

PASTOR WALTER F. BECKMANN

A BIOGRAPHY

DON SCHULTZ
SENIOR CHURCH HISTORY
PROFESSOR BRENNER
MAY 1, 1997

FOREWORD

The purpose of this paper is to provide biographical information on Walter F. Beckmann, Pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia, and District President of the North Atlantic District. This paper will focus mainly on his character, and will avoid getting caught up in the many details that could be included.

Information was obtained through interviews and letters, as listed in the bibliography. Many more interviews could have been done, and many more letters could have been written, but time has limited the amount of research. I apologize to anyone who feels that they should have been contacted, but weren't.

The paper has been arranged chronologically, and in some places topically, as listed in the table of contents. I included as many quotes as I possibly could, letting Pastor Beckmann's associates, congregational members, friends, and family tell the story. Their quotes have been documented in the endnotes. Quotes from Pastor Beckmann's "Anecdotal History of the North Atlantic District" have also been documented there. However, quotes from personal interviews with Pastor Beckmann have not been documented, since it's self-evident who the speaker is. Any undocumented quotes have been taken from those personal interviews. The appendices include a number of items which illustrate Pastor Beckmann's writing ability. A list of the contents precedes them.

As you read this paper, you will do well to remember the words of Pastor Beckmann:
"History is not necessarily what actually happened, but what people remember happened. If any historical inaccuracies have crept in, what can I say except, 'If it didn't happen, maybe it should have.'"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Childhood and Prep Years: 1932-1950

II. College and Seminary Years: 1951-1958

III. St. John's: Battle Creek, Michigan: ¹⁹⁵⁸1951-1963

IV. Beginnings in the East: 1962-1967

A. Pastor at Grace

B. Missionary in the East

V. Growth and Expansion: 1968-1978

A. Pastor at Grace

B. Missionary in the East

VI. More Responsibilities: 1979-1997

A. Pastor and District President at Grace

B. Pastor and District President of the North Atlantic District

C. Pastor and District President serving the Wisconsin Synod

VIII. Thoughts of the Future and the Past

Endnotes

Bibliography

Appendices

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus illustrates the growth of his kingdom by pointing to a mustard seed. Though small to begin with, it can become quite sizable, perhaps more than expected. Pastor Walter Beckmann witnessed this kind of growth during his ministry. Years ago, he arrived in Virginia to serve a handful of people as the only WELS pastor for hundreds of miles. Today he serves over 250 people at his parish, and hundreds more as District President of the North Atlantic District. This paper intends to look at his ministry.

I. Childhood and Prep years: 1932 - 1950

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Proverbs 22:6

On December 24, 1932, Walter Frederick Beckmann was born in his grandparent's home in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Nine years earlier, his father, Walter Albert Irvin Beckmann, had come over from Germany, looking for work. Since his uncle had paid for his trip to America, Walter moved to Minnesota and worked for him to pay for the price of the ticket. Afterwards he moved to Chicago, where he began working as a fireman for the railroad. During the Depression when work became scarce, he moved to LaCrosse and

found a job at a local hospital. There he met Esther Parsch, and soon they were married. Finding a better job at the town brewery, he quit the hospital and spent his days brewing near-beer during the Prohibition. This working class, German family provided a comfortable home for young Walter. While growing up there he took note of his father's good work ethic, and would someday exhibit that himself. His father's courage to leave familiar surroundings and move to America also made quite an impression on Walter. Someday he, too, would be asked to leave familiar surroundings and display the same courage his father had.

Walter's mother came from a solid Lutheran background. Her parents and grandparents had been members at First Lutheran Church of LaCrosse, and had raised her in the Lutheran faith. She proved to be a strong religious influence in the Beckmann family, first by sharpening the Lutheran beliefs of her husband, who had come from a state church background. She also saw to it that Walter was brought into the family of God: On January 7, 1933, Pastor Julius Gamm of First Lutheran baptized Walter in his grandparent's home (it had been too cold to take the baby to church). Like many Lutherans at that time, Walter's baptism certificate was written in German. After two years in the public school, his parents enrolled him in First Lutheran's elementary school where he began the third grade.

The Beckmann's were also blessed with a baby girl, Gloria Ann, in 1935. She too would be brought up in the Lutheran faith, eventually graduating from D.M.L.C. and teaching in a Lutheran elementary school.

World War II was being fought during Walter's first years at First Lutheran. One couldn't turn on the radio or read the newspaper without hearing about the War. U.S. involvement in Europe and the South Pacific dominated conversations at home, at church, at school, even on the playground. Something other than the War, however, began to catch the attention of young Walter. His teachers had been faithfully teaching the Word of God, emphasizing the importance of sharing the Gospel with others. Walter was learning that the world needed pastors to preach and teach God's Word. The idea of becoming one of God's full-time workers was first introduced to Walter by his third grade teacher, Pastor

Karl A. Gurgel, (father of Synod President Karl R. Gurgel). While serving as an associate there, Pastor Gurgel also taught grades three and four in the elementary school. His presence as a teacher gave him an opportunity to be a role model for his students and speak highly of the ministry. From that time on, Walter wondered, "Will I someday be a pastor?" After visiting Northwestern's campus in Watertown a few years later, he was sure he wanted to study for the ministry. "I'm going to be an African missionary," he thought, and traveled to Northwestern in 1946.

No sooner had Walter arrived when he became plagued with a severe case of homesickness. A new friend - Richard Balge - provided some relief. They met that first night in the dorm, Walter sleeping on the top bunk and Richard on the bottom. Like Walter, he too was from a German, working class family and knew no one at Northwestern. Through their friendship, God helped Walter deal with the stress of being away from home for the first time. "Every year, it was never a done deal that Walter would come back after summer vacation."¹ He decided to set a lofty goal for himself: "I'm not going to be a quitter - I'm going to last until Christmas." God would help him last longer.

Synod President Emeritus Carl Mischke remembers Walter during his prep years:

I first met Pastor Beckmann in the summer of 1947. That's the year that I was assigned as an assistant pastor at First Lutheran Church in LaCrosse, Wisconsin where the Beckmann family held membership. At that time he was a student at Northwestern in Watertown. During the warm summer evenings we did not have air conditioning, so I would often sit on our front step after supper to read the newspaper. Young Walter Beckmann would often ride his bicycle into our neighborhood, and if he saw me sitting on the step he would usually stop and visit a bit. Naturally I was quite impressed that a Quintaner from Northwestern would stop to visit with the assistant pastor. I'm sure we made a lot of small talk about sports, etc., but we also talked a great deal about how things were going at school, about the ministry, and the like. My first impressions from those conversations were very positive. I was convinced that, unless something unusual would derail him, he would not only make it into the ministry, but would do well as a pastor."²

Prep classmates of Walter describe him as someone taller than most who "always wore a cherubic smile and was a gentle, friendly person. When it came to playing sports such as basketball, he was not one who was blessed with graceful moves but was gangly."³ "People gave him a real hard time for being so tall and thin, but he was thick-skinned and took the ribbing well."⁴ He was "naturally shy" when he initially met a person, but became more out-going as time went on.⁵ One of the ways he entertained himself and others was by drawing cartoons: "While they weren't very artistic, the point he was trying to make was quite clear."⁶ On March 4, 1948 he and several of his classmates invited a few girls to go tobogganing. Walter worked up the courage to ask Marilyn Jean Miller, a fellow student one class ahead of him. The two of them dated for a short period of time but went their separate ways. Their paths would cross again a few years later.

II. College and Seminary Years: 1951 - 1958

"If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task."

1 Timothy 3:1

During his college years Walter developed physically into a force to be reckoned with on the football field. No longer could his classmates give him a hard time about his physical appearance. Besides sports, Walter enjoyed writing. After Armin Panning (present Seminary Professor and President Emeritus of the Seminary) graduated from Northwestern, Walter took his place as "Campus and Classroom" columnist for the *Black and Red*, a monthly periodical produced by the student body. Through his many articles he was able to display his sense of humor for the entire student body to enjoy. Academically, Walter put forth the necessary effort to achieve a respectable G.P.A., but wasn't about to spend endless hours studying for the perfect grade. He preferred to spend less time with books and more time with friends, enjoying the kind of fellowship and humor only Northwestern could provide. During his junior year, he became reacquainted

with Marilyn, who had been attending D.M.L.C. and was presently filling an emergency teaching position in the area. After seeing each other for awhile they became engaged. Walter graduated from Northwestern in 1954.

Marilyn graduated from D.M.L.C and received a call to teach in Oak Grove, Wisconsin. Because of their engagement, Walter had decided not to take part in the vicar program at the Seminary. (Vicaring was still optional at the time.) After call day of his junior year, however, his plans would change. St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Winona, Minnesota was in the midst of a major building project, and had unexpectedly lost their vicar to marriage. Pastor A. L. Mennicke's time was being consumed by all the extra responsibilities that were accompanying that building project. Besides this, his service on the World Mission Board was also quite time-consuming. He had grown dependent on the vicar for help, and was now in a bind. His vicar was leaving that summer to get married, and no one had been called to take his place. He appealed to the Seminary for a student to help in an emergency capacity. Walter Beckmann was asked to serve during the 1955 - 56 school year, and accepted the challenge.

That fall, Vicar Beckmann arrived in Winona and found a formidable task awaiting him. That year he preached 19 sermons, taught elementary school every day until noon, and filled whatever time was left with Bible classes, meetings, and church activities. From morning until evening, seven days a week, Vicar Beckmann labored faithfully. Although he had received only one year of seminary training, he was still able to fulfill all of his responsibilities without too much trouble. Returning to the Seminary, he looked back on this exhausting experience and realized: "I'm not that smart - I still have a lot to learn."

Walter married Marilyn on June 30, 1957 and proceeded to finish his seminary training. During this time intense discussion on fellowship issues was taking place between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. Although the Seminary faculty was involved, the issues under discussion never received much attention in the classroom. Students viewed the problem as something involving only the seminary professors and "other important people." Soon, however, the problem would involve Walter himself. Walter graduated in May of 1958 and prepared for his first call as Pastor of St. John's

Lutheran Church in Battle Creek, Michigan. That same month, God blessed Walter and Marilyn with their first child, Deborah.

III. St. John's: Battle Creek, Michigan: 1958-1963

"Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully"

Jeremiah 23:28

Pastor Beckmann arrived to find a church of about sixty communicant members. Looking for guidance, he became associated with three Missouri Synod pastors in the area. One of them helped him through his first funeral. Another suggested methods of canvassing and record keeping. At times they exchanged pulpits. But then, in 1961, the Wisconsin Synod broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod. The three Missouri Synod pastors were deeply hurt, regretful that something like this had happened. Pastor Beckmann wondered if this would be the beginning of the demise of the Wisconsin Synod:

When we terminated our fellowship with the LCMS, I was worried that we were too small and too concentrated to survive on our own. I don't remember where I said it or even if anyone was listening when I said it, but I do remember that I said, more in fear and frustration than with courage and dedication, "Well, now we'd better be ready to go and serve our people when they move into those places where we don't have churches."⁷

His concerns caused him (along with the rest of the Wisconsin Synod) to become more mission-minded. Soon he himself would be serving the kind of people he was describing - Lutherans who had moved to places without a WELS church.

At that time a number of families decided to leave his congregation for reasons related to the break with Missouri. With membership dropping, Pastor Beckmann decided

that it was time to canvass the area. Unfortunately, no one in the congregation seemed interested in helping. The break in fellowship, the loss of families, and the lack of congregational involvement caused Pastor to feel down and discouraged. Walking into a post office one day, he saw a recruitment poster for the Washington D.C. police department. "That looks really good," he said to himself. "At least there was a job where people would respect you and look up to you." Little did he know at the time that soon he would become very familiar with the Washington D.C. area, but not as a policeman. In hindsight, he now realizes that Washington D.C. policemen probably don't receive as much respect as he had thought at the time: "Not everyone respects them. A lot of people shoot at them."

Pastor Beckmann followed the suggestions of others and began to more aggressively recruit members to take part in the canvassing of Battle Creek. After a few phone calls and some gentle words of encouragement, forty two people took part in the evangelism of the community. As more members got involved, excitement to do evangelism grew. St. John's even set up a chart in the entryway to keep track of how many houses they had contacted, how many people were home, etc. God blessed their labor: In one year, twenty seven adults were confirmed - friends of the congregation, relatives, and people they had met in the community.

With membership growing, St. John's decided to build an addition to the church to provide more room for seating. During construction, Pastor Beckmann experienced the usual challenges that come with a building project. Yet, he didn't hesitate to take part in a great deal of the work himself. Certain memories stand out in his mind:

I remember being up on the roof with one of the members. They were lowering the steeple back into place on top of the church, and we were there to guide it into position. The wind caused the steeple to begin spinning. It looked like things were getting out of control so we ran off the roof and jumped for safety.

Later, the steeple was set back into its proper place without any other problems. Pastor also remembers shingling a majority of the roof himself and sustaining a third degree sunburn. Obviously, he wasn't the kind of pastor who was afraid to get his hands dirty. His experience with this building project was preparing him for another, more difficult building project in the future.

During those days in Battle Creek, Pastor Beckmann was able to develop his skills as a preacher. His wife remembers: "When he first went into the ministry, his biggest challenge was writing a sermon for each Sunday."⁸ He spent a great deal of time preparing his first sermons, memorizing them as he walked the sidewalks of the neighborhood.⁹ When he walked into the pulpit, he "always preached with gusto" and was "very energetic."¹⁰

In spite of his work load, he still found time to relax:

I first met Walter in the early 1960's. It was in my high school years at M.L.S. My brother and I happened to be at home when he and Marilyn arrived to talk with my father. After their discussions, both my father and Walter came outside to play a little touch football with the high schoolers. If memory serves me correctly the high schoolers won. Point being that he was one of the guys and has never thought himself as more important than others.¹¹

God blessed the Beckmann's with their second child, Laurel, in May of 1960. Money wasn't always readily available at that time, but God always provided. These "tight times" provide some humorous memories for the Beckmann's: While canvassing, Pastor would occasionally run out of gas. Since he didn't always have any money to buy gas, he would simply park his car on the side of the road and walk home. There the car would sit until the next paycheck arrived. More than once Pastor had to abandon his car and travel home the old-fashioned way. There were also times when money was available, but late in getting delivered: One night, when they had run out of money because of a forgotten paycheck, the treasurer arrived, slightly embarrassed. Before producing the much

anticipated check, he threw his hat into the house, along with a package of hot dogs, as a "peace offering."¹² Pastor and Marilyn still smile today when recalling those hot dogs.

While Pastor Beckmann served in Battle Creek, Lutherans in the suburbs of Washington D.C. were beginning to notice liberal tendencies in their Missouri Synod churches: "We had the liberal element of the Missouri Synod out here. We were disillusioned because our churches were teaching strange things, like speaking out against the Virgin Birth. So we wrote to the Michigan District Mission Board."¹³ This took place in August of 1962. It was not uncommon during that time for the Wisconsin Synod to receive requests to start missions in various parts of the country. Since no WELS churches existed in that particular part of the country, the mission board was interested in finding a way of expanding into this "frontier" area. In September of that same year, Pastors H.L. Engel and Daniel Gieschen met with some of the families in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Geweke to discuss the possibility of opening a mission.

Seeing these dedicated families as an open door to the East Coast, the Michigan District Mission Board decided to fund people to serve the area with the Word of God. On March 31, 1963, Pastor Leonard Koeniger conducted the first service there in the Churchill Road School in MacLean, Virginia. Twenty eight worshippers attended. Pastor Koeniger had been given a six-week leave of absence from Emmanuel First Lutheran Church of Lansing, Michigan, to do exploratory work there. After he had completed his time of service, other pastors arrived for short periods of time to continue the Sunday services. Among these people were Professor Harris Kaesmeyer of M.L.S., Pastor Arthur Wacker of Ann Arbor, Vicar Gary Schroeder, and Pastor Art Walker.¹⁴

In spring of 1963 the mission board approved funds to call a full-time pastor to serve the northern Virginia area. The calling process began shortly afterwards. Pastor Beckmann first learned of the mission work out East while attending the district convention that year. After listening to Pastor Engel describe the situation, he said to him, "Wow! Whom do you put on call list like that one to Virginia?"¹⁵ To his surprise, he learned that his name was on the list. "I was not only embarrassed, I was scared. Then I was relieved, but I guess also a little disappointed, a few weeks later when I learned that

Pastor Scheile had been called."¹⁶ After Scheile returned the call, Pastor Kurt Koeplin was called. He, too, would return the call.

While this was happening Pastor Beckmann began to receive a number of calls of his own. There was a critical shortage of pastors at that time, which accounted for the many calls that were coming his way. A congregation in Medford, Wisconsin issued a call to Pastor Beckmann. While considering it, he received another one to be a missionary-at-large in the Milwaukee-Chicago area. This one really interested him. While brainstorming how he might utilize seminary students to do mission work there, he received yet another call - to be missionary-at-large in northern Virginia. Including the congregation he was presently serving, he had four calls to consider. A neighboring pastor, Waldemar Zarling, advised Beckmann to accept the call to Virginia. (Afterwards they played football - see above). In spite of the number of calls, there was no question in Beckmann's mind which one he would take. "It was so clear, it was as though someone had just switched on a lightbulb." "It felt right. I knew I should take it. In the years since, I've often advised pastors and teachers, 'If you're so excited about a call that you can practically taste it, you ought to accept it.'"¹⁷

His family was also excited about moving, but had no idea what to expect. Familiar with the area only through an atlas, questions were running through their minds: "What will it be like out there? Are there hotels on the other side of the river there?" Mrs. Beckmann remembers feeling slightly concerned: "Having heard about the crime in D.C., I was wondering into what I was moving my little girls."¹⁸ Pastor knew he would miss the friends he had made, both within his congregation and among the area pastors. He knew it wouldn't be easy to move so far away from his parents. He also realized the difficulty of starting a congregation from scratch. "But I remembered my father had left Germany and everything familiar at a very young age. If he can do it, I can too." Pastor still remembers "getting choked up" as he delivered his farewell sermon to the congregation in Battle Creek. He had grown quite fond of those people. They also had become attached to him, and many made a special effort to visit him and his family after they had moved to Virginia.

IV. Beginnings in the East: 1962-1967

"A great door for effective work has opened to me."

1 Corinthians 16:9

A. Pastor at Grace

Pastor Beckmann was installed on September 22, 1963 by Pastor Norman Berg, chairman of the Michigan District Mission Board. Pastor Beckmann made a good first impression among those families: "We were impressed by his sincerity and desire to give the truth. He was a chip ^{off} of the old conservative block. We could see that God had sent the right guy for the right job at the right time."¹⁹

He rented a home in Arlington, Virginia, and set out to achieve the goal the mission board had set for him: to establish the first WELS church along with another mission in the area. The mission handbook at that time was the size of a lengthy church bulletin - about eight pages. Synod code for a missionary's salary was \$335 per month plus \$35 car allowance, and \$1 per month extra for each year in the ministry.²⁰ Learning the area was the first obstacle to overcome, since the streets didn't follow the normal grid patterns one would find in the Midwest.

Some of the original members of that first group still remember quite vividly the worship services held in the Churchill School cafeteria. At times roosters could be heard crowing in the background, since there was no glass in the windows. Halloween decorations made by students, such as paper cut-outs of witches and goblins, decorated the walls behind the make-shift altar during the month of October. Occasionally, flies would mercilessly attack the preacher.²¹ In spite of these distractions, Pastor Beckmann faithfully preached and taught the Word of God at that school. Average weekly attendance at the end of 1963 was twenty-nine. (To see photographs of the first worship setting, see the Appendix: *Anecdotal History* page 15).

In November of that year the Beckmann's third child, James, was born. Early one Sunday morning, Pastor took Marilyn to the hospital, and then returned to Churchill School to lead the people in worship. Afterwards he raced back to the hospital just in time to welcome his new son into the world. All duties - pastor, husband, and father - were fulfilled that morning.

Pastor set out to find a plot of land his people could use as a place of worship. The Synod's only advice for him was to use his best judgment. After looking at various pieces of property and following up on leads in the newspaper, he narrowed his choices down to a few. Taking eight men with him, they surveyed the possibilities and decided on a five acre plot in Falls Church, Virginia. On February 13, 1964 the land was obtained for \$28,500. Later that year, a parsonage was purchased about a mile away, since the land for the church didn't lend itself to also having a parsonage. Services were moved to Walnut Hill School in Falls Church until the worship facility was completed. Since this would be the first WELS church in the East, the mission board was willing to spend extra money - over \$70,000 - to construct a showpiece chapel for the new congregation. As the building process began, Pastor enjoyed increased attendance at his services in Falls Church. In 1965, they averaged fifty six.²²

The building project proved to be a very difficult time for Pastor Beckmann. While he had faced similar challenges in Battle Creek, these were much more trying. The neighborhood that had at first encouraged Grace to buy that five-acre property ^{was} were beginning to cause a few problems. People in the area knew that a storm drainage system was needed in the neighborhood. They decided that Grace, since it was building, should pay for the installation of the entire community sewer system. One person even sought an injunction to stop construction of the chapel until Grace had first paid for the neighborhood sewer. Pastor Beckmann found himself in the middle of a long, drawn-out legal battle. At times he tried to take care of the problem himself: "I remember how I thought it was a good idea to fill in the low spots of our property with large amounts of dirt. Perhaps that would fix the drainage problem. Unfortunately, it rained and all that dirt washed into our neighbors' yards." Finally, Fairfax County stepped in and installed a

storm sewer system. In spite of these problems, construction of the church was quickly finished. Work had begun in January of 1966 and was completed in November of that same year.

Right before the dedication of the church, the Fairfax County building inspector denied Grace an occupancy permit. Until the electrical wiring met up to his standards, no one could "occupy" the building. Pastor Beckmann wasn't sure what to do. The guest preacher was already enroute, and worshippers were on their way. Should he hold dedication services somewhere else, or go through with the services there?

That was when I was reminded that God was in control. While taking a walk and trying to figure out what I was going to do, I dropped my keys. They scattered all over the sidewalk and into the street. As I stooped down to pick them up, I realized that God would take care of the problem, because I sure couldn't. I couldn't even take care of my keys.

They decided to go through with the dedication service in the church. In November of 1966, 329 people attended two dedication services, without any problems from county officials. Afterwards Pastor worked to tie up the legal loose ends. Finally, in September of 1970 the site was completely finished and permanent occupancy was granted. Mrs. Beckmann remembers all the difficulties her husband and the congregation went through. Yet she never thought things wouldn't work out: "There was never a doubt."²³

Under Pastor Beckmann's leadership, the congregation grew. In June of 1967, fifty three children attended the first Vacation Bible School at Grace. Average weekly attendance had increased to 98 per Sunday.

People who transferred into the area always received a warm welcome from the Beckmann's. One remembers interrupting them at supper, only to be asked to join. After a warm and hospitable welcome, he felt very at home with the pastor, and soon with the congregation. "He has the gift of meeting people easily. He doesn't know a stranger."²⁴ Mrs. Beckmann was always willing to go above and beyond the call of duty to make the parsonage a model of hospitality (and still does today). "They were always willing to take

people in when they had nowhere else to go and were trying to find a home in the area. People always felt welcome in their home."²⁵

B. Missionary in the East

When Pastor Beckmann arrived in Virginia in 1963, he immediately began to investigate mission possibilities in the area. It was the general philosophy of the mission board at the time that another mission should be established in the area to give Pastor and his congregation some company. Solitude had been a problem for some past missionaries, and they wanted to avoid those same difficulties in the East. A few WELS families residing in Maryland seemed to be the first logical choice, since they had over an hour of commuting before they could worship in Virginia. These people, however, enjoyed the fellowship with the families of Grace and weren't quite ready to be on their own.

A number of families were traveling even longer distances to be a part of the mission efforts at Grace. People were involved from as far south as Norfolk, Virginia and as far north as Matawan, New Jersey:

My parish was 400 miles long from north to south, but not as wide as some people thought: I got a letter from a pastor in southeastern Wisconsin who tried to send me a transfer for one of his members who had moved to Kentucky. I refused the transfer on the grounds that this member still lived closer to his home church than he did to ours.²⁶

In 1964 two summer vicars, Keith Kruck and John Henning followed up on leads in the New York City area. Since a WELS family was living in Matawan, New Jersey, the two vicars began to hold services there for anyone interested in starting a WELS mission. During that same summer, that family became unable to travel to services in Virginia due to the addition of a baby daughter. After the vicars had left, Pastor Beckmann began traveling from Virginia to lead them and others in worship. For the next ten months he

held services in the vicinity of Exit 9 off the New Jersey turnpike, most of them in the music room of Highland Park High School.

In January of 1965 Pastor also began to hold services down in Norfolk, Virginia. He showed great determination and persistence to be at these services, regardless of the distance or traveling conditions:

While I was driving down for the first service, it started to snow. There were about 4 inches on the ground by the time I got to Richmond and almost 8 when I arrived in Norfolk. The people didn't think I would come in such weather so they weren't at the base chapel where we had planned to meet. But we called them by phone and they all came to the Richard Cordner residence where we held our first Norfolk service. I probably wouldn't do something like that today, but at that time I was only about 16 months removed from the Midwest and 8 inches of snow didn't seem like that big of a deal.²⁷

They met once a month there for about nine months until job transfers moved most of those people away.

During the summer of 1965 C.R.M. Gary Baumler was installed as a full-time pastor in East Brunswick, New Jersey to continue the work that Pastor Beckmann had begun. Baumler still remembers his first impressions of Pastor Beckmann:

He was very energetic if not dynamic. I was told I'd need to put on my roller-skates to keep up with him. He and Marilyn were very kind. They housed us for a week because our new rental parsonage wasn't ready when we arrived. He treated the rookie more like a veteran and a peer right from the beginning. He was a trademark preacher with a tommy-gun style. He was good at using illustrations in presenting things.²⁸

Together, Beckmann and Baumler investigated leads in Philadelphia during the fall of 1965. Even though there were only eleven communicants there, the mission board called a full-time worker, Pastor Ronald Ullhorn, to serve the area. With three pastors in the East, the first conference was born, informally called the "Colonial Conference." Besides attending meetings for the Southeastern Conference (they were allowed to attend once a year) of the Michigan District and its district conventions, these three pastors held

"conferences" of their own. While one served as host and conducted a communion service, the other two presented papers. Since they were serving "on the frontier," they valued their fellowship, and used these informal conferences as family get-togethers. Outings and family camp-outs also took place as these three pastors grew not only as co-workers, but also as friends.

In the middle of these three mission outposts lay the city of Baltimore. Although they had been following up on leads in the area, they couldn't seem to find enough families to warrant a regular service. Finally, the last family they needed arrived in Baltimore, enabling them to start a mission. Still a member of the present church in Baltimore, the head of that family recalls Pastor Beckmann meeting him with these words: "We're glad to see you. We've been praying for your arrival. We didn't know who you were going to be, but here you are."²⁹ A mission was begun and C.R.M. Carl Pagel was assigned there during the spring of 1967.

During this time Pastor Beckmann seemed to have a dual call: On certain days he was serving his members at Grace. On others he was traveling all over the Eastern seaboard, following up on leads and organizing worship services. How could any growth take place under one man over such a large area? "God was in control. I found it interesting how often I would travel so much in one area, that I would neglect another, sometimes my own church. And yet, whenever that happened, we seemed to have the greatest growth." During his first five years in the East, it was obvious that God had plans both for Grace and for the Wisconsin Synod.

V. Growth and Expansion: 1968-1978

"So is my Word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Isalah 55:11

A. Pastor at Grace

The numbers at Grace continued to grow. Many were transfers from other WELS churches who had moved into the area. Others were adult converts. And still others were disenchanting Missouri Synod members. One member, still there today, recalls her first impressions:

We first met Pastor Beckmann in April of 1968 when we attended Grace for the first time. We were favorably impressed with his sermon delivery and content. His personality was also very appealing - friendly and outgoing. He had been told . . . that we, along with my Missouri Synod retired pastor father, would be visiting Grace due to our unhappiness with the way our Missouri Synod church was heading in a liberal direction. Our first visit was enough to convince us that this is where we wanted to worship from then on. We found Pastor Beckmann very orthodox but also willing to bend when it wasn't a matter of theology. He was perfect for the area.³⁰

By December of 1968, only five years after Pastor Beckmann had arrived, the congregation became self-supporting and was able to return all Synod subsidy received during 1968. 112 communicants adopted a budget of \$30,000 for the following year. Average weekly attendance during 1971 grew to 153. In April of that year 283 people worshipped at Grace on Easter Sunday.³¹ The Word of God was accomplishing amazing things in a short amount of time.

It is interesting to note the political backdrop at this time. The Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum in the Washington D.C., not too far from Grace. Marches and the riots remained on the other side of the Potomac, however, and didn't really affect the life of the congregation. The Vietnam War was being fought, causing more riots and more marches in the nation's capitol. One member was so caught up in the issues at hand that he even suggested that Pastor ought to declare the war unjust from the pulpit. Pastor wisely refused, staying out of the political arena, and concentrated on preaching the Gospel. He made it very clear to his people that the Word of God was the

primary focus of that church, even though they were located so close to the political epicenter of the country.

While Grace was growing, Pastor Beckmann received a number of calls. One was a call to be pastor at St. John's, Wauwatosa. Another was to be principal at Winnebago Lutheran Academy in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. He also received calls to Texas, Florida, and Kansas. Why did he decline all of them? "Except for the principal call, most of them were quite similar. Why should I move to do the same thing I was doing in Virginia? We also had some momentum going. We were laying the groundwork for a new grade school at our church. It seemed best to stay." Later in his ministry, his name was placed on a few call lists to serve as a professor at the Seminary. He was never called, however, because people were concerned what might happen if "the father of the Colonial Conference" was called out of the area. Perhaps the district would lose momentum. Pastor Beckmann provided stability for the Wisconsin Synod missions of the area, and it seemed best for him to remain there.

The people at Grace appreciated the fact that their pastor was turning down calls to stay with them. While his dedication gained their respect, so also did his willingness to go "above and beyond the call of duty." One member recalls an example:

My father was discharged from the hospital and was too weak to walk on his artificial leg. Pastor Beckmann met us outside and carried my father into the house and put him in his wheelchair.³²

He also showed this willingness to go beyond their expectations as he dealt with the children of the congregation. One Christmas, he learned that the Sunday School children would not be given any kinds of gifts after the church service. At times on other Sundays, food was occasionally handed out to them. But not that day - it didn't look like anyone had thought to bring anything. Pastor quickly made a trip to the store and used his own money to buy each child a certain amount of food. Worried that some might not receive very much at Christmas, he wanted to make sure that each child got something from the church. He used this opportunity and others to make himself a model of Christian love

and humility for his congregation to follow: "He set an example for everyone in his way of dealing with people. He doesn't set himself above but truly sees himself as one who is to serve, and he does it."³³

His concern for children spread to his members, and they decided to open a Lutheran elementary school in 1973. Miss Susan Westendorf was called to teach classes in the basement of the church. During that first year ten children attended, ranging from grades kindergarten through third. The school continued to grow, and two years later Mrs. Beckmann was called to teach kindergarten and assist with other responsibilities. That same year, a three room education wing was added onto the church to accommodate the growing number of students. In 1977, Mrs. Joan Richards was called on a part-time basis. Miss Westendorf and Mrs. Richard still serve as teachers at Grace today.

Pastor Beckmann recalls some of the benefits of being involved in a Lutheran grade school. "I found it rewarding, not so much because of growth opportunities as much as the colleagues it allowed me to enjoy. Those teachers are my friends and provide a great deal of fellowship." Pastor went out of his way to show them that they weren't just business associates, but people he was deeply concerned about. Mrs. Richards describes it this way:

He has the uncanny ability to spot when things are tough. He'll come into my classroom after hours and pep me up. During tough times he has been a wonderful encourager, yet practical in stating exactly what needed to be done - not glossing over any problems, such as low enrollment or parental unhappiness. He has always helped us see the commitment the congregation has to the spiritual education of its children.³⁴

At times when teachers made mistakes, Miss Westendorf took note of how he always exhibited "persistent forgiveness, patience, and even a sense of humor."³⁵ The students enjoyed his presence as well:

Pastor Beckmann has a terrific way with children and they love him. He treats them like a grandfather would and they react like loving grandchildren. He would often take a stroll through the classrooms on Friday mornings and the kids would call out, "Pastor Beckmann!" We always knew it was sermon

writing time and he needed some inspiration or interaction with children that would help him get started on that sermon.³⁶

God used Pastor Beckmann's presence to give the grade school stability, guidance, and direction.

Pastor Beckmann also went to great lengths to make sure the adults grew in their faith and knowledge of the Scriptures. His untiring sermon preparation and distinct style of preaching have made quite an impact on his congregation:

Our first impression of his preaching was one of awe. How could someone speak so fast, fluently, and not breathe! I don't think I heard much of his first message . . . I kept waiting for him to take a breath. Now that I've grown accustomed to his manner of speaking I find it a bit dull to listen to slower speakers. Just listening to him preach, one cannot help but realize his joyfulness in sharing the wonderful saving Gospel message each and every sermon. His intellect, vast knowledge of the Bible and Biblical times, and his ability to talk to people at their level are some of the gifts with which the Lord has blessed him. The one quality that impresses us is the freshness, eagerness, and heartiness with which he preaches sermon after sermon.³⁷

People continue to appreciate the effort he puts forth in his sermons. His writing style is quite distinct. It's not uncommon for Pastor to write a four- or five- part sermon, each part logically dividing the theme. One never leaves the sermon thinking that Pastor had nothing to say that day.

Pastor Beckmann enjoys preaching perhaps more than any other part of the ministry, and displays his joy and the joy of the Gospel in every sermon. To get a taste of his preaching and writing style, two of his sermons are included in the appendices of this paper. An Easter sermon preached in April of 1996 expounds on the joy of the resurrection as found in Job chapter 19 (Appendix 1). His D.M.L.C. graduation sermon of 1994 is also included, where he focuses on the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Pastor remembers preaching that particular sermon as one of the highlights of his ministry.

Pastor also put forth a great amount of effort in his Bible classes. Sunday morning adult classes, weekly home Bible studies, confirmation classes, and adult instruction classes have always been a priority. Generally he lectures, allowing plenty of time for questions and discussion. He goes to great lengths to make sure every point is clearly understood by his students before moving on: "He has the ability to answer any question one might have with a very thorough explanation. In fact he himself sometimes says, 'I built a clock again.'"³⁸ In spite of all his other duties as both Pastor and missionary, he has always made sure to be present at as many Bible classes as possible: "We appreciate the fact that Pastor is never too busy for any of his congregation, and with all his duties still has time for our small group of ladies for Thursday morning Bible class."³⁹

Through his faithful preaching and teaching of the Gospel, God caused Grace Lutheran Church to grow and expand.

B. Missionary in the East

During this time, mission opportunities throughout the East were also growing and expanding. After contact with families in Connecticut, C.R.M. Karl Gurgel was assigned there as a mission pastor in 1968. While serving there, he immediately began to investigate leads in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. At the same time, Pastor Luther Voss, a retired pastor, was developing another nucleus in Norfolk, Virginia. In 1969, that group received mission status and requested a full-time pastor. In January of the following year, Pastor Beckmann and Pastor Pagel began to offer weekly services for families just east of Washington D.C., in Landover, Maryland. Increasing activity indicated the need for more manpower.

The needs of those various mission groups were met when three men were assigned to the East on call day of 1970. Paul Kelm was assigned to Pittsfield to continue the work Gurgel had begun. Paul Ziemer was assigned to Norfolk to replace Voss. And John Mittelstaedt was assigned to Landover to take over the work Beckmann and Pagel were jointly doing. That same year, two Missouri Synod men entered the WELS with their

churches through colloquy: Pastor Thomas Pfothauer of Ottawa, Canada, and Pastor Otto Zeeb of Dover, New Jersey. In just one year, the number of WELS pastors in the East had doubled from five to ten. The Michigan District recognized that it was time to acknowledge this growing part of the Church and referred to them in the 1971 Statistical Report as the "Colonial Conference." Pastor Beckmann enjoyed overseeing this growth and recalls that it was "an exciting experience to compare the 'one original and two copy' conferences of only a few years earlier with the more populated conferences we were beginning to enjoy."

In 1975 the Colonial Conference was given district mission status, and became known as the "Colonial Mission District." Pastor Beckmann was elected chairman of that mission board and held that position for eight years until the status of his district changed. He enjoyed the increased contact with Milwaukee-area WELS pastors. Feelings of isolation were beginning to decrease as he attended meetings and made contacts with other pastors and missionaries in other parts of the country. He found their advice helpful, and returned the favor by offering advice of his own. His influence reached outside of the Colonial District as he took part in decisions and offered suggestions and strategies for missions all over the country. "He was in the thick of synodical things at a very young age, and yet he did quite well."⁴⁰ During his travels, he was also had opportunities to share his sense of humor:

My second meeting occurred while I was dean at DMLC. Both Debbie and Laurel (his daughters) were students at the time. It was May night of my first year when the dorm matron, Mrs. Ziegler, telephoned to say there was a fire in the dorm. . . . When I arrived on campus I drove up to the dorm as all of the girls were lined up along the road. Smoke was drifting out of three of the floors. I headed into the dorm, good suit on, and there was Walt standing on the curb with the girls. He shouted words of encouragement: "Sure Zarling, your first year as dean and you let one of the new dorms burn down."⁴¹

From 1971-1978, fourteen more missions were opened and served with resident pastors.⁴² A number of schools were opened as well. Under Pastor Beckmann's leadership, the Colonial Mission District was quickly expanding.

During this time Pastor also experienced a family tragedy when his sister Gloria died of cancer in 1978. She had served God faithfully as a Lutheran elementary school teacher in Arizona and Kaukauna, Wisconsin, before the Lord decided to take her to her heavenly home.

VI. More responsibilities: 1979-1997

"If a man's gift is leadership, let him govern diligently."

Romans 12:8

A. Pastor and District President at Grace

As the district continued to expand, Pastor Beckmann became busier and busier, yet kept up with his duties at Grace. While watching over the expansion of his district, he continued to "go the extra mile" to help his members. One member recalls: "Before there was a congregation in the Richmond area, he offered to go all the way down to Richmond to baptize our granddaughter."⁴³ He always made himself available to his members, ready to deal with any questions or problems that might be troubling them: "Whether it's wanting a point of doctrine clarified or getting his opinion on how to deal with something, he always has an open ear and gives of his time so readily."⁴⁴

In 1983 the Colonial Mission District became the North Atlantic District, gaining equal status with all the other districts of the Wisconsin Synod. Members of the new district voted Pastor Beckmann into the office of district president. "I was stunned and intimidated by the responsibility and had no idea what to expect." The additional amount of traveling, writing, and speaking would take away from the time he would be able to

spend with his members at Grace. The congregation, however, felt no regret that their pastor was chosen as district president. Grateful that the Wisconsin Synod had reached out to them twenty years earlier, they were more than ready to share their pastor with the rest of the Synod.

Two years earlier, the members of Grace had provided a secretary to help Pastor Beckmann deal with his extra responsibilities. Now, she had become indispensable. Mrs. Shirley Schuler, a long-time member of Grace, was the first to serve in that capacity and still serves as secretary today. From the beginning, she noted how "he puts in many hours, not only at the office but also at home on the phone. He puts forth a great amount of effort."⁴⁵ She also appreciated his willingness to listen to her ideas and respect her decisions. At times he hesitated to agree, but was able to set aside his pride and accept the better judgment of others:

We had an old copy machine that needed more repairs than the church could afford. While Pastor was away at a C.O.P. meeting, I gave the copier away. When Pastor returned he was not pleased at all. He never said a word to me, but did the "slow burn" as he went to the office. Weeks later he finally said, "I guess that copier wasn't salvageable." End of discussion.⁴⁶

Pastor Beckmann admits that Mrs. Schuler is a major reason why things run so smoothly at Grace. Her organizational skills and computer ability have made her an invaluable part of the church.

Pastor Beckmann's lack of interest in technology can be a source of great amusement:

Up until a few years ago he was using an old green typewriter with a ribbon that would unravel into the garbage can. Now he uses an IBM electric typewriter which is covered with white-out. If the computer doesn't work he turns the switch on and off repeatedly. He actually knows more about computers than he lets people know.⁴⁷

While some may view this as a fault, it could also be perceived as a sign of correct priorities: He explains: "When you become district president, you learn how to take

shortcuts without cutting down on the quality of your work." Rather than sitting in front of a machine, Pastor prefers to spend time studying the Word and working with his people. There is a temptation for today's pastor to spend too much time trying to stay on the cutting edge of technology. Rather than neglect his family, his congregation, his district, or the Synod, Pastor Beckmann chooses to leave technology in the hands of others.

One may walk into his office and perceive a lack of organization. His colleagues admit: "He's not a clean-desk man. But he gets the job done. Some of his methods might make other people uncomfortable. But he has good instincts and reacts well to situations that come his way." ⁴⁸ All one has to do is see how orderly he runs his congregation and district to realize that he knows exactly how to neatly arrange something when he wants to. Perhaps other things (family, church, district, and synod) are higher on his priority list than dusting the bookshelves of his study.

The Synod began to supply Pastor Beckmann with a vicar every year to allow him more time to serve the church-at-large. While quite busy, he still spent a great deal of time with these young men as they experienced their first taste of the ministry. He taught his vicars very effectively, primarily by example:

He is the most serious, comical pastor I have ever known. While he is very serious about his work, he does it in a light-hearted way that shows both the joy of his work and the joy in his heart.

I learned to put your all into the ministry. Whether it was writing a sermon, preparing a synod report, or putting up the Christmas tree, he put his all into it.

I learned that everything doesn't have to be solved by 5 p.m. Friday. So often, we want to make quick decisions and then be done. But it doesn't work that way when dealing with people's souls.⁴⁹

In this writer's experience as his vicar for a year, one thing stands out: the time and effort he spent to improve his vicars' sermon-writing abilities. After reading the manuscript and writing notes in the margins, he would call the vicar into his office and offer suggestions. Sometimes this would take awhile, depending on the sermon. At times

he would recommend extensive revisions, but always in a constructive, positive way.

Another former vicar recalls the same thing:

I really looked forward to certain things, such as when he and I would sit down in his office to go over my sermon. For one thing I learned a great deal; for another, he was able to make me feel so comfortable about evaluating my own sermon that eventually all he would have to do is ask me what I thought of a certain portion I had written. I'd read it, realized it was a dumb statement, I'd say so, we'd laugh, I'd change it, we'd move on. I really miss that.⁵⁰

The amount of time he spent working on the sermons of his vicars was his way of emphasizing the importance of sermon preparation in the ministry.

He enjoyed taking humorous life-situations and showing his vicars how to apply them to spiritual matters:

The most memorable moment I had with him was in the furnace room at the church. During one of the clean-up days the outside door to the furnace room was left open, and during the night a squirrel was trapped. He had been there for a few days. By the time we found it, we had a rather upset squirrel. Together we went in, and opened the door to the outside to let it out. But it refused. The squirrel kept trying to go through the closed window, rather than the opened door. After drying our eyes from laughing so hard, he suggested how this could be used in a sermon application to describe our stubbornness in our sin. That incident still sticks out in my mind to show how he could take virtually any occurrence and make it come alive in our faith life.⁵¹

He continues to use humorous aspects of life as illustrations in his sermons and Bible classes today.

In spite of the time required to fulfill both the duties of district president and parish pastor, Pastor Beckmann still readily sacrificed time for his members. During the summer of 1995, a new member arrived at the church to introduce himself. During the course of the conversation he expressed his concern for finding a home to rent during his temporary stay on the East Coast. Rather than pointing him to a realtor, Pastor Beckmann spent the day driving the man around the neighborhood. After a few hours of searching, they found a nice home at a reasonable price. Though the house had been for sale, Pastor Beckmann

reasoned with the owner to lease it for a few years. That new member and his family were very grateful to Pastor for putting aside his studies for an afternoon to help them find a place to live.

His members also appreciate his ability to remain calm and keep others at ease in difficult situations. "He's like oil for rough seas."⁵²

A Friday evening wedding rehearsal is completed - a small, simple, second marriage for both. Pastor says he will sign the license now so it will not be forgotten at the wedding on Saturday afternoon. The groom (congregational member) freezes, turns white, and says, "I can't believe it never occurred to me to get a license." The bride hardly blinked an eye. Pastor took the lead without delay, calmly developing a course of action. Calls to lawyers and judges confirmed that there was no way to obtain a license before Monday. There was no talk of a wedding on schedule, without a license. The bride and groom were given quiet privacy to discuss what to do. Monday evening was determined to be the best, earliest option for the wedding. Since there were 12-15 couples invited to the wedding, notification took only a few minutes: "Due to unforeseen circumstances, the wedding would be delayed until 7:30 p.m. Monday." The honeymoon hotel agreed to a two-day delay in arrival. The bridal party, about five couples including Pastor and his wife, went to the rehearsal dinner only about an hour late. The wedding went off without any further complication. Throughout the bride was calm, cool, collected, and elegant, aided in large measure by Pastor's handling of the situation. After twelve years, the couple continues to be active at Grace.⁵³

Under Pastor Beckmann's steady leadership, Grace has grown to over 250 souls. To see its growth from the beginning until today, see Appendix 3. Today, Pastor Kevin Wattles serves as Beckmann's associate. This "pioneer congregation" will continue to face challenges, some of them new, such as reaching out to the ethnically changing community around them. Life at Grace has certainly changed since five families began to search for an orthodox Lutheran shepherd in the early 1960's. Yet God's presence and blessing will remain as long as his Word is faithfully preached and taught. Through Pastor Beckmann's service God has richly blessed those first five families and the many more who have since joined their fellowship.

B. Pastor and District President of the North Atlantic District

From 1979 until 1983, twelve more WELS missions were begun and serviced by resident pastors, from Canada to North Carolina. This prompted the Wisconsin Synod to recognize the area as the "North Atlantic District." Pastor Beckmann was the logical choice for the office of district president. Since then fifteen more missions have been opened and blessed with resident pastors. As district president, he began to spend even more time overseeing the growth of the district and dealing with problems that came to his attention. "In many ways," Pastor Beckmann says, "being a district president is similar to what the Apostle Paul did as he took care of his churches around the Mediterranean."

Often, Pastor Beckmann involved his own congregation in the mission expansion of the East. Already in 1970, Grace had daughtered a congregation in Landover, Maryland. Ten years later, Grace laid the groundwork for another congregation in Manassas, Virginia. In 1981 an assistant pastor, Paul Ziemer, was called to do outreach work there. Two weeks after he was installed he held his first service in Manassas. At first his salary was paid entirely by Grace. As that mission grew, however, its subsidy was decreased, until the new congregation, "Bethlehem" of Manassas, was able to support itself. Approximately fifty communicant members of Grace transferred to Manassas, causing quite a drop in attendance. It took Grace only three years to recover, enjoying numbers higher than before they had begun the mission in Manassas.

Another group of Grace's members began a mission in Sterling, Virginia in 1988. Pastor Thomas Zarling was called to serve this new mission, providing a bit of irony. Years earlier, Thomas Zarling's father, Waldemar, had advised Pastor Beckmann to accept the call to be a missionary on the East Coast. Now, Pastor had the opportunity to advise Waldemar's son Thomas to do the same thing. Pastor Zarling accepted the call and began to serve the northwestern Virginia area. Once again, membership at Grace dropped as some transferred to Zarling's church.

Four years later, another group from Grace set out to start a mission in Woodbridge, Virginia. Today that group is being served by Pastor Timothy Unke. In spite of losing so

many of its members to "daughter" congregations in surrounding areas, Grace continues to thrive. Pastor Beckmann has clearly instilled a mission-mindset in the members of his congregation, motivating them to spread God's Word around the nation's capitol. This concern for mission work is clear to pastors who have worked with the members of Grace:

The congregation contributed a large amount of money to the mission board to start up our mission. They helped to jump-start us when ten or more members helped us do telephoning for our mailing program over a three-week period. Through their grant program, the congregation also helped support several of our children who have gone away to synod schools.⁵⁴

Besides overseeing expansion, Pastor Beckmann also spends time dealing with any problems that might arise within his district. "His district is not an easy one. The area is heavily populated, strongly Roman Catholic and liberal Lutheran, and there is the influence of the political arena."⁵⁵ In spite of these challenges, things run quite smoothly under his supervision. Pastor Beckmann attributes this to the wise advice of his peers: "I involve the presidium in all important decisions. If you don't have agreement among the presidium members, you'll probably be headed for big problems. Two other minds will often see things you hadn't seen." Pastor Beckmann has always been ready to listen to the ideas of others before taking action on a certain issue. "He is able to calm storms even with fellow pastors through his willingness to listen and work through problems."⁵⁶

Patience has been another asset for him during difficult situations: "He has the ability to practice patience when others would be trying to solve a district problem with urgency. 'Make haste slowly' has been his motto, as is 'Give the Holy Spirit the chance to work.'"⁵⁷ "You will never see him jump to conclusions or take action before all the information is obtained."⁵⁸ He listens to both sides of the story and takes time to discuss situations with those he trusts. Not until after much discussion and prayerful consideration will Pastor Beckmann decide how to solve a problem within his district.

His sense of humor has also served him well, even when dealing with difficult, serious situations. At just the right time, he has been known to utter a few humorous words that have a way of relieving tension: "His humor has set him apart from other

pastors. While there have been others that contribute to life's problems with humor, Pastor Beckmann has the unique ability to develop one-liners on the spot. Not a harmful attribute when others are trying to 'cut throats.'"⁵⁹ His co-workers have learned to appreciate this unique quality in their district president: "He continues to apply his hobbies, such as old John Wayne movies and his love for the circus, to various church scenarios we have had to deal with. This helps to lighten the moments and give those of us trying to make a decision a bit more objectivity."⁶⁰ His even-tempered, evangelical spirit seasoned with his sense of humor endears him to others, and others to him, as he makes difficult decisions to benefit his district.

From a former Synod President's point of view, Pastor Beckmann's style of leadership has had quite an effect on those around him:

Pastor Beckmann is the only district president the North Atlantic District has ever had. As President of the Synod, I had the privilege of attending and assisting with the constituting convention. When the same man serves as president for a longer period of time, he makes a certain mark on the district. Pastor Beckmann's mark is on his district, whether he realizes it or not. The Synod President gets a lot of mail from all parts of the Synod. The mail that I received from the North Atlantic District was minimal. Walter built a solid foundation for the district and problems were handled on the district level before they got out of hand. He has exhibited a no-nonsense approach to solving problems.⁶¹

His co-workers note that although Pastor Beckmann has been serving the East Coast for almost 35 years, he still approaches his work with energy and fresh ideas:

At times men who have served 35 years or more just put in their time at worst or develop a more laissez-faire approach to the ministry. Pastor Beckmann continues to look ahead and see things for the congregation he serves and the district he loves. He has provided stability in the district. Younger men come and go but the living history behind it all remains to quietly instill the fact that the Lord keeps his Church.⁶²

While Pastor Beckmann appreciates the praise of his brothers in the ministry, he realizes whom ultimately deserves all credit: "We give all glory to God for all the success we've

enjoyed in the Colonial Conference and the North Atlantic District." To see the growth of the North Atlantic District through the eyes of Pastor Beckmann, see Appendix 5, his "Anecdotal History of the North Atlantic District." Included in that paper are photographs and charts that illustrate the growth and activity that took place under his leadership.

C. Pastor and District President serving the Wisconsin Synod

Besides serving his district as district president, Pastor Beckmann also serves the Wisconsin Synod. While this added responsibility can be quite challenging, it is also very rewarding: "The most challenging part of being a district president is being ready for anything when the phone rings. The most rewarding part is being actively involved in the broader work of the Church. It's also a good feeling when you see that your brothers trust you enough to do the job."

Other district presidents have enjoyed working with Pastor Beckmann. To many, he's much more than just a business associate: "Walter is a friend. I can talk with him as I would a blood brother. He also has a fine sense of humor. He often provides the levity that is healthy when matters under discussion have been tense and stressful."⁶³ His sense of humor has also served well outside of the meeting room:

My most memorable moment of him comes from my farewell dinner on the eve of the 1993 convention, my last convention as president. He was the best after-dinner speaker that night and really outdid himself. The whole affair was intended as a roast and he did that too, but with exceptional dignity. He brought the house down and had us all in stitches. I have a tape of the affair which I still play often, because it brings back so many good memories.⁶⁴

While Pastor Beckmann can be quite humorous, he also knows when it is time to be serious. The Conference of Presidents has the responsibility of tackling difficult issues of doctrine and practice. His approach to these discussions has always been firm, yet evangelical:

He doesn't get lost in trivialities. He has been an instrument of peace rather than conflict. A person for whom everything in life is black and white will regard this as a weakness, but I consider it a real strength. This doesn't mean that he is lax, or that he closes his eyes to error. It means that rather than rushing to judgment he lets the spirit of the Gospel predominate in his dealing. If he is going to make a mistake, he prefers to make it on the side of the Gospel rather than on the side of the law.⁶⁵

A good example of this would be his involvement in discussions regarding the role of man and woman. Pastor Beckmann recalls that this was one of the more difficult challenges he faced on the Conference of Presidents: "We needed to maintain a balance between legalism and liberalism. This continues to be a difficult issue to deal with because of the strong feelings of some people, and the often stubbornness that keeps resurfacing." In spite of the volatility of this issue, Pastor deeply involved himself in an issue that others would have preferred to shy away from:

When the Synod adopted the resolution/position regarding the role of man and woman, it was understood by some as somewhat abrasive. Walter indicated to me that he would have worded the statement differently without giving anything away. Subsequently, he was asked to write a popular pamphlet (see Appendix 4) on the subject, which he did. Even that caught some flak, but the point is that he heard the complaints of people and tried to address them in an evangelical way.⁶⁶

His evangelical approach to the role of man and woman has been noted by the female faculty members of the Lutheran elementary school he oversees in Virginia:

For the past seven years we have had male principals. Before that it was women only on the faculty. He has always shown implicit trust in our judgment and has never in any way indicated that he placed himself over us. In other words, he didn't see himself as the principal because we were a female faculty. However, whenever he was asked to take on the role, he always willingly did. Here I am referring to cases where we as a faculty had to suspend or expel students. His caring for the school and for the faculty is very evident in his dealings with us.⁶⁷

Throughout his meetings with other leaders of the Church, he has always been "dead serious, yet friendly and disarming. He is level-headed in times of crisis and not easily angered. He has been a very good negotiator."⁶⁸

Besides tackling doctrinal issues, Pastor Beckmann has also faced difficult practical issues. One noteworthy situation was the amalgamation of Doctor Martin Luther College and Northwestern College, along with the amalgamation of Martin Luther Preparatory School and Northwestern Preparatory School, together with the closing of the campus in Prairie du Chien. Strong arguments were made on both sides of the issue. Some argued vehemently to leave the system the way it was. Others argued for change. Emotions ran high as pastors, teachers, and lay people hotly debated what, if anything, should be done. Questions and concerns are still raised today as the Synod adjusts to its new worker-training system. How did Pastor Beckmann approach this issue? "The amalgamation issue was, for the C.O.P., a divisive one. We were not all of one mind in how the matter was handled. Walter made his points in a soft, kind, evangelical, yet firm way."⁶⁹ Pastor recalls that "a lot of tradition was lost. But I suppose it was the practical thing to do. I had no strong feelings either way. We made the decision and now it's time to move on."

Doctrinal and practical issues will continue to be discussed among the district presidents as they oversee the affairs of the Synod. Pastor Beckmann looks ahead to future discussions the leaders of the Church might have and offers this observation:

The biggest challenge the Wisconsin Synod faces in the next 50 years is being ready to change where Scripture allows and standing firm where Scripture stands firm. What we have in our Synod that others don't is the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God, a place where we can go when we tackle difficult decisions. We need to remember that Scripture doesn't change, but applications may. One needs to be careful not to insist on applications sometimes. One example is the role of man and woman. For awhile women weren't allowed to enroll at D.M.L.C, but now they can. Other applications may change as well. When it comes to Scriptural principles, though, we need to stand firm.

Besides discussing doctrine and practice, Pastor Beckmann also plays a role in assigning recent graduates of the Seminary and Martin Luther College to the field.

For me, call day is the high point of being a district president, having the opportunity to assign the gifts of God to the Church. What's difficult is when you realize you're dealing with lives and careers. The most rewarding part is seeing the enthusiasm of the youth and knowing that the Church is in good hands. It's exciting to see someone work out well in a place God led you to choose for him. It's also great to see someone work out well when you weren't quite sure that would happen. I enjoy the spirit of cooperation that exists among those who participate in the call meetings.

Pastor Beckmann takes this responsibility very seriously. Long before call day, he begins researching each name, memorizing their strengths and weaknesses as set forth in the profile booklet sent to him by the schools. He also contacts former vicars, area pastors, and anyone else who might be able to lend insight to his decisions. On the nights surrounding call day at the Seminary, he stays at the home of his long-time friend, Seminary Professor Richard Balge. Professor Balge has observed his methodology for quite some time:

He is very decisive. He does his homework and knows who he wants. He doesn't just accept someone because they are recommended by the Seminary, but takes responsibility for the people he calls. I have observed at past call meetings his good understanding of the needs of other district presidents. Throughout his preparation and during the meetings, he is a realist without being a cynic.⁷⁰

Careful preparation and thoughtful decisions characterize his work as a tool of the Holy Spirit on call day.

Aside from these duties, Pastor Beckmann also regularly contributes articles to the *Northwestern Lutheran*. To gain a flavor for his writing, his most recent articles are included as Appendices 6-9 of this paper. He uses these articles as opportunities to encourage people in Bible study (Appendix 6), as a way of addressing various issues that

face the church-at-large(Appendices 7-8), and to inform them on events that are taking place in the near future (Appendix 9).

Pastor Beckmann's presence on the Conference of Presidents has been appreciated by the Wisconsin Synod and will be remembered by his associates for years to come.

VII. Thoughts on the Future and the Past

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."

Psalm 115:1

Pastor Beckmann knows that retirement is around the corner. While he continues to serve in full capacity as district president, he is beginning to hand over more and more of his parish duties to his associate, Pastor Kevin Wattles. He has been entertaining the possibility of semi-retirement, serving as a part-time pastor and full-time district president. Discussion with friends and colleagues will certainly play a role in any decisions he will make:

One should always be ready to step down when it's time. Ideally, this is before other people ask you to. A pastor should be careful never to overstay his welcome. An important factor in deciding objectively what to do is input from colleagues. I'll be asking them whether they think I should retire or not. Eventually, you have to realize that you just don't have it anymore.

What best serves the needs of the Synod, his district, and Grace will determine what he decides about his future. One would have to conclude that he will always serve the Lord and God's people in some capacity. His love for the ministry will always be there.

One aspect of retirement he especially looks forward to is the more leisurely-paced lifestyle. He will have more time to spend with his family and friends, and more opportunities to travel to see his children and grandchildren. Perhaps he will take up some

hobbies he had given up in the past: "I used to read history, but there has been so much variety in my work that I didn't really need a diversion. I enjoyed the work."

Looking back on his ministry, he says, "I will have done my job well if no one can remember who my successor's predecessor was." This observation is very true in church history. Orthodox pastors who have served faithfully are usually forgotten. Generally, ministers are remembered more for false teachings or questionable practices. One who does his job well, as Pastor Beckmann observes, usually doesn't call attention to himself and fades into the past. He hopes to be "forgotten" as one of those people.

He is also thankful to God for surrounding him with people who have been so supportive throughout the years. Most noteworthy of them all, of course, is his wife Marilyn. "She encouraged me when I needed it and put me in my place when I needed that as well." Her presence has been invaluable to Pastor Beckmann. Whether it's preparing a dinner for guests at the parsonage, or making a visitor feel welcome at church, she has always been there. He is also thankful for the members of Grace who have been with him almost from the time he arrived in 1963. These "pillars of the church" were a source of cooperation and support, and offered suggestions and encouragement whenever their pastor needed it.

Pastor Beckmann recalls some of the high points of his ministry:

Preaching at Easter services has always been a highlight in my ministry. Preaching at major events, such as at a synod convention, or at D.M.L.C.'s graduation (see Appendix 2), have also been high points for me. Funerals at Arlington Cemetery will always be memorable. And I've always enjoy being involved in an adult confirmation.

He offers a few thoughts for those who are just about to enter the ministry, wondering how they will someday fit into the Synod:

No one is more important than someone else in the ministry. God gives gifts to each person, and each person uses them accordingly, whether it's a district president, a seminary professor, an executive secretary, or a parish pastor. Sometimes people view the parish pastor as someone lower on the totem pole. He is just as important, though, since he is directly responsible for the many

souls placed under him. He has the luxury of being less caught up in administrative things and more involved in spiritual things.

For those harboring doubts about their abilities to do the necessary work of a pastor, he offers these words of wisdom:

You're probably right in that you don't have the ability or strength to do all the necessary work. That comes from God, not yourself. The people you have to worry about are the ones who graduate from the Seminary thinking they are God's gift to the ministry. Just be faithful. You are called to preach a lot of sermons and teach a lot of classes. Have a good work ethic, and God will bless you as he sees fit.

God has certainly blessed Pastor Beckmann during his ministry. Under this man's leadership, the Holy Christian Church has grown while remaining faithful to the Word of God. We can be sure that Christ will continue to send dedicated workers into the field, using each person's gifts to bring people into the Kingdom of God.

"Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

1 Corinthians 3:7-9

ENDNOTES

1. Richard Balge
2. Carl Mischke
3. Marcus Nitz
4. Richard Balge
5. Richard Balge
6. Richard Balge
7. Anecdotal History p. 2
8. Marilyn Beckmann
9. Daniel Gieschen
10. Daniel Gieschen
11. Thomas Zarling
12. Marilyn Beckmann
13. Earl Cooper
14. Earl Cooper
15. Anecdotal History p. 2
16. Anecdotal History p. 2
17. Anecdotal History p. 2
18. Marilyn Beckmann
19. Earl Cooper
20. Anecdotal History p. 3
21. Earl Cooper
22. Grace Lutheran Church 1996 Annual Report pp. 30-31
23. Marilyn Beckmann
24. Shirley Schuler
25. Richard Balge
26. Anecdotal History p. 4
27. Anecdotal History p. 4
28. Gary Baumler
29. Anecdotal History p. 6
30. Dorothy Hoeting
31. Grace Lutheran Church 1996 Annual Report pp. 30-31
32. Dorothy Hoeting
33. Joan Richards
34. Joan Richards
35. Susan Westendorf
36. Joan Richards
37. Joah Richards
38. Dorothy Hoeting
39. Dorothy Hoeting

40. Richard Balge
41. Thomas Zarling
42. Anecdotal History Appendix
43. Joan Richards
44. Joan Richards
45. Shirley Schuler
46. Shirley Schuler
47. Shirley Schuler
48. Richard Balge
49. Duane Schmeichel
50. Peter Unnasch
51. Duane Schmeichel
52. Peter Unnasch
53. Donald Richards
54. Thomas Zarling
55. Carl Mischke
56. Melvin Schuler
57. Thomas Zarling
58. Melvin Schuler
59. Thomas Zarling
60. Thomas Zarling
61. Carl Mischke
62. Thomas Zarling
63. Marcus Nitz
64. Carl Mischke
65. Carl Mischke
66. Marcus Nitz
67. Joan Richards
68. Marcus Nitz
69. Marcus Nitz
70. Richard Balge

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- I. Pastor Walter Beckmann - personal interviews during January and February 1997.

- II. Pastor Walter Beckmann - "An Anecdotal History of the North Atlantic District." Paper presented at the North Atlantic District Southern Pastoral Conference. October 20, 1992.

- III. Professor Richard Balge - personal interview during February 1997.

- IV. Letters received from the following pastors during February 1997:
 - Gary Baumler
 - Daniel Gieschen
 - Vilas Glaeske
 - Karl Gurgel
 - Carl Mischke
 - Marcus Nitz
 - Duane Schmeichel
 - Peter Unnasch
 - Warren Widmann
 - Thomas Zarling

- V. Letters received from the following family members and congregational members during February 1997:
 - Mrs. Marilyn Beckmann
 - Mr. Earl Cooper
 - Mrs. Dorothy Hoeting
 - Mr. and Mrs. Donald Richards
 - Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Schuler
 - Miss Susan Westendorf