

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Summerville, SC:
From Mission to Mission Minded



Mark Schutz

Senior Church History

Professor Korthals

December 11, 2006

It has been described as “an old mission” and “brand new” at the same time. Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church of Summerville, South Carolina, has seen its share of hardships and triumphs. All of these remind us of how beautiful our Savior truly is.

Where Two or Three Come Together in My Name...

“Our captain was a real go getter, so I was out to sea quite a bit.”¹ The faint sound of hymns and preaching could be heard on Sunday mornings just outside the door to the Chief’s Mess Hall aboard the USS William V. Pratt Destroyer. Chief Petty Officer Thomas Laich spent many Sunday afternoons at sea, but not without his Lord.

The military brought the Laich family to South Carolina in 1973. Since Tom would be out to sea quite a bit they were very interested in a cassette tape ministry that a WELS church was producing at the time. Services with worship folders could be mailed out and used. When they were returned more services would be mailed out.

As hard as it was to be away from family, it was a comfort to know that his wife and children would have opportunities to hear about their Savior, too. Pastor John Guse started holding monthly communion services in a chapel at the Naval Weapons Base in Menrivi Park, Charleston. Pastor Guse was already serving a mission congregation in Lexington, about one hundred and twenty miles northwest of Charleston.

This was an effort by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s Special Ministries Board to bring the Word and Sacraments to members who were stationed at the Charleston Naval Station and the Charleston Air Force Base, and who were separated from the closest WELS congregation in Columbia by 120 miles. The next three years were a history of “on again-off again” services with attendance fluctuating between two and thirty; of services in Naval chapels and in homes, of “live” services and tape-recorded services; of 240 mile trips to and from Columbia: of hopes and dreams and fervent prayers.²

¹ Laich, Thomas. An e-mail concerning his years at Beautiful Savior – November 26, 2006. Received: November 29, 2006.

² Guse, John, Pastor. An unaddressed letter from Pastor John Guse. July 25, 1976.

WELS members who were coming on to the base would bring their family and friends. Having to move often with the military, they enjoyed the Christian fellowship and celebrating the Lord's Supper.

When the William B. Pratt would return to harbor, the Laich family would make the trip up to Columbia to worship with the congregation of Hope Lutheran Church. In 1974, the congregation was meeting at a rented location in the West Columbia area.³ Nonetheless, the Laich family along with other military families would make the trip up north, especially for Christmas and Easter. Being together with fellow believers during the high points of the Christian year was something that these military families longed for.

During 1974 the Laich family continued to make use of the cassette tapes in their own home. Several other families would meet with them. On January 25, 1976 the first exploratory service was conducted by John Guse. They met at the Sheraton Inn on Aviation Avenue in North Charleston. Weekly services were held at seven o'clock on Sunday nights. On February 8, the following goals were set: 1. Apply for mission status by mid April, 2. Receive mission status by mid May and begin calling a pastor, 3. Install a pastor by early July. Soon the group applied to the South Atlantic District Mission Board to receive exploratory status. This request then went to the Board for Home Missions (BHM). By May 4th the congregation had received mission status with permission to call a pastor.⁴

While the congregation was seeking mission status, the Navy brought Dale Tess and his family to the Charleston area. Dale had joined the Navy in 1969, but Charleston was the first place he had been sent with a WELS congregation nearby. He and his family were members of

³ Guse, John, Pastor. Phone Interview – December 5, 2006. Electronic transcript: December 5, 2006.

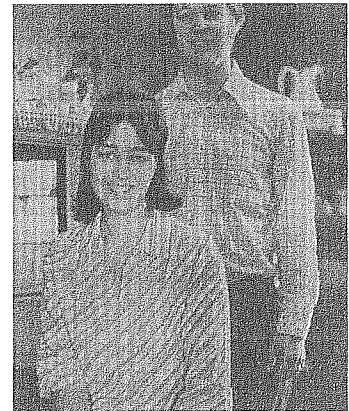
⁴ Groeschel, Ed. A Brief History of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church: An electronic document containing specific dates and descriptions for major events at Beautiful Savior – no date. Received: September 19, 2006.

St. John's in Milton, Wisconsin, and Dale himself was being served through WELS Special Ministries while in the Navy. It was through WELS Special Ministries that Pastor Guse received his name. Pastor Guse visited Dale and his family on the day their moving truck arrived. This was quite a reunion because Pastor and Dale had attended Northwestern Preparatory School together in Watertown, Wisconsin. John was two years ahead of Dale. Dale remarked, "John went ministry, I went Navy."⁵

The way in which the arrival of the Tess family was made known to Pastor Guse pretty much summed up the largest component of the "outreach strategy" for this congregation until the arrival of Pastor Martin Spriggs in 1990. The names of WELS military men in the area would be forwarded to Pastor Guse, and he would make a visit. Then these men and their families would bring friends and acquaintances, still mostly military.

We are "Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church"

Seminarian Randall Bartelt was called to be their first pastor through the assignment committee. Randall and his wife Mary arrived in Charleston on June 29th and moved into a rented parsonage at 117 Bailey Drive in Summerville. He was ordained and installed on July 11, 1976. If this congregation was going to grow and become incorporated it would need to have a name. Discussions began and suggestions for a name were requested.



Pastor Randal and Mary Bartelt. A picture from The Summerville SCENE, Summerville, South Carolina, Monday, January 24, 1977.

⁵Tess, Dale. An e-mail concerning the history of Beautiful Savior – October 26, 2006. Received: October 26, 2006.

Thomas Laich's daughter, Joy, suggested "Beautiful Savior" and on July 12, 1976 the congregation took that name.⁶ Worship services continued to be held at the Sheraton Inn, but Pastor Bartelt still met at the Laich home for Catechism classes with Joy and two other children.

By October 10th the congregation had moved services to the ABC Academy Day Care Nursery. Thomas Laich had been helping to develop a constitution and bylaws. The official constitution was adopted on October 20th. Four days later, the first church council was installed during the Sunday morning service: Thomas Laich served as President, Karl Perleberg - Secretary, Gerald Thomas - Treasurer, Doug Darelius - Financial Secretary. On the same date the first members were accepted into membership by transfer. They were Linda and Amy Smith, Marguerite Mundstock, Victoria and Greg Leggans, Randall and Mary Bartelt, Tom and Chris Laich with Joy, Marie, and Carolanne, and Dale and Barbara Tess with Denise and Daniel.

A Place of Our Own

Now that they had a name and a group of faithful members, they wanted to start looking for their own property. The General Board for Home Missions gave Beautiful Savior permission to search for land. Several locations were suggested. The land that was picked is where the church still stands today, 720 Old Trolley Road. According to Dale Tess, "This land was picked because it was high ground on Trolley Road and because Brandy mill on one side and Irongate on the other side (subdivisions that exist today) were to be built. Three acres were bought for \$45,000 from Mead Westvaco (a lumber company still in the area)."⁷ By November 15th Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church was recognized as an official religious corporation in the state of South Carolina.

⁶ Laich, Groeschel

⁷ Tess

During April of 1977, the parsonage was moved to 110 Boone Hill Parkway. In February of 1978 it was relocated to Foxwood Drive. Pastor Bartelt had to move about every six months because of rental problems.⁸ For this reason the Board for Home Missions approved the building of a parsonage for \$50,000. It would be completed after their new worship facility and by a different builder.

The first building committee was formed on June 9, 1977. Members were Chairman Jim Molstad, Jim Hoden, Doug Darelus, Karl Perleberg, Jerry Thomas, Dale Tess, Pastor Bartelt, and Tom Laich. By April of 1978 the General Board for Home Missions granted permission to proceed with the planning and construction of a 1,800 square foot Worship Education Fellowship (WEF) building. Bids didn't open on the building project until June 19, 1979. By this time only the chairman of the building committee, Jim Molstad, was left to serve. This is a good example of the fragility of a congregation trying to form its core around WELS military families who would only be in the area for a short time. In 1978 Dale Tess received orders to Great Lakes, Illinois. Thomas Laich retired from the Navy in 1979 and moved back to Wisconsin after his daughter Joy's confirmation.⁹

Between the formation of the building committee in 1977 and the first worship service in the WEF on March 23, 1980, worship services were held at the Ladson Homemaker's Club on Ladson Road. The members looked ahead and rejoiced. In October of 1977, the church council



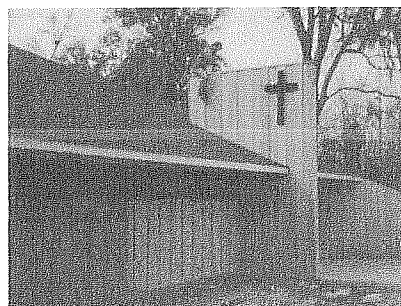
Ladson Homemaker's Club in November of 2006. Photo taken by Mary Groeschel.

⁸ Tess

⁹ There are occasional inconsistencies in data received from former members and the Board for Home Mission's official statistics of the congregation. These Statistics do not record that there was a youth confirmation in 1979. In fact, there aren't any recorded until 1984.

agreed to the forming of a choir and a ladies group. Dale Tess remembers doing a lot of canvassing during this time. They were excited about their new location on Old Trolley Road. They hoped that the new subdivisions going up around the church would be a fertile ground for new members. They were supposed to be filled with starter homes, but already in phase one, more and more custom built homes were popping up. The result was that people were simply moving in from other parts of the tri-county area (Dorchester, Berkley, and Charleston counties). Many of them already had a church home or were not interested in their canvassing. "So, we canvassed surrounding subdivisions with some success, but we were still mostly military."¹⁰ On September 25, 1977, the ladies of the congregation painted a wooden sign and put it on the new property in eager anticipation of their new church home. The ground breaking would not be until October 21, 1979. That original sign would eventually become a part of the attic floor of the WEF.

What a joy to finally have a place of their own! Pastor Bartelt would no longer need to move from one rental property to the next. They could set up for worship and leave everything set up. In April of 1980 they would be able to host a pastor's conference. They would have the space for a broken Wicks pipe organ from New York! Of course, Dale Tess helped Pastor Bartelt fix it when he returned from Illinois. It had two ranks of pipes, which could be drowned out if attendance reached more than 50, but it was faithfully used until 1992. On July 27, 1980, the members of Beautiful Savior publicly gave thanks to God



Finishing Touches to the WEF on February 13, 1980. Photographer Unknown.



The old Wicks organ box and console in the background. This photo was taken on Craft Day in 1987. Photographer unknown.

¹⁰ Tess

and held a dedication service for the WEF, the organ, and the parsonage.

In April of 1982, Pastor Bartelt accepted a call to Rock of Ages Lutheran Church in Madison, Tennessee.¹¹ He has since resigned from the ministry, but is actively serving the same church as a lay person. Pastor Wilmer G. Hoffman was called from Siloah Evangelical Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Pastor Guse installed him on July 18, 1982.

During the first years that Pastor Hoffman served Beautiful Savior, the congregation was beginning to get in trouble with various home owner associations for the canvassing. Now evangelism depended more heavily than ever on each member forming new relationships in the community or inviting those they already knew. Announcements were regularly put in the local newspaper. Pastor Hoffman conducted their first outdoor Easter services, with breakfast in between services on April 11, 1983.



A typical outdoor Easter Service. This photo was taken in 1988. Photographer Unknown.

More non-military families were joining, but they still primarily consisted of military families.¹² Mrs. Faye Hoffman described Pastor Hoffman's service in Summerville as still heavily involved with the military at this time. They would make regular trips to Myrtle Beach and the Beaufort-Hilton Head area to visit WELS military members whose names they had received through WELS Home Missions. Mrs. Hoffman would come along on follow up visits to the homes of those who had signed the guest book. She described many of these people as being military families who were WELS or at least Lutheran in the past. Again and again, the history of Beautiful Savior shows that the drive, determination, and discipline of members who

¹¹ Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church Bulletin, February 21, 1982.

¹² Tess

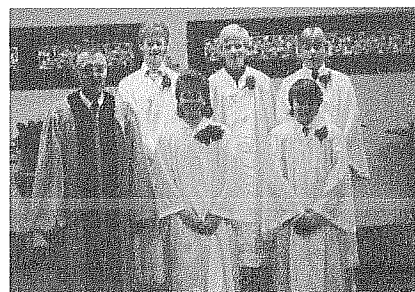
were in the military were valuable, but it did not always make things easy. “There was a lot of turn over. It was really hard. You’d wonder what happened to them. They could be gone and you wouldn’t hear from them for quite a while... I would check casualty lists to see if anything happened to them.”¹³

On Confirmation Sunday in June of 1984 Beautiful Savior dedicated their new altar, pulpit, and lectern hand crafted by Pastor Marvin Radtke, the District Mission Counselor.¹⁴ Later that year a large redwood cross was set up along Old Trolley Road. At the foot of the cross some of the members planted a garden resembling Luther’s seal. Little



The cross and garden along Old Trolley Road. This picture accompanied a public invitation to Their Easter morning service in 1988. Staff photo by Beth Ingram.

improvements like these would happen yearly. Pastor Hoffman’s sister donated a hand bell to ring at the beginning of services. It is still being used to start worship today. Pastor and Mrs. Hoffman found stained glass contact paper to put on the narrow windows along Old Trolley Road to make it look more like the churches they were used to up north.¹⁵ In 1985 a



Pastor Hoffman and the Confirmation class of 1988. Notice the “stained glass” windows in the background. Photographer Unknown.

brick sidewalk was added at the south side of the building along with a nice layer of sod right before that year’s outdoor Easter service. That year, membership had reached its highest point since 1978. Beautiful Savior now consisted of sixty-two baptized members, 42 of them

¹³ Hoffman. Faye. Phone interview, December 7, 2006. Electronic transcript of phone interview, December 7, 2006.

¹⁴ Hoffman

¹⁵ Hoffman

communicant members.¹⁶ Dale Tess had moved to Myrtle Beach that year, but he still held an elder position and membership at Beautiful Savior.

Moved by gratitude for all their blessings, members added a deck and awnings to the parsonage and built and installed cupboards in the kitchen area of the WEF during 1986. Often there was not enough money for even basic necessities. Pastor Hoffmann had to buy his own typewriter and copy machine, which often did not work properly. The ladies organization, eventually called the Priscilla Circle, often raised funds for different needs within the congregation.

Along with the largest membership they had ever seen, (73 baptized members, 47 communicants, an average Sunday attendance of 40) God also gave them the biggest storm they had ever seen. Hurricane Hugo hit on September 21, 1989. The windows on the WEF were boarded up and ready to go. Pastor decided to buckle down at his desk in the study above the garage of the parsonage. Mrs. Hoffman nervously listened to the storm as it rolled in. When the mighty trees began to snap like twigs all around them she decided that it would not be so good for Pastor to be studying upstairs. At her insistence he finally came down. When the storm passed the Hoffmans emerged to see many trees down, but not a single window on the parsonage or WEF was broken. The tops of some trees had landed on the roof of the parsonage. One of the members, Mrs. Betty Pound, volunteered her husband Dwight's truck. He came and helped cut up and remove the trees from the parsonage roof. Both roofs would need repair. The military came in and helped with the clean up. When they were done there were piles of wood four to six feet high.

¹⁶ Board for Home Missions statistics on Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church from 1976-2005. Received: December 7, 2006.

Thankful for their lives, the members of Beautiful Savior decided to use this opportunity to reach out to the community. They made the church into a depository where food could be dropped off for those in need. A gift of money was sent from the Synod and presented to the city to aid in relief. Pastor Hoffman received public recognition from Mayor Berlin G. Meyers for their congregation's help after the disaster.

By June of 1990 Pastor Hoffman had suffered a heart attack. He retired from the ministry on June 30th and moved back to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but not before the arrival of Pastor Martin Spriggs. He wanted a smooth transition. He stayed to install Pastor Spriggs on July 8, 1990. During the eight years that he served, Pastor Hoffman saw membership increase from 43 to 73 and the average attendance rise from 21 to 40.

A New Perspective

In 1984, a thousand miles away from Beautiful Savior a change was taking place. Pastor David Valleskey was called to serve as president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

That year marked the beginning of a special emphasis in evangelism at WLS, in that my call to the Seminary specifically named evangelism. I was called to serve as professor of New Testament and Pastoral Theology, with emphasis on evangelism. That fall for the first time there was a separate course on the theology and practice of evangelism...¹⁷

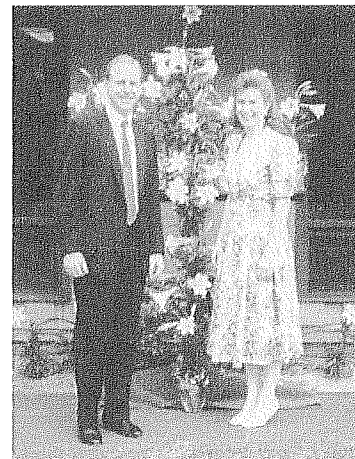
This did not mean that evangelism was not being taught before Pastor Valleskey came to the seminary. It was being taught as a part of the Pastoral Theology course, but now it would receive special emphasis. Eventually, they would seek ways to get students involved in practical, real-life evangelism experiences. This would be the beginnings of the Early Field Training program. Professor Valleskey would influence the seminary training of the next two

¹⁷ Valleskey, David, Pastor. An e-mail concerning his impact on evangelism at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. October 21, 2006.

pastors of Beautiful Savior. This would change the approach to outreach in this congregation forever.

A New Direction

Things began to move very quickly after Pastor Hoffman left. Pastor Spriggs brought a lot of energy to the church. By October of 1999 worship services had changed from 10:30 am to 9:30 am, followed by Sunday School and Bible Class. Membership shot up from 73 to 92 in one year. Pastor Spriggs described the situation as “struggling” when he got there. The congregation was still made up of mostly military families. “I’d say they were committed people, but not necessarily outreach minded. They knew they were there for only two or three years. Most of them were WELS. Almost none were from the community.”¹⁸



Pastor Martin and Debbie Spriggs at Easter of 1991. Photographer Unknown.

One of the objectives of Pastor Spriggs and the Home Mission Board was to get Beautiful Savior rooted into the community for stability of leadership in the congregation. In order to accomplish this, Pastor Spriggs thought that the first thing that needed to be done was to make the church look more like the surrounding community as far as the background of the members and the look of the facility. So, the congregation started surveying the community one door at a time in order to build a profile of the people they were going to serve.

During Pastor Spriggs first year the congregation primarily did “go and tell” ministry. This consisted of law and gospel presentations, follow up visits, and canvassing in general. This got people to consider coming, but Pastor thought that what they were coming to was a

¹⁸ Spriggs, Martin. Interview at Synod Administration Building – November 15, 2006. Electronic transcript of recording: November 15, 2006. The questions that were asked can be found in the Addenda.

“downer.” “People feel conspicuous when they come to a congregation of 30 people.”¹⁹ He did not want to do away with this type of ministry because it helped the community identify what Beautiful Savior had to offer. They learned that especially when people had a major life event they would come and seek out Beautiful Savior because they had heard of them and knew that they were there for them. “Despite the facility, we had numerous requests for weddings.”

During his second year, Pastor Spriggs implemented what he called a “come and see” strategy. They tried to make worship all that it could be. “We improved the music quality. We put together good soloists and duets. We modified the worship format, which caused some consternation in the congregation.”²⁰ With no organist, the organ was sold and MIDI started being used for worship music. Pastor and Mrs. Spriggs would program music into a laptop computer and members would be trained to cue music during worship services.

Pastor Spriggs also began offering a contemporary service once every month. These included a “seeker service.” The idea behind a seeker service is that a “seeker” is someone who doesn’t have a personal relationship with Christ. They have little or no religious background. They view church services as boring and lifeless, predictable and repetitive. They think sermons are irrelevant to daily life in the real world and that pastors often make people feel guilty and ignorant. The seeker service is then meant to remove these obstacles. Then, as faith is created, members are encouraged to attend regular worship services, and finally, small group, in-home Bible classes called K-groups (*K stands for Koinonia, “fellowship” in Greek*)²¹ The weaknesses Pastor Spriggs saw in the seeker service was that it made for inconstant worship, but it was

¹⁹ Spriggs

²⁰ Spriggs

²¹ Beautiful Savior 5-year planning guide for 1992, pp. 6-7. Home Mission Board file on Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. Synod Administration Building. Copy Received: December 8, 2006.

implemented anyway in hopes that the benefits would outweigh the drawbacks. They also tried to have regular events and to publicize them. All of it seemed to work. Membership shot up to over one hundred. There were more members who were not WELS transfers. Outdoor Easter services averaged 160-170 people. “We were more event driven than institution focused.”²²

In August of 1992 the District Mission Board wrote a letter saying, “As we review your monthly reports your attendance is certainly increasing, but your communicant growth has increased much more slowly.”²³ In the history of Beautiful Savior, 1992 saw the highest average Sunday attendance up until that point. The trend at Beautiful Savior had always been and continues to be that as average Sunday attendance rises, Communicant membership also rises. This year it dropped by eight people. Eleven people transferred their membership out of Beautiful Savior, too.²⁴ This was a unique year.

In late September of 1992 the Board for Home Missions approved a building of 3,150 square feet. It would be funded by a Church Extension Fund loan as soon as the District Mission Board was satisfied with their plan to increase their Synod Mission Offerings. This plan would never make it off the ground because of finances and disagreements over the planning process.²⁵ Two men and four women of the congregation aggressively brought charges of false doctrine

²² Spriggs

²³ Wehmeyer, Danny, SADMB Secretary. A Letter to Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. August 8, 1992. Home Mission Board file on Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. Synod Administration Building. Copy Received: December 8, 2006.

²⁴ Board for Home Missions statistics on Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church from 1976-2005. Copy Received: December 7, 2006.

²⁵ House, Jack. Letter of resignation from the Building Expansion Committee. March 28, 1993.

before the congregation at open forums. In 1993, Pastor Spriggs made a public apology for false doctrine found in his sermons.²⁶

On December 11, 1994, Pastor Spriggs resigned for the good of the ministry at Beautiful Savior due to lack of trust among the elders.²⁷ There was a lot of confusion on the part of members. Most, if not all of them had never seen anything like this happen in a church before. Talk about these issues continued among some members while others wished to simply forget about everything that happened. Looking back, Mr. Spriggs commented that if he had it to do all over again, he would have taken things more slowly and made sure that everyone shared a common vision for reaching out to the community. The changes that were being made to worship and outreach caused a split that he noticed early on. It was not a visible split at first, but it did exist.

Sheep Without a Shepherd

The next couple years would be the most challenging for the members of Beautiful Savior. In 1994, the closing of the Charleston Naval Base by 1996 was announced. This meant a good number of members would be leaving. The faith of those who remained would be tested even further with a vacancy that lasted for over thirty months. Mrs. Betty Pound recalls how difficult it was. She can remember how Christmas just was not the same being without fellow believers to share in the joy of their Savior's birth.²⁸ Beautiful Savior did not seem so beautiful during these years. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Some members had ill feelings towards one another. Many ended up leaving. What had made Beautiful Savior beautiful in the past? What would make it beautiful again in the future? The only one who could make it

²⁶ Groeschel

²⁷ Groeschel

²⁸ Pound, Betty. Phone interview – December 5, 2006. Written Transcript: December 5, 2006.

beautiful again would be the very person their name referred to – Jesus, their beautiful Savior. They needed to be grounded and anchored once again to the One who had blessed them in the past.

During the vacancy, various retired pastors served for about three months at a time. Among them were Pastor Elton Huebner, Pastor Jerome Spaude, Pastor Reginald Pope, and Pastor Richard Werner. On August 25, 1994, Pastor Elton Huebner wrote a letter to the South Atlantic District Mission Board suggesting that this mission not close:

I believe that the beginnings here in this congregation may not be typical of some of our other fields. The extremely high presence of the Baptist Church and the relatively low presence of the Lutheran Church make it just a bit more difficult to establish an identity. But more significantly, the deep turmoil which the recent pastoral controversy caused within the congregation has had a devastating impact upon the membership here. The devil has been working overtime in his attempts to shake these people in their faith and in their confidence in the ministry, in the Synod and in their relationship to each other. By the grace of God the people are coming together again, even though there still are some problem areas... I, for one, would love to see the WELS Board for Home Missions make a “new start” here in the Charleston area²⁹

In light of so many people leaving the congregation, the District Mission Board debated changing the course at Beautiful Savior. Once again the question of whether to pour more funds into the mission had to be asked. By February of 1996 the re-start was approved. They would call a full time pastor and the mission status would return to “exploratory.”

A Fresh Start

In May of 1997, Seminary graduate, Jon Hein was called by the District Mission Board to be the next pastor of Beautiful Savior and a missionary to the people of Summerville and the surrounding counties. This would mean that worship would have to be balanced with outreach.

²⁹Huebner, Elton, Pastor. A Letter to the South Atlantic District Mission Board - August 25, 1995.

Pastor Hein's first two years were mostly spent canvassing every neighborhood within a two mile radius of Beautiful Savior. He gathered as much information as possible to help guide their future plans.

Just as with Pastor Spriggs, Professor Valleskey played a large role in shaping Pastor Hein's view of mission work:

He really set the groundwork for the theology of mission work. His book, "We Believe Therefore We Speak" is excellent. So much of it is stuff you already know: The Lord does the work. We're just jars of clay. But that basic message needs to be driven home to missionaries. It's the kite string that keeps us on the ground. And yet, that book also puts proper responsibility on the missionary. God never intended his Word to deliver itself. For reasons only he understands (I sure don't!) he chose to place the Word and Sacraments in the hands of mere men, for using and for sharing. In that sense, we have an awesome responsibility to make those canvass calls... to prepare our sermons well... to teach an excellent BIC. Valleskey instilled all of that.³⁰

While influenced by the same professor, Pastor Hein took a much different approach to mission work at Beautiful Savior. Where the seeker service concept assumed that people in the prospect area were unchurched and merely considering Christianity,³¹ Pastor Hein found the exact opposite to be true. In his first two years he had almost 1,200 conversations with people in the community. He found that their prospect base had a strong church background, but many of them had left their churches because of what they considered to be startling changes:

Many of the churches in Summerville got caught up in the Evangelical push to do away with denominational names, to go with full contemporary worship, to make everything very casual, etc. Some wrongly equated changes in practice with changes in doctrine.

Secondly, some felt that as churches grew, they got overscheduled. In the Bible Belt, church can be a three day a week thing. You have worship on Sunday, a

³⁰ Hein, Jon, Pastor. Electronic survey response – November 8, 2006 Received: December 8, 2006. The survey that Pastor Hein responded to contained the same questions that were asked in the Martin Spriggs interview. These questions can be found in the Addenda.

³¹ Beautiful Savior 5-year planning guide for 1992, p. 6. Home Mission Board file on Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. Synod Administration Building. Copy Received: December 8, 2006.

second Bible class on Wednesday, and various work/youth groups meeting on Saturday. While that is commendable in a sense, we found that people felt the church was getting too busy... doing too much.

Finally, we found that as churches in Summerville grew, people felt disconnected. They felt lost in an ocean of people. My first full year here, 1998, I knew of 21 churches that began in the Summerville area. These were largely established by people who wanted a smaller, more intimate atmosphere.³²

As a result, Beautiful Savior started to be known as the smaller, simple, conservative church. All of their canvassing and mailings and outreach became directed at getting people to attend a worship service, similar to Pastor Spriggs' approach, but a "seeker" service was not used. They identified many people in the community who viewed a slide away from traditional worship as a negative.

Influenced by Professor Tiefel of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Pastor Hein learned to appreciate the role of the liturgy always keeping the Gospel center stage. Even today, all worship services are still liturgical:

Yet [Professor Tiefel] also taught that the liturgy is not page 5 and 15 in the Lutheran Hymnal... The Liturgy allows for great variety. We utilize services that employ the historic canticles regularly. We follow the pattern of the church year. And yet our worship features great vitality and variety. This seems to be pleasing to people of all religious backgrounds.³³

He started printing more and more of the order of service from Christian Worship into the worship folder to make the flexibility of the liturgy a reality and to be user friendly for visitors.

Seeker services were meant to aid in assimilating people into the congregation. The casual, no pressure atmosphere was supposed to give the seeker a chance to "sort things out"

³² Hein

³³ Hein

because he was supposedly just considering whether Christianity was worth while.³⁴ Pastor Hein accomplished this same goal by making use of Friend, Associate, Relative, Neighbor or FRAN outreach because people were already coming from a Christian background. The thinking behind FRAN outreach actually accomplishes what the seeker sermon tried to do through making worship a casual, no pressure atmosphere. With FRAN outreach, liturgical worship is maintained, and the thing that makes someone feel comfortable is the fact that their friend, relative, associate or neighbor is sitting right there with them. So they are not all alone. They don't feel conspicuous. "FRAN is very big for us. I can trace about 20% of our congregation to one family. They brought their neighbor. That neighbor brought a co-worker and so on."³⁵ In 2002 a study of their own congregation found that 43% of their communicant members came from FRAN outreach.

When it came to keeping members at Beautiful Savior, Pastor Hein found benefits to adjusting the format Bible Information Classes for the heavily churched community. The traditional BIC class consists of about 20 lessons. This tended to turn people away, and it started with creation. Since the area around Beautiful Savior is so heavily churched, they decided to divide BIC into a three phase program. The first covers sin, grace, faith and works and is taught in the home. The second is taught in a smaller group and expands on the person and nature of Christ, the Trinity, the Means of Grace, and the Church and its ministry. At this point people are taken into membership with the understanding that they will attend the third part one of the two times it is offered during the year. It focuses on sanctification issues like marriage, stewardship, citizenship, and evangelism. Even long time members are encouraged to go to these classes

³⁴ Beautiful Savior 5-year planning guide for 1992, p. 6. Home Mission Board file on Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. Synod Administration Building. Copy Received: December 8, 2006.

³⁵ Hein

again. “This has been EXTREMELY productive for us. It virtually eliminated people saying, “not interested,” when you introduced BIC. And yet, when you look at the time spent and quantity of materials used, our BIC is actually longer than most others.”³⁶

Not only did their study of the community lead them to more traditional, yet not routine worship services, but it also lead them to make use of educational ministry as an outreach tool. As a result, the previous building plan of about 2,800 total square feet was not going to be enough. Pastor Hein encouraged the members to be more aggressive in their plans. He sketched out the design for their current building on the back of a placemat while taking some of those who did not support his idea out to dinner. The result is what they have today. The sanctuary is 3,400 square feet, full of light and welcoming. This area is able to seat up to 270 people. The 2,000 square foot entry foyer promotes a family atmosphere. Connected to the entry foyer are two 860 square foot rooms that can be divided up. This way they have the option of using them for preschool or elementary classes. The new church building was dedicated in January of 2004. John Guse delivered the sermon. As many previous members as possible were invited, even the contractors.

After 20 months of studying their options the WEF was finally remodeled and turned into a home-school cooperative in 2006. This simplified elementary school offers a classic curriculum. This means that the school day lasts from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. and parents are required to be heavily involved. As a result, all the teachers are part time. This allowed the congregation to start a school without impacting the budget of their church.

Today the entire campus consists of around 10,000 square feet divided up over three buildings, the new sanctuary, Trinity Classical Academy, which is the remodeled WEF, and a storage shed. With all of these changes, their focus remains the same. So, the church which

³⁶ Hein

became known to the community as “the small church with uplifting worship services and a great family atmosphere,” now offers a simple, yet high quality education, too.

Currently, less than 10% of the church is military. There aren't a lot of WELS people who move to the Charleston area, except what is now a small military population. This means that the growth that has happened in the past ten years has not been solely because of transfers in, but actual adult confirmands from the community.

By 2006 Beautiful Savior became self supporting. By the grace of their beautiful Savior, this little mission church has grown to stand on its own and is even considering branching off into the Mount Pleasant Area by 2008.



Beautiful Savior in the Fall of 2005. Photograph by Author.

Addenda

Beautiful Savior Questionnaire and interview form.

You are being asked to participate in research for a church history project for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability and as completely as possible. Thank you for your time and effort.

Church History Project Intent:

This paper will look at the history of this once mission congregation from its founding to the present. More predominantly, it will be a case study of the different mission methodologies that the pastors of Beautiful Savior used and how they developed the congregation into what we see today.

Year of graduation from WLS _____

Please list the places and dates of pastoral service previous to your work at Beautiful Savior:

Describe your call to Beautiful Savior. Were there specifics as to the work you were to be doing beyond that of being a pastor? What were they?

Please list the professors who did the most to shape your view of mission work.

Before you were called to Beautiful Savior, how were you prepared by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and by personal experience in the areas of outreach or evangelism? (Please distinguish between what you learned through WLS and what you learned elsewhere from personal experience or elsewhere).

How did you go about studying the community during your years of service at Beautiful Savior?

How did your study of the community influence the method or methods you chose for reaching out to the people of Summerville?

Describe the method(s) of mission work that you made use of. If your methods for outreach changed during the years you served, explain what led to these changes and how the new changes affected the numerical and spiritual growth of the congregation.

Which methods for mission work were the most effective during your years of service? Explain why.

Characterize the congregation at the beginning and end of the years you served. What was the make-up as far as religious background, age, military or non, etc.

Please list any other information that you think would be beneficial to this research:

May I quote you in this paper? (Yes/No)_____

Research Notes

Specific dates and descriptions of what happened on them were taken from three main sources:

Groeschel, Ed. A Brief History of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church: An electronic document containing specific dates and descriptions for major events at Beautiful Savior – no date.

Received: September 19, 2006.

Laich, Thomas. An e-mail concerning his years at Beautiful Savior – November 26, 2006.

Received: November 29, 2006.

Tess, Dale. An e-mail concerning the history of Beautiful Savior – October 26, 2006. Received: October 26, 2006.

Many of the dates and much of the information given by these three sources overlapped or agreed with one another. Repeated mentions of these names in footnotes shows that the nuance of certain information in the body of the paper was reflected most clearly by that particular person, not necessarily that the other sources did not have that information or agree with it.