

A Brief Historical Sketch of the
Missions of the Northern Wisconsin
District Since 1960

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The mission outlook of the Northern Wisconsin District was not at its best in the early 1960's. The Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board of the 1960 District Convention reported that "there are two elements today that raise a great barrier to our mission endeavors, namely, the lack of manpower, and the reluctance on the part to contribute the necessary \$15 average per communicant to fulfill our cherished desires to expand the kingdom of God on earth" (District Proceedings, 1960 p. 42). Two years later the DMB reported this discouraging report:

Two years ago we bewailed the fact that two great barriers were hindering our missions endeavors, 1) the lack of manpower, and 2) our own reluctance, or perchance, disinterest in the Budgetary and CEF requirements. As reported previously, in May of the year there were some fifty pastoral vacancies, and only 17 men available from the graduating class of our Seminary. More than half of the vacancies remained unfilled. The Budget is far in the red. In the May meeting of the GBHM the various Districts of our Synod had urgent requests for land and chapels amounting to \$940,000 and 11 men for new mission fields that appear ripe for the harvest. \$157,500 only could be allowed for lots and future building sites, and that only because of dire necessity, and two men. (District Proceeding, 1962, p. 43).

Perhaps the recent break between WELS and LCMS had something to do with this lack of mission activity. In any event this poor report prompted the question, "What are we to do, declare a complete moratorium on our mission expansion" (District Proceedings, 1962, p. 43)? The Lord of the harvest did not forsake the WELS nor the Northern Wisconsin District as expressed

in this report of 1964:

Today, it is our privilege to sing with David: "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits." The Lord's blessings are bestowed daily; but often we fail to use the blessings for the purpose for which He has bestowed them. We give praise and thanks unto the Lord who opened the hearts of our people this past bi-ennium to the cause of missions, enabling us today to make one of the most encouraging reports in the past years, perhaps in the history of our Synod. In this past year, we were given the privilege of opening 24 new missions. In the May meetings, \$500,000 was available not because of greatly increased CEF offerings but rather the result of many of our Mission Congregations refinancing their CEF loans assuming larger portions of CEL monies. Today, we must indeed praise the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits. At the same time, let us pray that the Lord will continue to open the hearts of our people. There is so much to be done! Even with 24 new fields in one year, we have only scratched the surface. And, brethren, pray that the Lord will grant us laborers! Our expansion today is almost completely limited to the opening of fields which can be served with existing manpower. Many fertile fields are not opened because there is no one to serve them. We need men! (District Proceedings, 1964, p. 15)!

Despite of the lack of mission activity in the Northern Wisconsin District in 1960, one new mission was opened in Green Bay on the southwest side. Missionary, Pastor Carl Voss worked the area. The first worship service was held April 24, 1960 with 147 in attendance. This mission was organized as the St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church. Already in 1964 it was approached by the Board of Trustees to determine if it should be self-supporting, lest future growth be hindered. In 1966 the DMB reported that St Mark recieved \$75,000 of CEL monies for the facilities needed for continued growth. By 1966 plans for the facilities were nearly completed and the subsidy that

it recieved from the Synod was next to nothing. By 1968 St. Mark of Green Bay was self-supporting.

On June 12, 1960 Candidate Richard Lauersdorf was assigned to the mission in the Canadian "Soo." During the early 1960's, when funds were short, the Northern Wisconsin District did not request money even though there was need of a chapel at the mission in Sault Ste Marie. It was also reported that, "A prolonged vacancy there has hindered the mission's growth, and it has even suffered because of the determined efforts of the opposing "Lutheran" organization to defeat our program". (District Proceedings, 1960, p. 42). In 1962 there was an encouraging report that enthusiasm was on an upward trend because a chapel was on priority and planning under way. However, by 1980 this mission was closed due to the fact that it was a small group and a financial burden. The church building, parsonage and property were sold.

1966 was a good year as reported in the report of the DMB. For it reported two new missions. As a result of several areas which had been canvassed, two promising fields were revealed, namely, Little Chute, WI and Shawano, WI. In both these missions exploratory services were begun in December, 1965. Not long into 1966 exploratory services were begun in Waupun, WI at the request for such services. The initial responses were far beyond what was expected.

In Little Chute the average attendance at such services was 55 with 24 children attending Sunday School. As a result St. Luke of Little Chute was granted mission status and was permitted to call a pastor in connection with the Greenleaf

congregation. Seminary graduate, James Diener was installed at St. Luke on July 17, 1966.

Shawano enjoyed similar success. It was granted mission status in May, 1966 and by June was organized as a congregation. Services were begun later in Waupun than in Little Chute and Shawano. Yet, here too there was a fine response consisting mostly of present and former WELS members.

So great was the response in these three missions that the DMB was pleased to report at the 1970 District Convention this progress:

In this past biennium Grace of Waupun, St. Luke of Little Chute and Divine Savior of Shawano were granted financial assistance from the Church Extension Fund for the construction of the chapels of first units. Grace of Waupun and St. Luke of Little Chute completed their first units. Grace dedicated their building to the Lord and His Word on June 14th. St. Luke will dedicate their building, on September 13, 1970. Divine Savior of Shawano has received the "green light" to begin construction and should be well under way at the time of this convention. (District Proceedings, 1970, p. 22).

These missions continued to grow at such a rate that by the 1974 District Convention Grace, Waupun and Divine Savior, Shawano reached self-support. The Little Chute congregation became self-supporting in 1977, having observed this historical step with a special service on March 20, 1977.

Mission work continued in the Northern Wisconsin District when in 1970 the mission fields in both Gladstone and Stambaugh were enlarged. Pastor Klein was asked to serve the students at Northern Michigan University and the service men at K. I. Sawyer A. F. B. in connection with his exploratory work in Marquette, MI,

which was done in response to requests from that area. After two years of exploratory services in Marquette, MI it was granted mission status. In 1973 Marquette, MI received its first resident pastor after being served by Seminarian David Linn the summer before. The mission was also given \$25,000 for land. The work in Marquette seemed to be going well in the late 1970's, but by 1980 they needed to request assistance again. On July 12, 1981 Pastor Thomas Schnick became the pastor of the dual parish, namely, Faith, Marquette and St. Paul, Green Garden. By 1985 St. Paul of Green Garden called a pastor, leaving Faith, Marquette on its own. After Pastor Schnick took a different call, Seminary graduate, David Furno was assigned to Faith congregation. He also served students at Northern Michigan University. Even at present Faith remains a mission of the Northern Wisconsin District. As of 1988 the DMB is "looking for some sustained growth and will be reevaluating the future of this mission in 1989" (District Proceedings, 1988, p. 16).

At the District Convention of 1972 it was announced that the Suamico area was granted exploratory services. The initial work was undertaken by Pastor Carl Voss and members of St. Mark congregation of Green Bay. This was a very successful mission. On July 7, 1974 Pastor Kieth Kuschel was installed as Pastor of Mount Olive, Suamico. After Pastor Kuschel left Pastor Larry Nast became Mount Olive's pastor. Over the years this mission had steady growth resulting in its 10th Anniversary celebration in 1983. By 1985 it had reached self-support status.

The DMB reported to the 1976 District Convention that Antigo, WI would like WELS services. Pastor D. Fleming investigated

the area and found 17 communicants who committed themselves to a WELS mission after only a few weeks. In view of this it was granted mission status, and by 1980 was renting a church near a Mc Donald's restaurant, hoping to be noticed in the community by more people. In 1982 the GBHM gave Antigo the right to give up its mission status resulting in having exploratory status with manpower. In connection with this it also received salary subsidy and mass media subsidy. In June of 1982 Pastor Michael Spaude began work in this area. By 1984 the communicant membership had doubled from 19 to 41. This was probably a result of its participation in the mass media effort in Central Wisconsin in connection with 10 of its members conducting a TCW canvass. On September 20, 1983 it was once again granted mission status. The Antigo mission continues to be a successful mission to the present day. In March 1986 membership was listed as 112 souls with 62 communicants, having a prospect list of 167 names. A CEF loan gave them adequate funds to buy the needed church building that they were renting when it went up for sale. In 1988 it was reported that their VBS was strong having the enrollment of 94, of which 44 were unchurched. An apparently successful mission.

Just prior to the 1976 District Convention, the DMB received requests for WELS services in the Plymouth area. Before services were begun, 34 souls were committed to a mission. In view of this the GBHM gave it exploratory status. On September 1, 1976 this field was served by Vicar Peter Kassulke under Pastor Henry Juroff. In July, 1977 Pastor James Rath became pastor of Good Shepherd, Plymouth. In the same year on August

4, the mission became a member of WELS. This mission steadily grew. On May 8, 1980 Good Shepherd dedicated its new worship/education/fellowship (WEF) unit. On June 5, 1983 Pastor Robert Fleischmann was installed and on September 20, 1983 this mission dedicated its new parsonage. By 1986 the membership listed 120 souls and 70 communicants. Due to the growth of Sunday School and worship attendance, crowded conditions existed in the small WEF unit. So in 1987 the mission broke ground for a new church building and dedicated it in November of the same year. By 1988 it was looking forward to becoming self-supporting in the near future.

In 1986 the Houghton-Hancock area became a place of serious mission activity. In February of 1986 exploratory status with manpower was approved. The DMB was in the process of calling a mission explorer who would use the "new mode" approach. On July 13, 1986 Pastor Robert Taasch was installed. A community profile was compiled by Mission Counselor, Pastor Robert Hartman. It was noted that many unchurched families lived in the community. Since the other churches underwent very little outreach, Pastor Raasch is able to maintain a decent prospect list and a fair enrollment in the instruction classes. It is the hope of the District that this mission will become self-supporting in the near future.

As the 1960's came to a close, campus ministries became a primary focus of the mission endeavors of the Northern Wisconsin District. In 1969 Pastor Kante was asked to serve the Michigan Tech. campus in Houghton, MI. He served this campus ministry from his Stambaugh mission. Much thanks is given to

Dr. J. M. Skaates because he organized a group of Lutheran Collegians on this campus. In 1974 the DMB was in the process of buying a lot for the campus ministry and to serve several families in the area. By 1980 this field has a chapel-student house, which was dedicated on September 30, 1979. At that time it had 65 students on its mailing list and eight families in the area that it served. Also Pastor Mark Hannaman was serving this mission at that time. Up to 1986 the Pastor of the National Lutheran Church of Calumet, MI served as campus pastor. But due to the needs of the Calumet church, this joint venture came to an end. Therefore, it was decided that after a mission explorer established a mission, it would again be served by a pastor. Pastor Robert Raasch is the one who now serves this campus ministry while serving Peace Lutheran Church of Houghton, MI.

In July, 1969 the Campus ministry of the Wisconsin State University of Oshkosh had its beginnings. It was at this time that the DMB purchased a home in Oshkosh to serve as a campus house. This mission also served Fox Valley Tech. Institute in Oshkosh. Despite its late start, this mission proved to be a success, thanks to the efforts of Pastor J. Ruegge of Faith and Vicars R. Diener and R. Rose of Grace and Martin Luther, Oshkosh. Already in 1970 the need of a full-time pastor was determined in view of the work involved on Campus. However, this ministry was served by a pastor and vicar until 1977, when Pastor Robert Diener became the full-time campus pastor. On November 11, 1979, after the campus house was remodeled in order to meet the building code, the 10th Anniversary of the campus

house was observed.

The 1980's were a productive time for the campus ministry in Oshkosh. In 1982 the average attendance at the services was 47. By 1984, 257 student names were on file, 50 of which were non-WELS. Over the years repairs were made on the campus house to keep it up to code. In 1987, however, a new parsonage was purchased. And a request for a grant for a chapel was granted by the BHM. In addition to these facilities and high attendance this campus ministry serves as a training ground for Travel/Canvass/Witness teams. Such teams have served a suburb of Jacksonville, FL in 1981, also in Marquette, MI within the District itself in October 1981. And in 1982 a team was sent to Charlotte, NC. In 1984 a TCW team went to Texas and New Mexico. There is no doubt that the Northern Wisconsin District will continue to encourage this ministry in the future. At present it goes by the name Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center.

The two newest missions of the Northern Wisconsin District are Green Bay, Southwest and Appleton, Southeast. The mission in Green Bay consists of three couples who were appointed by President Voss to assist the DMB. As a result ^{of a} community profile and zeal of St. Mark members, the DMB approved exploratory with manpower in this area. Pastor Paul Thierfelder began working this area shortly after Easter 1988. It has been estimated by the planning commission that this will be the fastest growing area of Appleton. Here too exploratory with manpower was approved. It is hoped that many unchurched will ^{be} reached and mission status and self-support in the not too distant future.

This concludes this brief historical sketch of the more prominent missions of the Northern Wisconsin District of the WELS.

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