

Multi-Language Publications
Ten Years of Bringing the Written Word to the World

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Preface

As a young man growing up, I knew my grandpa, Pastor Harold Essmann, loved mission work and spreading the gospel. I always heard stories of the mission work he was involved with in far off places like Colombia, Africa, Puerto Rico, Russia, and Bulgaria. After mission visits Pastor Essmann brought back some kind of memorabilia for his three children and seven grandchildren. And there were always slides. Pastor Essmann documented his trips in pictures for us. He gave commentary and insight about the trip, with an occasional crack about “that strange lady (my grandma)” who kept popping up in his pictures. “She seemed to be everywhere,” grandpa said. He gave us all a lesson on the culture and history of the country, as well as any other insights he garnered through the visit. But always the reason for his trip was to spread the gospel, something he drove home to my entire family.

Pastor Essmann’s love for the gospel and mission work has shown through his work in WELS missions during 50 years he has served God’s church. He served as a missionary in Northern Rhodesia in the late 1950s and in Bulgaria and Russia in the early 1990s. He served as a member of the Committee of Mission Expansion, Board for World Missions, and the Chairman of the Executive Committee for Latin America.¹ He has left his fingerprints on many areas in WELS. One area of the WELS that has Pastor Essmann’s fingerprints on it is the Multi-Language Publications (MLP), a committee that he initiated in 1996. Through the publications of this group - *The Promise*, *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach*, *Bible Stories in Pictures*, the *Bible Teachings Series*, and many more - millions of people have heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

¹ For a very excellent account of Pastor Harold Essmann’s life and work as a pastor please read Pastor Michael Hartman’s paper in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, EF 2983.

This paper will document the first ten years of MLP's eleven and a half year history. It is my hope that by documenting the history of this group, using information I gathered from interviews with the committee members, predominantly Pastor Essmann, as well as their meeting minutes and quarterly newsletter, more people will know about "the best kept secret of the WELS."² The Lord has unexpectedly blessed Multi-Language Publications' work of "Bringing the Written Word to the World."³

Multi-Language Publications: Bringing the Written Word to the World

For many years, WELS missionaries were constantly in need of quality confessional Lutheran materials in the language they worked. They needed books, tracts, booklets, and videos for outreach, worker training, and cradle-to-grave education of lay people. To meet this need, many missionaries either produced their own materials or took whatever was available to WELS congregations in English and translated them into the national language of their mission. What WELS missions lacked was coordination between the mission fields to share materials developed for cross-cultural work.

I [Pastor Essmann] was in Bulgaria and involved in the literature program there and also in Russia. In providing materials for these two mission fields, I questioned why some materials had to be developed when they were already developed in other mission fields. Why not use these other printed materials as a basis, without reinventing the wheel, and merely translate them. Surely there were good materials developed in other mission fields that were worthy of use elsewhere.⁴

It was this need Pastor Essmann identified that led him to propose the development of a committee to coordinate the gathering and production of confessional Lutheran literature for use

² E-mail from Dr. John Kolander.

³ This is the phrase MLP uses on the cover of their catalog to describe what their main goal/purpose is. A Baptist group from Virginia loved the phrase so much they asked MLP for permission to use it, making a slight modification to it for its own use. This phrase isn't yet trademarked for by MLP.

⁴ E-mail from Pastor Essmann, September 24, 2007.

in WELS world mission fields. In 1995, while attending a missionary conference of men and their wives at a resort on the Black Sea near Burgas, Bulgaria, Pastor Essmann “suggested to Pastor Duane Tomhave, then Administrator for the Board for World Missions, as well as other missionaries present, that we collect the printed materials developed in all of our WELS mission fields and gather them together in one place.”⁵ Then all these materials could be made available to other mission fields.

Pastor Tomhave loved the idea and asked Pastor Essmann to outline such a program and present it to the Board for World Missions at their meeting in early 1996. Pastor Essmann outlined the program for the Board for World Missions. They liked the idea, approved it, and asked Pastor Essmann to coordinate the program. Pastor Essmann asked that a committee be appointed to help him do the work and the Board for World Missions agreed. They appointed: Mr. Mark Brunner, a self-employed business man from Kewaskum, WI, as chairman; Professor John Hartwig, professor and librarian at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, as secretary; and Pastor Paul Hartman, the first full-time director of Mass Communications for Latin America, as a member of the committee. The committee met for the first time in September of 1996 at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary under the name Multi-Language Literature Committee (MLLC).⁶

In keeping with their primary purpose, the committee started “to gather and organize all available resources that may be of interest to confessional Lutherans for multi-cultural outreach.”⁷ They did this by collecting and sorting materials already in use in WELS missions and called it the World Mission Collection. The World Mission Collection began with about 300

⁵ E-mail from Pastor Essmann, September 24, 2007.

⁶ Throughout the next ten years this name changed from MLLC, to the Multi-Language Publications Program (MLPP) at the March 30, 1998 committee meeting, to its present name, Multi-Language Publications (MLP). This name change occurred at their June 22, 2001 meeting. MLP will be the sole designation of the committee throughout the rest of the paper.

⁷ See Appendix A for the mission statement and objectives of MLP

pieces of literature that were previously stored at the Synod Administration Building, items that had been submitted by WELS mission fields. Professor Hartwig offered the Seminary library as the home for this collection, and it can be found in the lower level of the library to this day.

In March of 1997, Pastor Ken Fischer was called to work on entering these items into the Seminary's online database. He served in this capacity for ten months before accepting a call to serve at Risen Savior Lutheran in Milwaukee, where he serves today. Pastor Fischer worked very hard to catalog these items on the Seminary database so that missionaries around the world could access the collection via the Internet.⁸ Fischer reported 300 pieces of literature in the WMC at the committee's March 21, 1997 meeting. Then, over the next ten months, Pastor Fischer developed a logo, letterhead, purpose statement, brochure, and display for the WMC. Within this ten month period, Pastor Fischer also contacted WELS missionaries for more publications and was able to gather and enter over 1,200 pieces of literature into the database, making these items available for missionaries around the world to use, both those inside and outside our fellowship.

Shortly after Pastor Fischer took his call to Risen Savior Lutheran Church in 1998, Mrs. Helen Hartwig worked part time for the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library in his place as World Mission Collection manager. She filled orders from missionaries and added items given to her by MLP as they added more and more pieces to it. After about a year Mrs. Hartwig accepted a call to teach at Calvary Lutheran in Thiensville, WI. The library staff took over in 1999 and filled orders. Today the WMC has over 2,200 items listed in 65 languages. The WMC continued to be used by WELS and LC-MS missionaries alike, since the WMC was very unique among confessional Lutherans due to its size and large number of different languages.

⁸ The World Mission Collection operates on the website www.wmcwels.com.

While Pastor Fischer developed this extensive collection of confessional Lutheran material for use in mission fields back in 1997, the committee started work on its second, equally important goal “to provide basic materials for outreach and nurture in as many languages as possible.”⁹

An important purpose of MLP is to provide tools for the missionaries in foreign fields and cross-cultural ministries in the U.S. to use. We want to produce quality materials, not only in content but also in appearance. Therefore, we translate quality materials or have competent writers to provide new materials. Also, we wish to use color and quality paper to make these tools appealing to those using them.¹⁰

The first pieces of Lutheran literature MLP printed were two booklets by Pastor Essmann, *The Promise* and *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach*. These two booklets became the most widely distributed publications of MLP. Pastor Essmann wrote these two booklets while he served in Bulgaria in the early 1990s because he wanted a simple way of explaining what Christianity was all about, as well as a simple explanation of how the Lutheran Church and the Bible are in agreement with one another. *The Promise* fulfilled that first wish. *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach* fulfilled the second.

The Promise was a 16 page booklet with eye-catching pictures that outlined for the reader the truth about sin and death in this world caused by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but also the glorious promise that is ours, eternal salvation and the forgiveness of sins, through our Lord Jesus Christ. This little booklet published by MLP was first printed in six languages: English, Spanish, Telagu, Bulgarian, Albanian, and Chinese. About 64,000 copies were printed to fill the initial demand for this publication.

⁹ See Appendix A for the mission statement and goals of the MLP.

¹⁰ E-mail from Pastor Harold Essmann, November 27, 2007.

Demand for *The Promise* grew quickly during the first ten years of publication and in Pastor Essmann's own words, "This product had the most unexpected results".¹¹ *The Promise* is now in its 9th printing in English and nearly 500,000 copies have been printed and distributed around the world in 37 languages.¹² It has moved from places familiar to WELS missions, like Central America and Europe, into countries completely off limits to WELS mission work just five years ago, such as Pakistan and Nepal.

Pastor Essmann documented some stories that show the wide range of readership and effect *The Promise* has had on people through the blessing of the Almighty Lord Jesus. Pastor Essmann had the opportunity to address a cooking class taught by Mrs. Habben, wife of retired missionary Kermit Habben, who served many decades in Japan. Pastor Essmann used *The Promise* as the basis for his presentation to this group and with it gave the group a law and gospel message. One lady came up to Pastor Essmann after the presentation and told him that she had read *The Promise* and through it she was led to take classes with Pastor Habben and she became a member of the WELS church in Japan.

Another story Pastor Essmann told showed the far reach of *The Promise* in Nepal and Pakistan. (More will be said about WELS work in these two countries later in the paper.) In Nepal, the WELS contact said a Maoist (communist) near his city got hold of a copy of *The Promise*. He read it, studied it, and was baptized soon after. In Pakistan, where *The Promise* was printed and distributed in the Urdu language, spoken in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the WELS contact said that *The Promise* has been distributed through the Christian Hospital Association and some copies ended up in Afghanistan and have been read by members of Al-Qaeda. It is truly amazing to think of how much influence this publication has had. With a

¹¹ Telephone interview with Pastor Essmann on December 1, 2007.

¹² See map entitled *The Promise* for all the languages *The Promise* has been distributed in as of February 2007.

distribution of nearly 500,000, only the Lord knows how many people have read this simple, clear presentation of his law and gospel and been brought to faith through the written word.

The second largest distribution MLP has for a product is Pastor Essmann's other booklet, *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach*. This 32 page book briefly and simply outlines twenty-nine different teachings of the Lutheran church such as Creation, Man and Woman, Justification, Salvation by Grace, Holy Communion, Abortion and Suicide, and Heaven. This little booklet presents each basic teaching in a paragraph and then follows with Scriptural support of five or six different Bible passages. This book gives missionaries a simple tool to present the Lutheran faith with Bible passages printed on every page to support the teaching. MLP published this booklet in 20 languages and printed over 230,000 copies for use around the world.¹³

Those two books demonstrate the main reason MLP publishes materials for WELS missionaries and cross-cultural ministries. Their primary goal from the start was to provide aids for missionaries for evangelism outreach. "The central thought for production of materials for MLP was to provide tools for missionaries to reach out with the gospel."¹⁴ These books, among many others, are then donated to WELS missions.

In order to make these booklets and others useful for all missionaries, the committee obviously had work to do in order to translate their materials. Native speakers of a language were essential for translation, as well as a cooperative missionary to oversee theological editing. In order to facilitate this, the committee developed the concept of a translation seminar. This seminar taught the translation team basically what was essential for a good translation. Dr. Ernst R. Wendland led the first translation seminar in Milwaukee during the summer of 1997. Subsequent seminars were held in El Paso (1997), India (2000, led by Dr. Wendland), and

¹³ See map entitled *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach* for all the languages it has been distributed in as of June 2005.

¹⁴ E-mail from Pastor Essmann, September 24, 2007.

Appleton, WI (2007). Dr. Wendland stressed the importance of solid review of proper grammar and punctuation. The piece of literature needed to be understandable to a native speaker. Most importantly, theological clarity was essential. There was a great deal of time, care and effort that went into translating a piece of theological literature. The committee recognized that. Clear, quality translations were essential for the transmission of the gospel. Many committee members were happy and proud of the good translators and translations the Lord blessed them with.

Along the way there were bumps in the translation process. Chairman Mark Brunner commented that the committee used non-native translators at times and they did not yield good translations.¹⁵ The committee has had any number of booklets or tracts retranslated for this reason. On the other hand, Mark added that one of the big accomplishments of MLP was its 35 fee-based native translators around the world. Additional teams work in Urdu, Nepali and Hindi, to name a few. Dr. John Lawrenz, president of Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong, just recently told Pastor Essmann of his desire to learn more about the translation process so he can have more materials available in Chinese. The Lord continued to bless MLP with visible growth as it brought the written word to the world.

The members of MLP were very excited about the possibilities for this committee from the start. They were convinced this was a committee that was long overdue in the WELS. But even still, Pastor Essmann noted in his interview that missionaries were not always so eager to join in the process. While there were not any big challenges at the start of MLP, it took missionaries several years to get on board and realize this was a group that would greatly aid them in their outreach work. In addition, the committee's work was something very new to WELS and information about the group needed to get out, to let people know about the great

¹⁵ E-mail from Mark Brunner, November 29, 2007.

work that God was doing through MLP. The committee employed two main outlets for this: a bi-yearly catalog and a quarterly newsletter.

The catalog, produced first for the 1998-99 biennium, listed all available resources, some published by MLP and others that were in the WMC. The catalog included such booklets as *The Promise, What the Bible and Lutherans Teach*, various volumes of the *People's Bible* in multiple languages, tracts for evangelism and instruction, and many other materials. The first catalog contained 262 items in 25 languages, a great start for a committee just over a year old. MLP printed 5,000 catalogs and sent them out to WELS missionaries, pastors and teachers, cross-cultural ministries in the US – both inside and outside our fellowship, WELS schools, and also LC-MS missionaries, cross-cultural workers, and campus pastors. Through the years the catalog grew. It added more and more items, the majority of which have been produced by WELS pastors, teachers and missionaries and then translated by translation teams around the world as needed. In December 2007, MLP sent out its latest catalog. It contained more than 500 items in over 40 languages. All orders for catalog items go through MLP headquarters in El Paso, TX.¹⁶

MLP developed its quarterly newsletter¹⁷ in October 1996. In December 2007, MLP published its 46th newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter was to pass on information about the work of MLP and new items available from the distribution center in El Paso. News concerning the use of printed materials in various mission areas was also included. The newsletter also contained articles to instruct people how to create quality translations. Through the catalog and newsletter, word has gotten out about MLP.

By means of the catalog, MLP gained influence even outside WELS—LC-MS, ELCA, ELS, and other Christian mission agencies around the world all have purchased from MLP at one

¹⁶ Catalogs are free from the MLP headquarters in El Paso, TX.

¹⁷ Issues of MLP newsletter starting with December 2002 can be read at their website <http://www.mlpwels.com/cgi-bin/home.cgi?newsletter>

time or another. Baptist mission agencies approached MLP and purchased copies of *The Promise*. A German mission group purchased thousands of copies of *The Promise* in Farsi, Arabic and several other Middle Eastern languages. LC-MS has started to translate *The Promise* and the *Bible Teaching Series* (more will be said about this publication later) into Russian and Kazak for use in its Kazakhstan mission field. Even the “Lutheran Hour” in Kazakhstan purchased MLP items for use in their own Bible Correspondence Courses. Despite all this visible growth in its first ten years, many committee members stated that MLP remains the best kept secret in the WELS.

The Promise, What the Bible and Lutherans Teach, a bi-yearly catalog, a quarterly newsletter, and the WMC, were all accomplished in the first couple years of this group’s existence. “I’ve been impressed with the volume [of work]” Dr. John Kolander, present secretary of MLP, wrote.¹⁸ And there was still more to come, namely impetus towards English as Second Language curriculum, *Bible Stories in Pictures*, *People’s Bible* in Spanish, a Bible Correspondence Course, and mission work through written material in Nepal and Pakistan.

Over the last several decades the United States has seen an influx in the number of non-English speaking immigrants, predominantly Spanish speaking. That does not mean many of the immigrants are not willing to learn English. In order to make a decent life for themselves, many immigrants realize that they and their children needed to learn English as a second language.

Several WELS congregations picked up on this need in the mid-90s. Congregations in Seattle, Tucson, Houston and Madison developed English as a Second Language (ESL) programs as an outreach tool to bring the gospel to these new immigrants. Even missionaries in Albania, Bulgaria and Indonesia reported that ESL classes were an integral part of their

¹⁸ E-mail from Dr. John Kolander, November 30, 2007.

outreach.¹⁹ As a result, at the June 19, 1997 MLP meeting, Pastor Essmann and Dr. Lawrenz presented the idea that MLP push for the development of ESL materials and ESL classes. Dr. Lawrenz brought a great deal of experience to ESL from his days as President of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, where he dealt with foreign students in need of ESL classes. In addition, professors at Martin Luther College (MLC) saw the need to equip future teachers with ESL teaching experience and the college sent Professor Tom Hunter to summer classes where he obtained a degree in ESL. Dr. Lawrenz wanted networking between MLC professors, WELS administrators, missionaries, an ESL committee, and the MLP so that an organized program could be developed with confessional Lutheran materials and necessary training for teaching ESL courses. MLP gladly accepted this idea and took it, for the time being, under their umbrella of oversight.²⁰

The program developed quickly with a large amount of funding from MLP. They generated interest in an ESL class offered at Martin Luther College during the summer of 1998 by offering five scholarships to cover student costs. The committee ended up awarding eight scholarships due to the interest in the course. Sixteen people attended the class. The committee also asked Mrs. Catherine Lake, living in Maryland, to develop an ESL curriculum for world missions as part of her master's thesis. Her work was reviewed by Prof. Hunter at the beginning of 1998, but was never utilized.²¹

As ESL interest picked up, MLP realized they did not have the time to oversee this project, nor was it really within their jurisdiction. Pastor Hartman encouraged Prof. Hunter to continue working on the development of the ESL program. MLP provided funding to help. MLP resolved to establish an ESL-EFL Steering Committee (English as a Foreign Language) to

¹⁹ MLP meeting minutes from June 19, 1997.

²⁰ MLP meeting minutes from June 19, 1997.

²¹ E-mail from Pastor Essmann, September 24, 2007.

further develop the program. It consisted of Pastor Richard Lauersdorf, Chairman; Pastor Walter Westphal, Board for World Missions (and MLP representative on the committee); Dr. Glen Thompson, Board for Home Missions; Prof. Tom Hunter, Board for Ministerial Education. The ESL-EFL Steering Committee met for the first time in January 1998. MLP provided \$100,000 to the committee for use in training ESL teachers during summer classes at Martin Luther College, developing an ESL curriculum, and for other needs as the committee deemed necessary. At the September 1999 MLP meeting, Pastor Westphal reported that the ESL-EFL Steering Committee would appoint a full-time coordinator. As the years went on ESL picked up steam and became a very common outreach tool used by many WELS pastors and teachers around the country and by many WELS missionaries throughout the world. It can be said that MLP, with the influence of Pastor Essmann and Dr. Lawrenz, initiated the push towards ESL outreach in WELS.

While ESL was one tool missionaries used in their outreach, Pastor Essmann had another idea he wanted the committee to pursue as an outreach tool. Pastor Essmann was interested in publishing *Bible Stories in Pictures*, written by Dr. William Beck, a former pastor of the LC-MS. On September 3, 1998, Pastor Essmann presented his idea to MLP with the intention that the committee ask the Beck family for the rights to publish these Bible stories. The book would then be used in WELS mission fields because, “in many societies cartoon form is readily used”²² for instruction.

Before it was published in book form by MLP, *Bible Stories in Pictures* was a series of 400 Bible stories in comic book form produced by Dr. William Beck, who also penned a translation of the Bible. Concordia Publishing House produced leaflets of all these stories about 40 years ago. They were distributed to thousands of Sunday Schools throughout the country and

²² Telephone interview with Pastor Essmann, December 1, 2007.

also appeared in *Christian News*, usually as one page, color stories.²³ Beck was eager to have a publisher pick up these leaflets and publish them in a one or two volume set, so he asked Hermann Otten,²⁴ editor of *Christian News*, to find a publisher. Otten came back with sad news for Beck. While publishers loved the artwork, they did not want to print a theological work that depicted Adam and Eve as real people and angels and the devil as really existing.²⁵

WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship wanted to publish some of these stories into booklet form (they produced seven of them). MLP collaborated with Youth Discipleship and gained permission from the Beck family to publish Dr. Beck's stories. Pastor Essmann sat down with Beck's 400 Bible stories and narrowed the selection down to 92. He provided transitions between the stories so the book had a better flow. Tyra Baumler and Michele Pfeifer²⁶ added additional illustrations and a table of contents for the book. MLP conducted a survey of WELS mission fields to see what the appeal would be for such a Bible story book and the response was overwhelmingly in favor of production. Pastor Essmann secured a grant of \$60,000 for production, and in 1999 the first printing came off the press at Winnebago Color Press of Menasha, WI.²⁷ "Pastor Essmann reported that presently there are requests for some 17,600 sets of booklets in English, Albanian, and Chewa and some 11,100 books in English, Telegu, Hindi,

²³ I remember as a little boy Pastor Essmann saved copies of *Christian News* for his grandkids so we could read Dr. Beck's Bible stories in comic book form.

²⁴ Hermann Otten and *Christian News* bought 1000 copies after *Bible Stories in Pictures* was printed so he could sell them.

²⁵ Brunner, Mark. <http://www.biblestoriesinpictures.com/cgi-bin/home.cgi>.

²⁶ Michele has served MLC since 1998 as one of its main layout editors, helping prepare many MLP books for print. She takes translated texts from translation teams and inserts them into the prototype for whatever book is being printed. In addition, she produces the catalog for MLP. This next year, 2008, she will be layout editor for *El Mensajero Luterano*.

²⁷ Pastor Essmann uses two printing facilities in Appleton and Menasha, Custom Printing and Winnebago Color Press, for printing MLP material. Winnebago does all the 4-color work such as *The Promise* and *Bible Stories in Pictures*. Custom Printing does much of the black and white and one-color publications such as devotional books, *What the Bible and Lutherans Teach*, and the Bible Teachings Series used in the Bible Correspondence course. Both of Pastor Essmann's contacts are WELS members of his church, Riverview Evangelical Lutheran in Appleton. Mr. Jim Vandenberg owns Custom Printing and Mr. Rob Glasel is Pastor Essmann's contact at Winnebago. Trinity Publications in California, owned by WELS members, has printed many materials. In addition, firms in many foreign countries such as Colombia, Pakistan, Nepal, India, and Bulgaria have printed MLP books.

Japanese and Spanish.”²⁸ Over 10,000 books produced in Chewa are now used in almost every WELS congregation in Malawi. The book had great success and is now in its 4th printing. The book has been translated into eleven languages with over 60,000 copies in print.²⁹

The Lord indeed blessed MLP from 1996-2000. In addition to all of the books mentioned above, MLP also supplied other missions with valuable materials for use in cradle-to-grave curriculum. Professor David Kuske’s *Blue Catechism* was translated into Korean and Swedish. *The People’s Bible* continued to be translated into Spanish, a project begun in 1987 by the Latin American Missionary Conference and finished by MLP when it merged with Publications for Latin America. Translation and publication of *The People’s Bible* in Spanish concluded in 2003. That made it the first complete Bible commentary in Spanish produced by any Lutheran church. Dr. Siegbert Becker’s commentary on the book of Revelation and *We Believe – Therefore We Speak* by Prof. Valleskey were both translated into Finnish.

As MLP looked back on the first five years of its existence there were many accomplishments and blessings. At the same time there were also lessons learned. As MLP entered into the new millennium, the Lord had more blessings and work for this group to do. It expanded into Spanish publications, sorted through budget cuts during the Synod financial challenges, which ultimately led to restructuring of the committee and its workers and came into contact with Christian groups in Nepal and Pakistan. Still, the Lord guided and blessed the work of these faithful men bringing the written word to the world.

²⁸ MLP meeting minutes June 6, 1999.

²⁹ See map entitled “Telling His Story Through Bible Stories to see all the languages *Bible Stories in Pictures* has been distributed in as of February 2007.

A New Millennium: Bringing the Written Word to the World

In order to set the stage for MLP's expansion into Spanish publications, a brief history of Spanish publications in the WELS is necessary. In 1987, while Pastor Essmann was Chairman of the Executive Committee for Latin America, the committee began Mass Communications for Latin America. The program provided materials in Spanish that were primarily translations from English materials. It also continued to publish *El Mensajero Luterano* (*The Lutheran Messenger*),³⁰ started by Pastor Ralph Martens and Pastor David Haeser, which was a magazine similar to the *Forward in Christ*, the official publication of the WELS. Pastor Mark Goeglein became the first director of Mass Communications for Latin America. He served as part-time director while pastor of San Juan Lutheran Church in El Paso, TX until 1989. El Paso became headquarters to this Mass Communications program. In 1991, Pastor Paul Hartman became the first full-time director of Mass Communications for Latin America, and during that same year WELS Spanish resources were listed in the *Lutheran Spanish Resources Catalog*, a joint magazine that contained ELCA, LC-MS, ELS and WELS materials. According to Pastor Essmann, WELS has nothing to be ashamed of when it stacks its Spanish resources next to those of these two very large church bodies.³¹

Spanish resources for Latin American missions were directed from El Paso under Pastor Hartman. As the Hispanic population of the United States grew larger, the materials produced for Latin America were needed just as much in the United States as overseas. Pastor Hartman's workload increased, which necessitated the need for more help. Patti Fernandez, a graduate of Martin Luther College, "became the first non-US citizen called in the WELS to serve as full-time

³⁰ This periodical had a very narrow readership at first, but after several years of interruption in the early 90s, the magazine started up again in 1993 and has grown significantly over past thirteen years so that today over 1,800 copies are printed and distributed.

³¹ E-mail from Pastor Essmann, September 24, 2007.

editor in a foreign language in 1997.”³² Letty Connell (Spanish editor) and Flabia Griffin (part-time administrative assistant) also joined the team by the year 2000.

In 1998, a building was constructed on the property of Victory in Christ Lutheran Church³³ in El Paso for these servants of the Savior, who worked for Mass Communications for Latin America. The name of Mass Communications for Latin America was also changed to Publications for Latin America (PubLA) at this same time. With the completion of this building, PubLA allowed MLP to handle distribution of its materials to worldwide WELS missions from there.

Committee members of both groups soon realized though that the efforts of PubLA and MLP competed against one another. Publications of MLP for distribution rose in number every year and the added work to fill MLP orders for Pastor Hartman and his team meant that publications for Latin American missions started to suffer. Something needed to be done. Both MLP and PubLA served excellent purposes and held basically the same goals. Why not amalgamate? The committee proposed this very thing in a letter and presentation to the Board for World Missions, which was approved by the board in 2001.³⁴

At the same time, because of the necessity of employing a full-time coordinator, Pastor Essmann stepped down as coordinator of MLP. Pastor Hartman took on the responsibilities of coordinator and Pastor Essmann assumed Pastor Hartman’s role as a voting member of the committee. As a result of this amalgamation, the MLP now had a vast array of Spanish materials to offer the cross-cultural ministries of the WELS in the United States and even some groups outside WELS.

³² “Unique Facts.” at <http://www.mlpwels.com/cgi-bin/home.cgi?uniquefacts>>.

³³ That church is present day Christ Our Redeemer Lutheran

³⁴ Found among MLP meeting minutes of 2001.

With the increased demand for Spanish materials came also the need for more staff. Pastor Ron Baerbock was called in 2000 to serve as editor for *The People's Bible* in Spanish, freeing Pastor Hartman to do other editing and coordinator work. Along with Letty Connell, Pastor Baerbock continued work on *El Mensajero Luterano* and broadened readership. Today distribution is at about 1800 every two months.³⁵ In 2008, the magazine will be published eight issues yearly, two more than its present six.

With the amalgamation, MLP received even more opportunities and requests for publications. There were always more projects the committee wanted to do than they could afford. This did not mean that the MLP struggled to receive funds. The Schwan Foundation donated close to \$250,000 to start-up the committee. The Antioch Foundation gave tens of thousands of dollars from 2005-2007 to underwrite the Bible Correspondence Program in Pakistan, the Scripture Learning Program in Nepal, and the Spanish Bible Correspondence Program in Latin America. MLP also received funds and grants from Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS), men's and ladies' groups, congregations and individual donations as well as from the Publications Coordinating Commission of the WELS. But a large source of funding for MLP came from Congregational Mission Offerings of the synod.

MLP was, and still is, under direct supervision of the Board for World Missions. Pastor Essmann stressed to the MLP committee members the need to be accountable to the synod. MLP was not a para-synodical organization as developed many times in the LC-MS, such as the group Lutheran Heritage Foundation, a mission agency that did a lot of work and published a periodical called *Good News* but was self-supporting and had no accountability. Pastor Essmann did not want that to ever be the case with MLP.

³⁵ See map entitled "Distribution of The Spanish Lutheran Messenger" for a map of it's distribution.

Yet, being under the synod budget also had its setbacks for the group, especially during the large cutbacks the WELS experienced starting in 2001 and moving into 2002. MLP held a special meeting on January 28, 2002 and discussed what they needed to do to meet the Synodical Council's recommendation to cut 25% of their budget because of Congregational Mission Offering shortfalls. Some of the ideas the MLP proposed were to cut a full-time worker; use fee-based work; and slow down production of publications. The group received a bit of good news at their November 21, 2002 meeting. They only needed to cut 9% and did that by putting a hold on several projects.

During this period, the staff that worked in El Paso also experienced some changes. Mrs. Jan Gamble was hired as part-time administrative assistant to replace Flabia Griffin.³⁶ In 2003, the committee itself experienced change in personnel. Prof. John Hartwig, who served as secretary from the founding of MLP in 1996 resigned his position effective June 2003 because he needed to spend extra time finishing graduate work. In his place, the Board for World Missions appointed Dr. John Kolander,³⁷ at that time vice principal of Fox Valley Lutheran High School, now provost of Wisconsin Lutheran College.

Soon it became apparent that to keep Pastor Ron Baerbock's position for the 2003-05 biennium, additional funding would have to be found because the Board for World Missions asked that MLP drop their budget from \$377,000 to \$160,000. Suffice it to say, the committee "was not warm to the concept of cutting staff and backing [off] on program[s]."³⁸ Some of the ideas floated about included cutting salaried positions, cutting administrative assistant Jan Gamble, halting production of *People's Bible Teachings* in Spanish, and halting development of

³⁶ E-mail from Mrs. Gamble, November 29, 2007.

³⁷ Dr. Kolander garnered a great deal of interest and passion for world missions from the numerous stories he heard from his wife Anna's grandfather, Edgar Hoenecke. More information about Dr. Kolander, his family life and background can be found in the June 2003 edition of the MLP newsletter at www.mlpwels.com/newsletters

³⁸ MLP teleconference meeting minutes, October 24, 2003.

future projects. That was not the kind of news the MLP wanted to hear, especially with the prospect of bigger mission opportunities in Nepal and Pakistan (more said below). MLP made it a priority to secure funds from outside sources: individuals; LWMS; and from the Publications Coordinating Commission.

The Lord answered many prayers, as reported at the January 9, 2004 meeting. Kingdom Workers elected to fund Pastor Baerbock's position until June 2005 and the Antioch Foundation devoted funds to publish a few books in the *Bible Teaching Series* for Nepal, Pakistan and China (development of Chinese books only, no printing at that time).

The staff received more change in October 2005 when Pastor Baerbock accepted a call. Due to budget considerations, Mrs. Letty Connell was not retained, but instead a full-time Spanish coordinator was hired, Mr. Gonzallo Delgadillo,³⁹ on November 11, 2005. Mr. Delgadillo was an electrical engineer from Colombia who became a Christian through the ELCA church there. Eventually, when he became aware of the doctrinal indifference and errors in ELCA, the Lord led him into contact with Pastor Carl Leyrer of the WELS mission in Colombia and eventually Mr. Delgadillo became a member of the Confessional Lutheran Church in Colombia. Since 2005, Mr. Delgadillo has overseen all the Spanish work of MLP, which is approximately 40% of its volume. About 220 of the 500 orders that come into MLP headquarters in El Paso each year are Spanish related. From that time forward the present full-time staff, Pastor Paul Hartman, Mr. Gonzallo Delgadillo, and Mrs. Jan Gamble worked faithfully from El Paso, TX to fill orders and coordinate publishing that went on in the United States and around the world for MLP.

³⁹ For a very thorough interview with Mr. Delgadillo, please read the March 2006 edition of the MLP newsletter at www.mlpwels.com/newsletters

While the possibility of cutbacks transpired and restructuring of personnel happened as a cost savings measure, sales began to pickup significantly for MLP according to Pastor Hartman's report at the November 30, 2001 MLP meeting.⁴⁰ And the Lord opened a new door to gospel outreach in Nepal and Pakistan, which presented MLP with a unique opportunity it could not let fall at that time.

In 2000, the Committee for Mission Expansion (CME) received a letter from Pastor Mark Bartels of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, which came from a contact in Nepal, who requested Christian literature. The CME gave the letter to Pastor Essmann to reply. Pastor Essmann sent the contact *Meditations* and Sunday school books, but very few people that this contact worked with spoke English. Thus, the contact asked if he could translate the materials into Nepali. Recruiting the help of an international student in Mankato, MN, MLP gave the go-ahead for the translations. With the help of this international student MLP had a way of checking the translation to see if it was accurate and doctrinally sound. MLP continued to provide literature for this small group and in 2002, the group had grown to nine worship groups and about 200 baptized members.⁴¹

About the same time an e-mail came to Pastor Essmann from a contact in Pakistan. This man asked for Christian literature as well. He had requested materials from other church bodies, but no one answered. WELS did. MLP sent this little family in Pakistan similar items to what was distributed in Nepal, but this time they needed to be translated into Urdu, the national language of Pakistan and of many citizens of Afghanistan. Pastor Essmann served as the liaison to both fields, communicating via the Internet. Growth happened gradually as more and more worship groups were gathered in Nepal.

⁴⁰ MLP meeting minutes from November 30, 2001.

⁴¹ Telephone interview with Pastor Essmann, December 1, 2007.

Then, an interesting development occurred in 2005. Both contacts in Nepal and Pakistan notified Pastor Essmann of their desire to have some kind of Bible correspondence program for their people so they could learn stories about the Savior and have quizzes on what they learned. The requests came one month apart from each other, independent of one another. The man in Nepal also wanted to train leaders to lead worship groups. In April of that same year, Pastor Essmann and Pastor David Priebe flew to Nepal and Pakistan and met the contacts face-to-face and investigated the situation among the people. What they found was amazing—many Christian men, women and children gathered in each country. Pastors Essmann and Priebe returned enthused by what they saw. They made a presentation to the CME about the possibilities they found in those countries. The CME agreed to a seed-sowing ministry in both countries and worker training in Nepal. Board for World Missions gave approval and MLP went into action and provided materials. A Scripture Learning Program started in Nepal and a Bible Correspondence Course started in Pakistan in 2006.⁴²

MLP filled the wishes of these two contacts with the *Bible Teaching Series*⁴³ books, a 17 volume set of books already in use by the Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries (WLIM) in its Prison Ministries program. These books, which are sent to prison inmates around the United States, focused on a central Bible truth and each book had quizzes at the end. The quizzes could be returned to WLIM and a new booklet sent in its place. MLP approached WLIM about using these books, published by Northwestern Publishing House, and WLIM gave permission for MLP to use them.

Pastor Essmann removed references to prison from the books and changed some of the “American” illustrations. Eventually five volumes were translated into Nepali, four into Urdu

⁴² Telephone interview with Pastor Essmann, December 1, 2007.

⁴³ See map entitled *Bible Teaching Series* to see all the languages it's been distributed as of July 2005.

and thousands were enrolled in the program through the contacts in Nepal and Pakistan. In Nepal, 25,000 pieces of Christian literature have been passed out and nearly 4,000 people are enrolled in the Scripture Learning Program, which has three full-time workers and six part-time workers to correct quizzes and send new books. Over 9,100 are enrolled in the Bible Correspondence Course in Pakistan, which has three full-time workers and two volunteers and they have the goal to enroll 10,000 more students in the near future. There are worship groups throughout Far West and Midwestern Nepal. Many of the people associated with the Bible Correspondence Course in Pakistan live in and around Sahiwal, in the Punjab, Lahore and Karachi.⁴⁴

Since 2005, these groups, under the supervision of these two contacts as well as the MLP, along with the blessing of the Lord through the written word, ^{have} has grown from a few hundred into thousands of men, women, and children eager to learn more about their Savior. And this all happened in predominantly Moslem and Hindu countries, where Christians are scorned and looked down on. MLP has provided all the materials for these two missions. WELS men have been on the ground in both Nepal and Pakistan for less than two months over the first five years of contact, but the written word did its work as our Lord promised.

During the research for this paper, a team of four men, Pastor Hartman, Mr. Ned Goede, principal of Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Pastor Essmann, and Pastor Dan Koelpin, Administrator for the Board for World Missions, visited Nepal and Pakistan and conducted the third worker training workshop. During the first workshop the contact in Nepal was confirmed and since that time has instructed many men as Lutherans and they have taken as a name the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nepal.

⁴⁴ E-mail from Pastor Essmann, October 2, 2007.

The Lord Jesus took that written word and blessed it far beyond what any member of MLP could have imagined. As of 2006, MLP had printed and distributed over 1,000,000 pieces of Christian literature in dozens of languages. MLP materials have been used by WELS pastors and teachers in this country and around the world. They have even been used by the LC-MS, Baptists, and other Christian mission agencies. The WMC they established has served WELS missionaries and their seminaries around the world, as well as LC-MS missionaries. In all these things, the Lord has blessed and blessed again the written word these men brought to the world. Only the Lord knows what the next ten years hold for this faithful group of men, “Bringing the Written Word to the World.”

Appendix A

The continuing purpose of Multi-Language Publications:

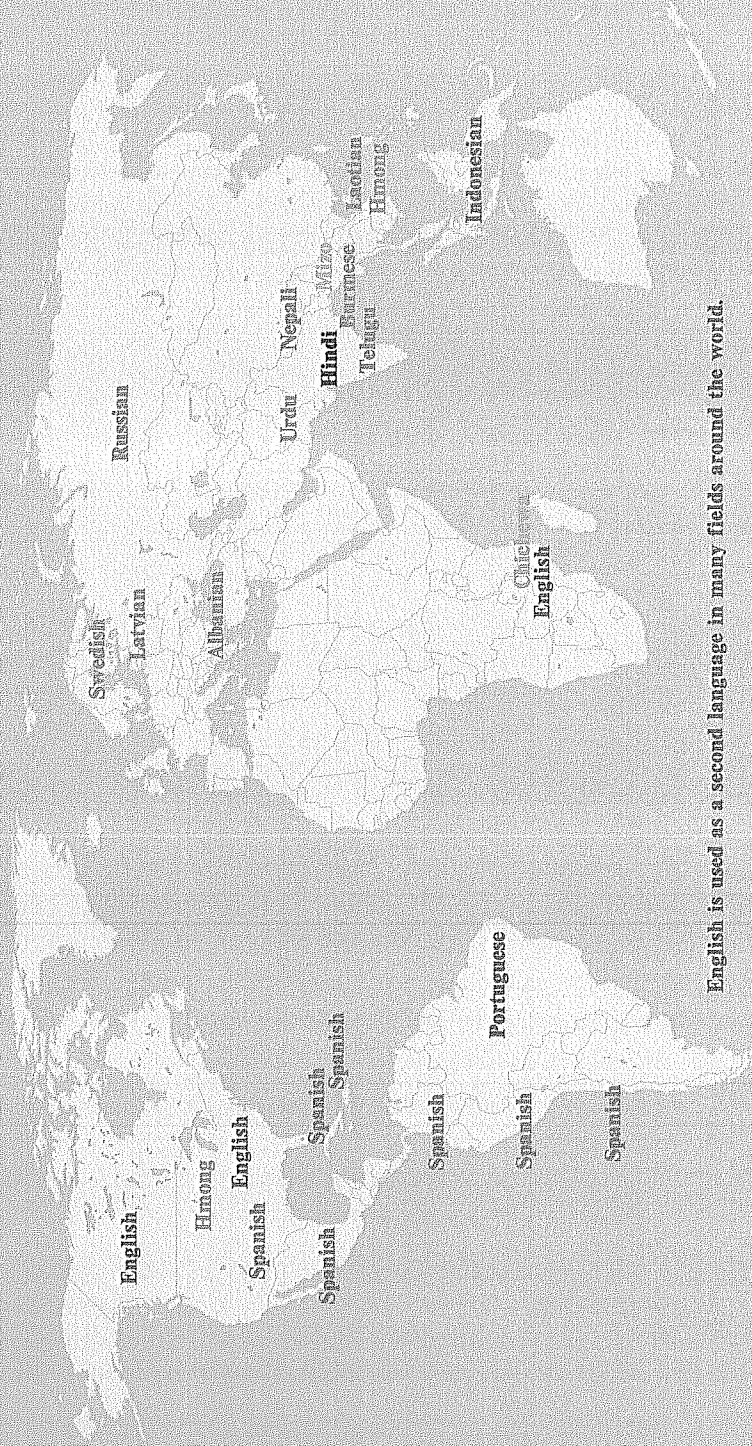
To provide a comprehensive listing and to assist in the production of confessional Christian literature and other mass-media in the languages of countries where our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is working and in other areas or language groups where we may never work, so that many more people throughout the world may come to faith in Jesus and know him as their crucified and risen Lord and Savior and thus have the hope of eternal life.

Our objectives:

1. To gather and organize all available resources that may be of interest to confessional Lutherans for multi-cultural outreach.
2. To provide basic materials for outreach and nurture in as many languages as possible.
3. To ascertain what additional resources are needed for use in mission fields and churches in fellowship with the WELS.
4. To promote, support and coordinate the development of new resources for multi-cultural outreach.
5. To provide training for teams engaged in the development of resources.
6. To distribute the resources produced by those in fellowship of the WELS through a catalog fulfillment service and a lending library.
7. To advertise and promote the resources contained in the Multi-Language Publications Catalog.

Telling His Story Through Bible Stories

80,000 Copies of Bible Stories in Pictures in 9 Languages
 32,500 Copies of Bible Stories (Simplified Catechism) in 6 Languages



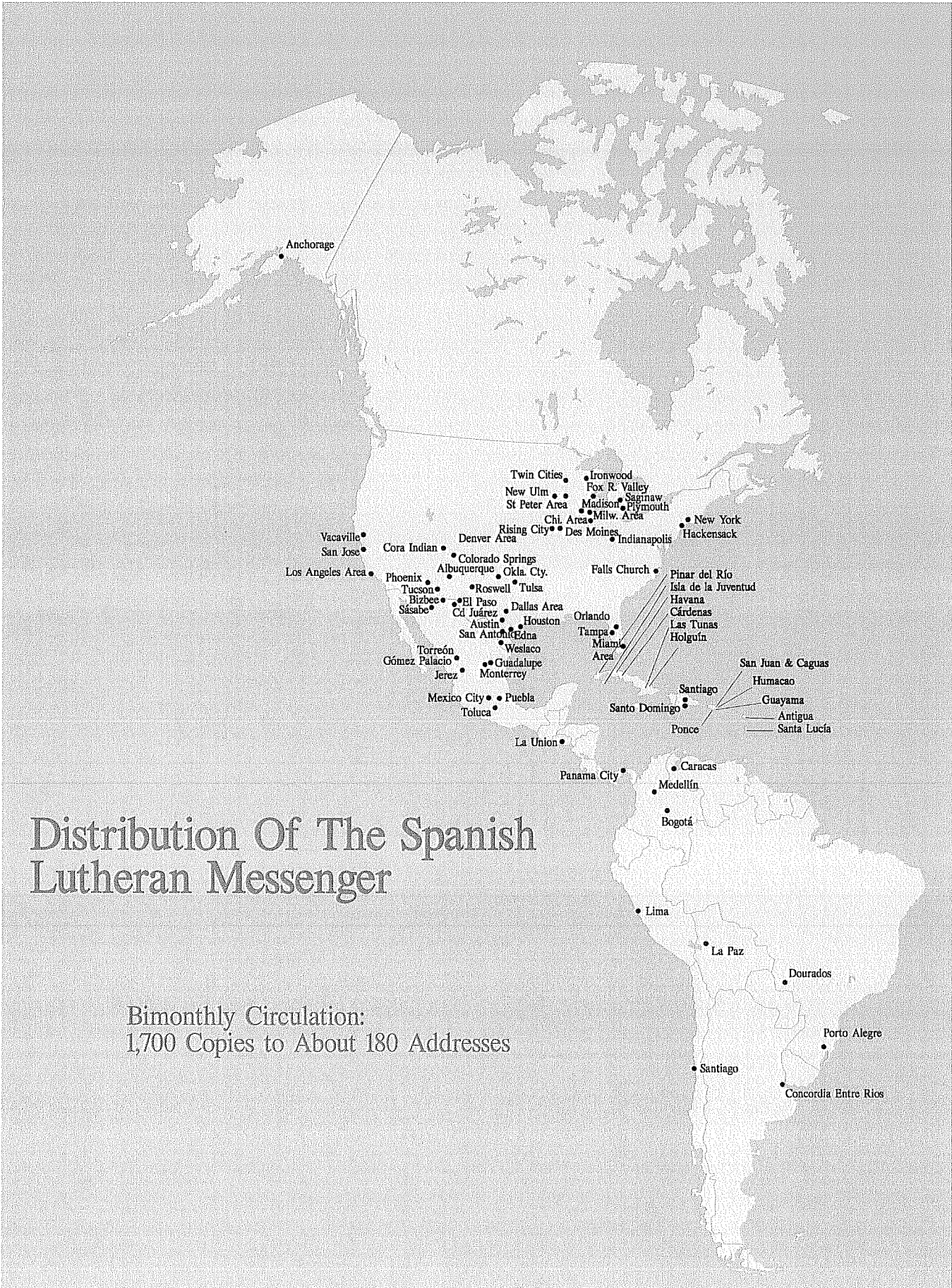
English is used as a second language in many fields around the world.

Bible Stories in Pictures

English	39,000	Russian	5,000	Forthcoming
Spanish	12,500	Telegu	3,000	Indonesian
Albanian	3,000	Hindi	1,500	
Swedish	3,000	Chinese	10,000	
Portuguese	3,000			

Bible Stories (Simplified Catechism)

Hmong	5,000	Urdu	10,000
Laotian	5,000	Nepali	5,000
Mizo	5,000	Burmese	2,500

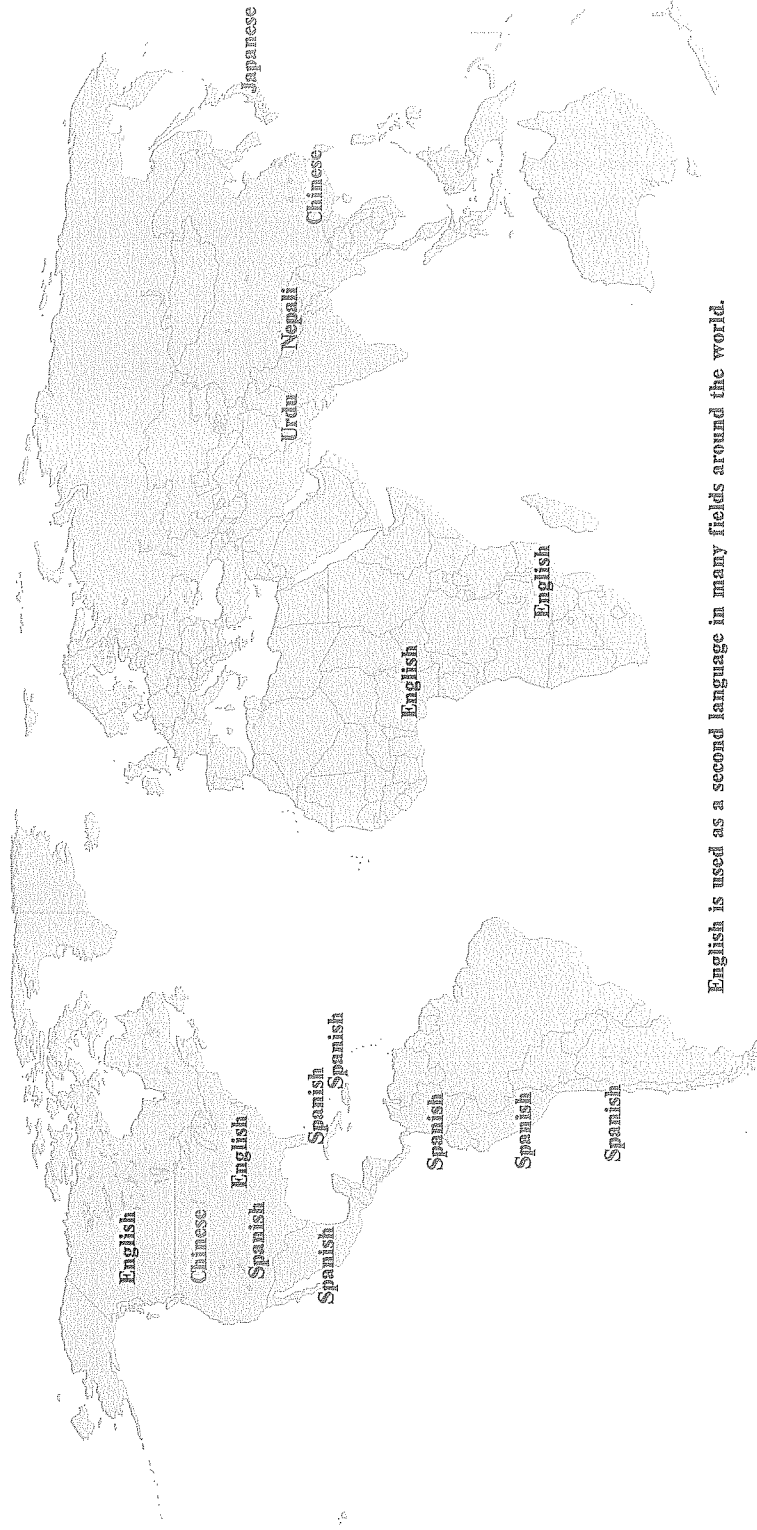


Distribution Of The Spanish Lutheran Messenger

Bimonthly Circulation:
1,700 Copies to About 180 Addresses

Bible Teachings Series

164,000 Copies In 6 Languages



English - 14 Volumes	105,535	Japanese - 4 Volumes	4,180	Urdu - 6 Volumes	30,140
Spanish - 6 Volumes	12,234	Chinese - 3 Volumes	3,210	Nepali - 2 Volumes	9,180

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