

EARLY MISSION FESTIVALS

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Church History

April 23, 1981

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

11831 N. Seminary Drive, 65W

Mequon, Wisconsin

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For the Hermansburg mission through Pastor Koehler from the church in Manitowoc \$ 8.50, through Pastor Streissguth \$ 9.20 (April 1, 1866).

For the mission in India: through Pastor Kittel \$ 2.25, from the Salem church in Granville \$ 28.00 ...for the Hermansburg mission: Pastor Sauer \$10.00 (May 1, 1866).

Hermansburg mission: Pastor Gesenke \$10.80, Liefeldt \$ 6.60, Quehl \$11.00, through Pastor Conrad \$20.00...for the heathen mission: through Pastor Stack \$8.19, Bachman \$ 5.00, Jaeckel \$ 2.50, Hoenecke \$27.10, Kleinert \$ 1.96, Meyerhoff \$25.00, Vorberg \$29.00 (for the Indians under this, \$18.00 by the Sunday School) (July 1, 1866).

These quotes from the treasurer's report in the Gemeinde-Blatt show that the spirit of missions and mission support was alive and prospering in the early years of the Wisconsin Synod. The receipts from these successive months also indicate that the mission thrust delved into several areas of mission work. But mission-mindedness was not relegated, for the most part, to individual deeds and consciences. For as early as October 1, 1865, we read in the Gemeinde-Blatt:

With heartfelt thanks we have received the following gifts: from the mission festival in Center-ville, Wisconsin (after the deduction for journey cost) \$31.00. From the collection at the mission festival in Fort Madison, Iowa \$16.00.

Congregational members also supported missions through mission festivals. This paper will examine the first twelve accounts (1866-1871) of mission festivals as reported in the Gemeinde-Blatt, concentrating on their essential and extrinsic characteristics for the modern mission planner.

I) HISTORICAL ROOTS

Support for missions and missionaries did not immediately accompany the apostles when they went out in accordance with Christ's command to "make disciples of all nations." The disciples of Christ went out as self-sufficient missionaries, devoting the most of their time to spreading the Gospel, and yet depending on some part-time occupation to provide their food and clothing^{WHEN NEEDED}. Gradually, over the centuries, this changed. Communities of believers, as well as individual patrons, began to sponsor missionaries. Of course, the amount of financial support was parallel to the amount of Gospel-motivated interest^{THAT} there was in missions. Thus, from the time of Christ to the founding of our Synod, fluctuations in mission support naturally occurred.

Perhaps the greatest historical factor, which influenced the mission awareness in our synod, was the movement of Pietism. Mission outreach received tremendous impetus from pietism, and Lutheran missionaries were sent to such diverse places as India and the American colonies. One only need think of Franke's University of Halle, the center and headquarters of Pietism in Germany, to realize that this mission outreach was deep-seeded and bound to continue, because it rubbed off on the theological students there and the people whom they served. Mission societies among the laity were formed, which supported mission outreach and theological training. It was with the influence of missions and mission support that our founding fathers came

to Wisconsin.

The rich heritage of mission rallies and festivals of the mission societies became a part of the Wisconsin Synod. Numerous mention is made of widespread mission festivals in very young congregations.

For the Coles in India through Pastor Kittel, a part of the collection from the mission festival in La Crosse \$15.00 (October 15, 1866).

For the Seminary: from the mission festival in Portage City \$ 4.31 (October 15, 1866).

For missions: from the mission festival in Helenville \$38.25 total (March 15, 1867).

From the mission festival of the northern conference through Pastor Sprengling \$30.00 (October 1, 1869).

For the heathen mission through Pastor Hoyer from the mission festival at Neikimi \$10.00 (November 15, 1869).

No one can deny that missions and mission festivals were made an important part of congregational life.

Because they were important, pastors shared accounts of mission festivals with the Gemeinde-Blatt readers. Seven congregations are represented in the twelve descriptive editorials: La Crosse (October 15, 1866), Fort Madison, Iowa (November 1, 1866), New Ulm (November 1, 1867, September 1, 1868), Centerville and Mosel and Sheboygan (September 1, 1868, ~~1, 1868~~^{AUGUST} 1, 18⁷⁰, August 15, 1871), Farmington and Helenville and Jefferson (August 1, 1870, August 15, 1871, September 1, 1872), North Leeds (August 15, 1871), and Milwaukee (~~1, 1870~~^{DECEMBER 1}, 1870). Let us consider the characteristics of mission festivals, as reported in these congregations.

II) PLACE

The natural choice of a worship place for mission festival was a church. Half of the congregations editorialized chose this ideal option. A couple of congregations put a little bit extra into their church for mission festival. The reporter writes about La Crosse's preparations:

Noch ehe der festliche Tag anbrach, gab's schon ein Regen und Bewegen in der Gemeinde, dass man sehen und merken konnte, die Festfeier sei eine allen Gliedern willkommene That, denn viele Haende waren beschaeftigt, Guirlanden und Kraenze zu winden um damit nebst vielen Blumen unser liebes Gotteshaus festlich zu schmuecken.

The beauty and fragrance of the natural decorations must have heightened the festival more than our plastic garlands and sewn banners could today. The Fort Madison congregation even decorated the exterior of their church.

Es waren in der von innen und von aussen geschmackvoll eingerichteten Kirche...

Several churches chose to hold their mission festival outdoors, especially in a small, wooded area. The combined congregations of Centerville, Mosel, and Sheboygan were one example.

Unsere Gotteshaus sind ja in der Regel bei Gelegenheit wie die eines Missionsfestes fuer die Menge der sich von allen Seiten versammelenden Zuhoeerer viel zu klein. Durch die guenstige Witterung war es uns denn gestattet, unser Fest im Freien zu feiern, und Alle, die gekommen waren, fanden Platz und noch mehr haetten Platz finden koennen in dem Tempel, den uns der Herr selbst erbauet und mit den schoenen gruenen Baeumen des Waldes gleich mit Maien selbst geschmuecket hatte.

For this gathering, room for all the worshippers was a primary consideration. And perhaps, the outdoor service made

mission festival more special. Yet, even for an outdoor worship service, preparations had to be made, as with the Farmington mission festival (September 1, 1871).

Der Platz war herrlich zu diesem Zwecke geeignet; wie zu einem Dome woelbten sich die Gipfel der Baeume; ein ganz stattliche Kanzel, Altar, ein Chor fuer den Gesang-Verein der Gemeinde erhoehte, sowie eine hinlaengliche Anzahl Sitz fuer die Zuhoeerer, waren angebracht, und erstere mit Blumen und Guirlanden sehr huebsch geschmueckt.

But there is one big disadvantage with outdoor worship services--the size of the turnout depends on the weather, as the Farmington reporter stated.

Doch als der bestimmte Tag herankam, bedeckten dunkle Wolken der ganze Himmel; trueb und drohend sah den ganzen Tag das Wetter aus. Schon fuerchtete man, dass viele durch den drohenden Regen sich vom Besuche des Festes abhalten lassen wuerden...

Today we have several places to choose from for a mission festival--churches, auditoriums, etc. Yet some congregations, like David's Star of Kircheien, still prefer an outdoor service.

III) TIME

The church year and its festivals limit a mission festival to the Trinity season. The majority of congregations chose an earlier time in Trinity to celebrate their festival. The New Ulm congregation of St. Paul's (of the Minnesota Synod) experienced a poor attendance because of the time chosen for their festival.

Die Zahl der Festgenossen war geringer als des vorigen Jahres, weil die Zeit weniger war, denn die Ernte nahm alle Arbeitskraefte spruch, was voriges Jahres nicht der Fall war.

At the mission festival previous to this one, the New Ulm congregation had to compete with a Turner Festival in Minneapolis on the same weekend, but many participants still attended its first festival. Some of the larger congregations, like the Milwaukee area churches, preferred a later time in the church year (around October or November). This is the case with many of our congregations today.

Another consideration is the length of mission festival day. Here again, geographical location plays an important role. The New Ulm congregation held its first festival amid other historic events. On Sunday, September 8, the Lutheran congregation at Mankato had a festival day. Then on Wednesday, September 11, August Kenter was installed as pastor of St. Paul's in New Ulm in the morning service. In the afternoon and evening, the mission festival was held. On the next year, the New Ulm congregation extended their festival from 10 AM to 10 PM. But for the most of the congregations, morning and afternoon festivals were common. In Milwaukee, the area congregations met at 3 PM, but the festivities were cut short in the evening by darkness. Scheduling is a factor.

IV) THE WORD PRESENTED

The worship service always remains the chief mark of a mission festival. The reporter for the mission festival celebrated by the Centerville, Mosel, and Sheboygan congregations put it this way:

Darum war denn auch Er der eigentliche Festber-

eiter und Festgeber, der uns zu Seinem Feste eingeladen hatte. Das tratt denn auch recht stark hervor in dem Worte, das verkuendigt wurde.

Fanning a burning eagerness for missions through God's Word is exciting for the congregation as well as for the festival preacher. Among the more popular choices for speakers were Synod dignitaries, like President Bading (who had recently returned from his extensive trip into Russia), or Pastor G. Fachtman (who was the Reiseprediger of the Minnesota Synod). Professors Ernst and Stellohorn were asked to preach at several festivals. Their sermons dealt more with recruitment and support of Northwestern college, which was our Synod's inner mission. Most congregations heard from local pastors who had been missionaries to some foreign country. Still, there were some disappointments, as with the mission festival at Mosel.

Obwohl wir mehr auswaertige Festredner uns gewuenscht, und wohl auch mehr Festgaeste haetten da sein koennen, als wirklich da waren, so war doch der Beste von Allen, unser lieber Herr Jesus nicht abwesend.

There was also a bittersweet comment in their next year's festival report.

So hatten wir also an geistlicher Nahrung keinen Mangel, obwohl zu unserer Betruenbnis einige Pastoren, die man erwartete und zum Predigen bestimmt hatte, ausblieben.

But the congregations made the best of it, which is good advice when the best laid plans go astray.

There is a noteworthy account of a children's mission festival in the Lacrosse congregation.

Um Nachmittage versammelte sich die fast hundert Schueler Sonntagschule des Gemeinde zu einem

Kindermissionsfeste, wobei Pastor Kittel im Anschluss an das Wort Mission, Pastor Bading aus seinen Reiseerlebnissen in Russland und der Schreiber dieses aus den Erfahrungen der Missionaere auf den verschiedenen Missionsgebieten herzliche Ansprachen an die Kinder hielten. Darauf wurden noch verschiedene Kinderlieder gesungen die Collect die mit der damit war denn aber auch der Sonntag ziemlich zu Ende gebracht und ein Tag gefeiert, der fuer Unalle von Reichem Segen war.

This is an excellant option for keeping missions alive-- train the next generation when they are young. Perhaps the parents of these children were invited to listen, too, which would be a wonderful opportunity to teach the parents through the children. While I am not aware of any congregations *in our synod* which have a children's mission festival, I do know that some Missouri Synod congregations make it a vital part of their mission festival.

The Word can be presented through another medium, the hymns. ~~Congregational~~ singing was assumed in most of the articles. But some made mention of a choir, with a goodly amount of praise, as was contained in Pastor Kern's report about the Fort Madison mission festival.

Der Singchor des Gemeinde in Nauvou unter der Leitung des Herrn Eggers erhoehte durch seine trefflich eingeuebten Gesaenge die Feier und verdient volle Anerkennung.

"Wach auf die Geist der ersten Zeugen" (TLH 494) was a favorite hymn of these mission festivals. The hymn choice, and especially choir selections, add to a festival.

V) CONGREGATIONAL PARTICIPATION

A mission festival offers the opportunity for a congregation to demonstrate its faith in deeds of love and fellow-

ship. Often a congregation may invite others to its own mission festival, as was the case at Fort Madison and La Crosse. But there also can be joint participation, where each congregation contributes something to the festival, as with the Farmington choir enhancing the service of the Farmington, Helenville, and Jefferson congregations. This may promote a spirit of working together among congregations, creating a greater appreciation of fellowship.

The biggest socializing time at the mission festival was the fellowship meal. The congregations of Centerville, Mosel, and Sheboygan offered a simple meal of "bread and coffee" to their guests. In their next mission festival, "bread and food" was offered. The Farmington congregation made sure that everyone was fed in a unique way.

Hierauf zerstreute sich die grosse Versammlung, um sich auch lieglichen erquicken zu lassen, eine Aufgabe, welche die Farmingtoner mit rühmlicher Gastfreundschaft lösten. Sie drängten sich förmlich um die anwesenden Fremden und suchten sie beinahe mit Gewalt in ihre Häuser zu bringen, in denen es an Speise und Trank nicht fehlte.

The Farmington congregation was known for their hospitality, because at the mission festival of the following year, the same thing occurred. Today, a potluck or a short snack is in vogue.

One more example of sanctification at these mission rallies was the collection. It usually was taken twice, at the morning service and at the afternoon service. At Fort Madison, the participants contributed \$47.93. The Sheboygan-Centerville-Herman-Mosel collection of \$77.17 was divided between heathen mission and Castle Garden. The

New Ulm congregation designated their \$18.00 to Hermansburg mission and to Northwestern College. The congregations of Farmington, Helenville, and Jefferson raised \$115.07, of which \$65.00 went to inner missions and \$50.00 to outer missions. The joint mission festival at Mosel gave $\frac{2}{5}$ of the \$102.00 collection to outer missions and $\frac{3}{5}$ to inner missions. Farmington's joint mission festival resulted in \$50.00 for home institutions and \$30.00 for heathen missions. And North Leeds split the \$29.00 raised between home and heathen missions. The specific division of the festival monies received, of course, depended on the stress of the mission service, and especially what the speaker emphasized. These people gave themselves to the Lord, and even what they had.

The records of these early mission festivals, as reported in the Gemeinde-Blatt, offer some worthwhile suggestions for planning a mission festival. The extrinsic form of the mission festival may vary, but the desire for missions, and the eagerness to learn more about our Synod's missions, changes--growing stronger in each mission festival. With a note of encouragement, Professor Ernst closed his report of Farmington's joint mission festival.

Moechten sich doch durch solche liebliche Beispiele alle Gemeinden bewegen lassen Missionsfeste in ihrer Mitte zu feiern! Diese wuerden ihnen ohne Zweifel grossen Segen und viel Freude bringen.