Fairview United Church in north Red Deer. They were granted exploratory status in the February GBHM meeting and, God willing, they will receive a candidate from this years graduating class. Alberta is very rich and growing rapidly and has been labeled "the Bible Belt" of Canada. It seems to be one of the choicest places to expand our efforts at the present.



### III. Canadian WELS Congregations That No Longer Exist

#### Our Savior--- Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario (Organized 1956)

Once again, for the sake of order, I will start with eastern Canada and move west. The first congregation is located on the border of U.S. in Sault Ste. Marie and is actually in central Canada. Our Savior began in 1965 with 40 souls and 23 communicant members. I could find and received little history on this congregation or its beginnings. According to the Statistical Reports of the WELS(1956-1978) this congregation was served by a number of pastors until the time it closed in 1978, but it experienced little growth. It was served by pastors Lyle J Koenig(1956), Paul G. Eckert (1957-59), Richard Lauersdorf (1960-64), Henry F. Kock (1964-67), Richard Fromader (V.P. 1968), Gaylord Gartman(1969-74). The Report the DMB gave at the 31st Biennial Convention of the Northern Wisconsin District in June 1978 tells the story of why this congregation met its end.

In the past two years Pastor James Hanson made over 1660 canvas calls and no real growth was experienced. This little mission also found it difficult to continue under its financial burden (\$53,000 loan) as it had expressed in a resolution at a voter's meeting. Only four members, including the pastor, were really supporting the congregation. Therefore, it was recommended by your DMB at the GBHM meetings in April 1978, that Our Savior's would become a preaching station when Pastor Hanson is no longer serving there, and be served from the American side of Sault Ste. Marie, and that a vicar be provided for Pastor Richard Frohmader during the adjustment in serving Our Savior's congregation. Other information presented included the need of retaining equity in Canada by purchasing a duplex, retaining possession of the charter and record books so that Pastor Frohmader could perform ministerial acts in Canada. After considering the resolution of Our Savior's congregation, the recommendations of the District Mission Board, and the stewardship of fund and manpower needs for our Synod missions, the GBHM passed a resolution that Synod financial support be discontinued at Our

Savior's and that steps be taken to sell the church building, parsonage and property with the money received from the sale being returned to the Church Extension Fund. A meeting of the congregation will be held to discuss how the members may be served and what steps need to be taken to sell the property. Our Lord will be with them and give them guidance in the important decisions yet to be made. 2

The recommendation was followed and this report was given by the DMB at the 1980 ~~District~~ Convention,

Because of the small group and financial burdens this mission congregation was closed and the church building parsonage and property were sold. Pastor R. Frohmader from the American side of Sault Ste. Marie is now their pastor. 3

St. Matthew's--- Edmonton, Alberta (Organized 1965)

There is a small article on this congregation in the Northwestern Lutheran, July 10, 1966. Other than that, I could only depend on the information I got from pastors that formerly served in this area.

St. Matthew's didn't really fold but was suspended from fellowship with WELS asking to be served in Word and Sacrament. They had been turned down by the LCMS and ALC because they only wanted their services to be conducted in German. When one looks at their reason for coming to the WELS, one cannot help but suspect that they didn't come because of our orthodox confessionalism, but merely for Synodical support. They were in desperate need of two things, money and a pastor who could speak German. Representatives of the HMB of the Dakota-Montana District sent them a copy of This We Believe and a short time later visited them to discuss any questions. Upon examining the group, the HMB found they hadn't even gone through the pamphlet of our WELS confessions, but they still

'accepted it' and wanted to be a part of the WELS. Having a soft spot for these German immigrants and against their better judgement, the HMB granted St. Matthew's its support. The Synod "loaned" money to the congregation for the site and the building material and the members built the church largely by themselves. Pastor Waldemar Loescher, who was also serving St. John's in Wetaskiwin, was called to serve this stron willed body. In 1967 he took another call and Dr. Peters, who had retired as professor at our Seminary and moved to Canada, served as the vacancy pastor until Pastor Daniel Deutschlander took over in 1970.

All along this congregation presented certain difficulties. They brought many practices with them from their Polish-German heritage and at the same time were trying to escape the rule the State Church had had over them back in the Materland. They were use to the Lehramt, who was more of a pope than a pastor. When they came to Canada they wanted to enjoy more freedom to rule their own church and, although they treated the Circuit Pastor as a Lehramt, they wanted their resident pastor to be a puppet. While they were in Europe they received much persecution from Russians. The Russians tried to take away their language, their way of worship, and finally their church. Now that they were in Canada they wanted to take any necessary steps the preserve their German heritage, language, and worship. Any attempt to introduce English into their worship not only aroused their suspicions but kindled defensive wrath.

This doesn't excuse their behavior but hopefully makes it passible for us to understand what was behind some of the problems.

The pastors serving this congregation were often put "on trial" and treated with very little respect for their office. Soon the congregation became involved in unionism and liberal fellowship practices. The choir and the band, which were the pride and joy of the congregation, would join the LCA, Pentecostal, etc. for mass choir concerts. The choir would frequently sing heretical songs. "Many of the meetings turned into shouting matches and at times, came close the next step," comments Prof. Deutschlander. "The pastor had to be stearn and clearcut because if he was soft spoken the congregation felt he wasn't serious about fellowship practices."

This is the report given by the DMB at the 26th Biennial Convention of the Dakota-Montana District held in June of 1972.

Differences between the members of St. Matthew's Luth. Church, Edmonton, Alberta, and the Wis. Ev. Luth. Synod in the area of Church Fellowship, Unionism, and the Public Ministry, came to the fore more and more during the years of our mutual association. On April 15, 1971 the congregation was suspended from fellowship with the Wis. Ev. Luth. Synod by the praesidium of the Dakota-Montana District. The congregation was advised of its right to appeal the suspension, but it did not avail itself of the opportunity to have its case reviewed. 4

Trinity--- Bashaw, Alberta (Organized 1966)

This was only a preaching station that never had more than 20 communicants. The situation here was very similar to St. Matthew's. A group of the same German immigrants ended up in Bashaw and when they saw their relatives at St. Matthew's receive help from WELS they turned there too. The HMB promised to provide them with a non-resident pastor and some funds. Pastor Strobel took care of the preaching station from 1967-72 while

he was Pastor at St. John, Wetaskiwin. When Paul Schliesser was called to St. John's Wetaskiwin, he also served Trinity, Bashaw until it was closed in 1972. The congregation had, basically, the same problems that St. Matthew's suffered; their band and choir became involved in unionistic practices. When they saw the measures taken towards St. Matthew's, namely suspension, they temporarily changed to adhere to WELS(moreso Biblical) doctrine. However, the change was not completed in the hearts of this congregation since they frequently reverted to their liberal fellowship practices. In spring of 1972 this preaching station was also closed.

Zion---Kelowna, British Columbia (Organized 1969)

This was also a preaching station started from the same stock of German immigrants that started St. Matthew's and Trinity. It was served by Pastor Gotthold Zimmerman who had to travel from his parish in Great Falls, Montana. Besides fellowship problems this congregation was very persistent in preventing any English from entering its church doors. It even went to the trouble of posting "ushers" at the entrance to prevent any outsiders from attending. Naturally it experienced little growth and because of its unevangelical and unionistic practices the Synod had to take action against it. This is the DMB Report at the 1972 Pacific Northwest Convention:

We are watching Kelowna very carefully. The future of our missions is in God's hands. Kelowna is no exception. Median age of the congregation is 59.6. 5

In 1972 this preaching station was also closed.

St. Paul's--- Vancouver, British Columbia (Exploratory 1977)

I'm afraid I didn't receive much information of this congregation. Steve Korth was called from the Seminary in June 1977 to serve exploratory requests. After a year of exploratory work it was decided by the DMB of the Pacific Northwest that the manpower and the funds could be more useful elsewhere in Synod. Pastor Korth received a call to Michigan and the exploratory congregation was closed in 1979.

As we look at some of these "failures" in Canada one might think the time is not right for mission work in Canada. That would be too quick of a judgment. When we look at the lack of success with some of those congregations it can only be attributed to the problems within the congregations themselves, problems that could happen to any WELS congregation across the U.S. We also have plenty of examples of successful mission work in Canada and that more so typifies the promising future WELS has in Canada. I and especially many Canadian Pastors and laymen would like to see WELS push the door a little further and offer the services and orthodox Lutheranism of WELS all across Canada. God willing this is in the making.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Crysedale and Wheatcroft, Religion in Canadian Society, Toronto, Ont. ; Maclean-Hunter Press, 1976. P. 347
- 2 District Mission Board, Report at the 31st Biennial Convention of the Northern Wisconsin District. June 1978, p.24
- 3 District Mission Board, Report at the 32nd Biennial Convention of the Northern Wis, Dist. Aug. 1980 P. 16-a
- 4 District Mission Board, Report at the 26th Biennial Convention of the Dakota-Montana District. June 1972. P. 15
- 5 District Mission Board, Report at the 28th Biennial Convention of the Pacific Northwest Dist. June 1972. P. 49.

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