

# THE TREASURE STORE IN UNCLE SAM'S ATTIC



A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE  
ON THE WELS MISSION PHILOSOPHY  
EMPLOYED IN ALASKA

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P R E F A C E

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* My sincere thanks to all those who took the \*  
\* time to fill out my questionnaires and send \*  
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## THE TREASURE STORE IN UNCLE SAM'S ATTIC

Alaska has great promise as the last American frontier. Even though in 1867 when Secretary of State William H. Seward negotiated its purchase from Russia, the giant landmass became known as "Seward's Folly," today there is an aura of respect for this arctic wilderness. In fact, most Americans raise their eyebrows and turn to listen with interest at the mere mention of the name "Alaska." Pictures of moose or sheep hunting, daring young bush pilots, Eskimos, salmon, and the billion dollar pipeline project sponsored by Alyeska Corporation have been popularized as characteristics of this northern frontier. Indeed, it has been the tremendous storehouse of untapped resources--once discovered--that brought Alaska into the American limelight and dream, and became the catalyst for a peculiar modern-day gold rush fever; "Alaska ho! There lies excitement, adventure and wealth!"

But the untapped treasure store does not lie only under the surface in this state. From a spiritual perspective, there is a potential for missions in Alaska that rivals its other resources. When a frontier such as this begins to boom, it lures in a steady flow of... you guessed it...people. Many of these opportunists simply drop the lifestyle they have grown up with, including their religious affiliations, and come north.

In studying the westward trek of American religion, I was fascinated by Fredrich Turner's frontier hypothesis, and began to wonder what application it might have with reference to the frontier spirit found in Alaska. What Mr. Turner detected in his research was that rugged experience turned the frontiersmen (persons) into hardy individuals who enjoyed the free air and the manifold opportunities for open expression.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, these individuals found they could live as they wanted to, bound only by themselves and the forces of nature. The only social pressures that they sensed came from the original homesteaders (the Indians), whose feelings they tried their best not to offend. Quite naturally, this individualism and lack of social interaction affected the religious atmosphere. Historian William Warren Sweet observed this:

Migration frequently has a disastrous effect upon civilization and culture, in general and upon religion, the matrix of culture in particular. It is difficult for a people in motion to carry their cultural roots with them....

Not only does the effect of migration react upon the personal lives and attitudes of individuals, it has an equally disintegrating effect upon institutions. A frontier society is strongly individualistic and, pretty generally, institutions, whether civil or religious, were left behind. Although there were some instances of congregations moving west as a body, that was the exceptional rather than the usual method of settling the west. A missionary writing from the Western Reserve of Ohio in 1826 states that many people in that region came from New England, "a land of Bibles, and Sabbaths

and ministers and churches," but now they act "like freed prisoners." "Many of them walked the courts of God's house in New England, but in that land of sinful liberty they fight against God without fearing man," or to put it another way, they were no longer restrained by public opinion to walk the straight and narrow path as they had been in their New England homes. It has been suggested that the frontiersman was normally unreligious, rather than irreligious. (underlining mine) He was not opposed to religion as such; and when the machinery of religion was introduced and set up in his community, he was willing to cooperate, at least for his wife's and children's sake if not for himself. Many a frontiersman was like Edward Eggleston's Colonel Wheeler, who, though no "professor" himself, was friendly to religion and welcomed the first circuit-rider to his cabin because of his wife who was a "professor."<sup>2</sup>

Surely, with the speed of transportation and communication that we enjoy, the new American frontier will not unfold in the same way that the old one did. But is it possible that circumstances are comparable enough to invoke similar reactions even today? What kind of a person is the Alaskan? What are his religious needs and desires? And most importantly, what things should a missionary keep in mind when entering the field in Alaska? What can we learn from the frontier hypothesis to help our work there? These are questions that puzzled me during my four summers in Alaska as I looked at the people and conditions around me. Undoubtedly, they have been asked over and over by our missionaries too, perhaps not in just this form, but certainly with the intent of learning how to "become all things to all men" in the Alaskan environment.



Prior to my research into this topic, I simply assumed that the WELS would do well in any mission field because of its commitment to proclaim the gospel of the inspired Scriptures. My observations in studying this unique area have not changed that point of view.

As Isaiah declares (55:11), God's Word does not return to him empty. Where Christ crucified is preached--even in such vastly different cultures as Japan and Hong Kong--the hearts of sinful people are changed. I firmly believe that whatever gains we have made in Alaska have come, and always will come, as a result of God's growing (I Corinthians 3:7) and not of a particular method of planting. The Lord has graciously allowed our efforts in this northern climate to be bountifully blessed. During the fifteen years of our ministry there, five congregations have

been established: one is a self-supporting church already, another has developed as a daughter to this congregation, and the other three are missions.

When I become so bold as to ask the question "why?" I hope not to presume upon the Holy Spirit's work. Rather, I wish to present the development of the WELS missions in Alaska as a history of soul-discovery. The people who have been instruments in God's hand and who have shared in this miraculous process--pastors, teachers, barricade builders, foresters, electricians, housewives, parents and children--are my story.

By necessity (and for the sake of my extremely charitable and patient professor), the scope of this paper will be limited primarily to the beginnings of each mission, and then the present perspective of the people involved. Since the information for the latter had to be gathered via questionnaires, it may not be as accurate as personal reflection or actual involvement in the missions. I do, however, hope to offset that deficiency by offering a large enough cross-section to draw objective conclusions. And now... WELS in Alaska.



## I

It was in the fall of 1966 when the Lord first opened the door of Uncle Sam's attic for our missionaries. What they uncovered was a treasure store full of souls. But like any visit to an undisturbed attic, it took awhile to blow the dust off and find out what was really underneath.

If you draw this analogy too tight, you could easily make the previous remark sound like there were very few, if any, churches in Alaska by the mid-1960's when we got there. That is not true by any means. In fact, it was almost two centuries earlier that the first known Christian missionaries Juan Riobo and Mathes y Noriega sailed into Alaskan waters with the Spanish Arteaga expedition. When the Russian American Company began to explore the coastlines and rivers, it brought in Russian Orthodox priests, who by 1794 had already penetrated the interior, reaching Yukon and Kuskokwim villages. Protestant missionaries followed the Russians and as early as 1853 a Lutheran parish had been established in Sitka.<sup>4</sup> After the U.S. acquired the territory, Moravians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Swedish Evangelicals and Congregationalists began to open up missions. The Presbyterians,

who arrived in 1878, have been the most active and also the most successful.

The rigid climate of the arctic and subarctic regions allowed for only a few scattered mission outposts. The sparse population necessitated long and arduous travel, and those who gathered for worship were the hardy ones. The census of 1880 reported a total population of 33,436, of whom only 430 were whites and 1756 Creoles. The pure non-white natives were divided among some 17,617 Eskimos; 11,478 Indians and 2,145 Aleuts. While the native numbers declined, the white population continued to grow and became a majority by 1900. Many of these adventuresome Americans were engaged in fishing, whaling, mining, lumbering and a few in farming. They constituted a transient element that frequently returned to the States. On this basis large and stable churches just could not develop.

This explains why the early Lutheran efforts rarely resulted in permanent congregations. For the most part, mission activities among the Alaskan Indians and Eskimos proved disappointing (apparently they had difficulty adapting to the German liturgical structure...!). So throughout the first half of the twentieth century less than ten Lutheran congregations are listed as continuing missions.

That brings us back to our story about the WELS. After the severance of fellowship with the Missouri Synod in the early 1960's, the Wisconsin Synod was faced with the challenge of mission expansion into several new fields. Since one of the qualifying criteria for a new mission area was that it be fairly uncontested by other Christian organizations, Alaska began to draw the attention of the General Board for Home Missions (hereafter referred to as GBHM). This was somewhat of an unusual case. Normally, the main impetus to look into a particular area comes from the District Mission Board (DMB). However, in this instance, the GBHM heard the initial report by Pastor Roland Scheele (from Michigan) about his recent trip to Alaska. That was on August 4, 1959.

Pastor Scheele was mission minded enough to present some comparative statistics for their consideration:

1. The two key cities are Anchorage (pop. 20,000) and Fairbanks (pop. 12,000).
2. There are 16 Lutheran churches in all of Alaska.
3. In Anchorage there are two ULCA churches, one Augustana, one Missouri and another Missouri mission contemplated.

The motion prevailed that our Pacific Northwest District Mission Board, in conjunction with the SWC (and using the Northwestern Lutheran), ascertain the number of communicants of our Wisconsin Synod at government<sup>5</sup> installation in Alaska, with a view to possible further investigation.

Three months later Chairman Gurgel of the GBHM wrote to Pastor Lee Sabrowsky, chairman of the Mission Board for the Pacific Northwest District with this information, "So far we have only heard from one family

and one single man of our Synod living in Alaska. Pastor Kuehl said that we have 25 men in the various military camps and stations in Alaska. In this day of very serious manpower shortages, it might be well to postpone any Alaska moves since we have so few people in this area."

These same findings were reported to the GBHM at their 1960 meeting and a motion carried to place the responsibility of keeping watch over Alaska in the hands of the DMB of the Pacific Northwest District.

During the following turmoil years, not much attention was given to Alaska until 1964, when, at the May meeting of the GBHM, a motion to defer the investigation of Alaska was defeated. A rival motion urging the chairman of the DMB and the Executive Secretary to visit the field carried, and the stage was finally set for action.

Pastors Lee Sabrowsky and R.L. Wiechmann flew north on October 31, 1966. Their first steps into the attic were not as encouraging as they had anticipated...you might even wonder how the mission ever got off the ground within the next year and a half when you hear the report to the DMB:

Meetings were to be conducted in Anchorage and Fairbanks in the homes of key Wisconsin people in both cities. Inviting to these meetings was also to be done by these two key families. No one showed up at either location. Some expressed interest but offered excuses for not coming to the meeting.

Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit obviously did not want our men to leave the attic without digging around. Early in 1967, the DMB asked Pastor A.B. Habben from Portland (our first resident missionary in Africa) to visit our people in the Anchorage area. He discovered that there were eight to ten Wisconsin Synod families in the area, and several service men who were stationed at the two military bases nearby Anchorage. As a result, the DMB decided to call a man to Alaska in April 1967. According to their records:

Sabrowsky was the first man called to Anchorage. Zietlow was finally called and what certainly seemed to be a shaky beginning has been truly blessed.

## II

When Pastor David Zietlow received the Alaskan call, he was already serving as a missionary in the relatively unpopulated area of Winnett, Montana. During his nine and a half years as a pastor there, he obtained (as he puts it) "a little building experience" in four missions--Winnett, Melstone, Sand Springs and Grass Lange.





Under his guidance the congregations built one church, remodeled a store into another church, expanded a third building for yet another mission, tripled the size of the parsonage and helped in a volunteer project to build a municipal swimming pool for the little ranch town of Winnett. Fortunately, the Lord directed this man and his family and the many skills with which they had been blessed to Anchorage at a very opportune time.

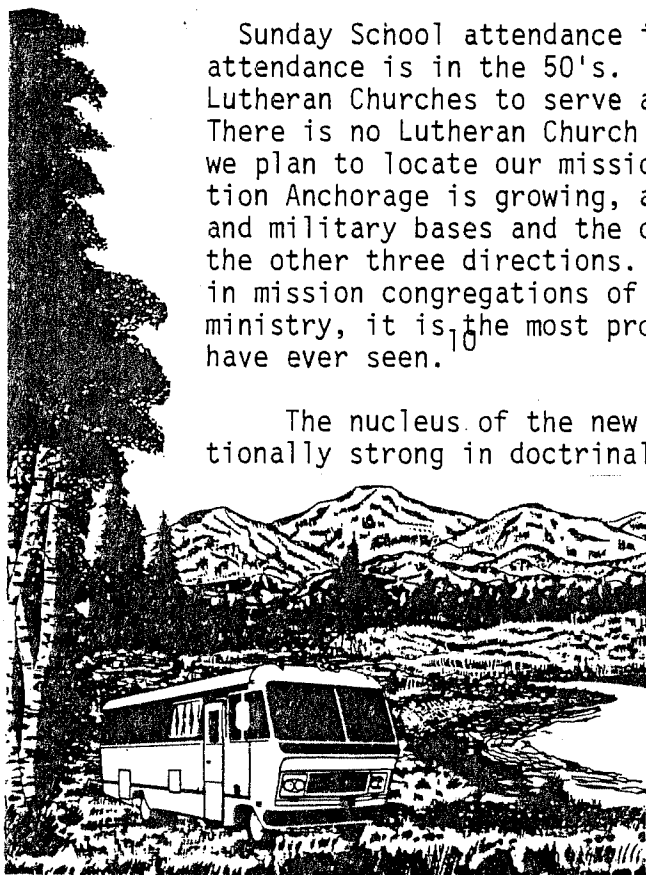
Zietlow may impress you as a builder, but his hands only give expression to the heart-felt commitment he has for his Savior and his Savior's people. His initial reaction to the call demonstrates the mission zeal that the whole family brought to this new field:

I was very excited. I guess the frontier spirit is in me. Although it meant getting rid of my two horses, selling a piece of property that I had just bought and packing up six kids (the oldest was nine at the time), we were willing and anxious to follow the call of the Lord.

Moving to Anchorage during the middle of December might not seem all that glamorous (in view of the blistery winters that one often associates with this American version of "Siberia"), yet the Zietlows found it to be one of their most exciting winters. After renting a house, Pastor Zietlow was installed by Pastor Habben in a rented Seventh Day Adventist church. Just two months into this new ministry the newcomer wrote back to the members of the GBHM:

Sunday School attendance is now near 20 and church attendance is in the 50's. There are only six other Lutheran Churches to serve a population of 120,000. There is no Lutheran Church in south Anchorage, where we plan to locate our mission; and this is the direction Anchorage is growing, and must grow. Mountains and military bases and the ocean cut off expansion in the other three directions. To me, one who has served in mission congregations of our Synod for all of my ministry, it is the most promising mission field I have ever seen.

The nucleus of the new mission was young and exceptionally strong in doctrinal training. Included in the original core group were three former parochial school teachers, some others who had attended WELS grade schools in the lower forty-eight, and several sons and daughters of pastors from our Synod. The average age of the people in Anchorage at that time was twenty-five, and Pastor Zietlow mentioned that in the first six



months the oldest person who attended services was forty. The youth, robustness and growing capabilities in the area made this a "hot spot" for a mission.

By march of 1968, the small congregation was already experiencing growing pains. Although the soul-discovery had taken place mostly among our own people, there was an alert sense of urgency to start reaching out to unchurched prospects. Zietlow wrote an article for the Northwestern Lutheran and his closing words were similar to these taken from his letter to the LWMS in Wauwatosa:

The prospects for growth of our mission here are limited only in so far as we are able to reach the people. We have taken adds out in the local papers, which didn't help too much; we are constantly calling on people we think might be interested in our Lutheran church, but are handicapped in that we don't have a church building of our own. How we yearn for that! There is so much that is temporary and insecure, there are so many families on the move, and worshipping in a church that is not our own does not give one a feeling that our church is here to stay. But, we are in Anchorage to stay! And a church of our own would help to prove the point.<sup>11</sup>

The first step toward permanence came later that same month when a search for land began. The three most appealing sites were selected from the initial thirty and the DMB was contacted. A quick visit by the chairman of the Board of Trustees resulted in a purchase by April. The next week Pastor Zietlow bought a chain saw and began to clear out the spruce trees. Within the next two months the congregation had ordered a Capp Home out of Minneapolis, surveyed and excavated the plot, dug the well and the sewer system, laid the foundation and built a garage to house the materials that were not weatherproof. About this time, Pastor Norman Berg, the newly appointed Executive Secretary of Home Missions, visited. Pastor Zietlow still recalls the incident with genuine missionary relish, "I showed him the area, bragged up the prospects and then put him to work building the sesspool--in a couple hours he had blisters...but so did I."

As it may already be evident to you, Alaska's first WELS missionary was not a man to waste time. Days were spent with the building of the parsonage, nights in making calls and teaching adult classes. Pastor Zietlow always had praise for the backing he got from the DMB, but he says he will never forget those forms "ad-infinitum!" Much of his incentive came from men like Habbs (Pastor Habben), whose advice he often asked and took to heart. Once, when the veteran missionary visited him, he asked, "Habbs, how can I get my congregation to grow faster?" The thoughtful reply came in the form of this little story:

When a tomcat wants something, how does he get it? He goes out at night, howls into the dark and makes all kinds of calls. Like the old tomcat, you may get tired...but then you get results too!

It took persistence to uncover the treasure store in Alaska as the tomcat of 5200 Lake Otis Parkway, Faith Ev. Lutheran Church knows so well.

By the end of the first year, Pastor and his wife Carol and the children were settled comfortably in the new parsonage. Most of the building had been done during the winter months, and for less than half the cost of a proposed bid by an area contractor. On dedication day the ground was broken for the chapel nearby. These people took their mission work seriously. And although construction took another year and a half (most missionaries envy such an accomplishment), the chapel was completed by the hard-working members and their pastor, the builder.

These words from the Book of Reports and Memorials sound forth the positive note that the annual Alaskan report struck for the Pacific Northwest District:

Like cooling, refreshing breezes, the news from Anchorage continues to speak of progress and joy at —our mission in Anchorage.<sup>12</sup>

A quick glance at the statistics of Faith Ev. Lutheran Church through its fifteen years of existence tells a remarkable story about soul-discovery. Much of the history of how this all happened cannot be presented here, yet the beginnings of the ministry to God's little ones deserves some of our attention.

In the spring of 1975, shortly after Faith became self-supporting, the members (exemplifying the name they chose, cf. NWL Dec. 4, 1975, p. 403), voted to call a Christian day school teacher. The man selected was Lance Hartzell, who was then teaching all eight grades in a one room country school at East Bloomfield, Wisconsin. Although the call was sent out only seven years ago, the event marked a new development in the Lutheran history of Alaska. Pastor Zietlow explained this exciting news to Lance in the cover letter he mailed with his call:

You will be our school's first teacher, in fact, you will be the first Lutheran parochial school teacher in all of Alaska! Our school will open in fall with all eight grades. Already there are sixteen enrolled, and our school board feels that the enrollment figure should be limited to about twenty. I'm sure there will be more who wish to attend this coming fall, and so next year we no doubt will be adding a second teacher as well...and build a new school building.<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Hartzell was well qualified for the call. Added to his five years of experience in a single classroom atmosphere, were his many experiences in the mission field. As the son of Pastor Eugene Hartzell at East Fork Apache mission in Arizona, he had learned to appreciate the sometimes tedious but ever rewarding work that soul-discovery demands in an outlying mission area. He had grown up with Apache friends who

taught him a love for nature and a few of their secrets for fishing and hunting. When the Holy Spirit invited him and his wife, Annette, north to Alaska, he accepted the call with anticipation.

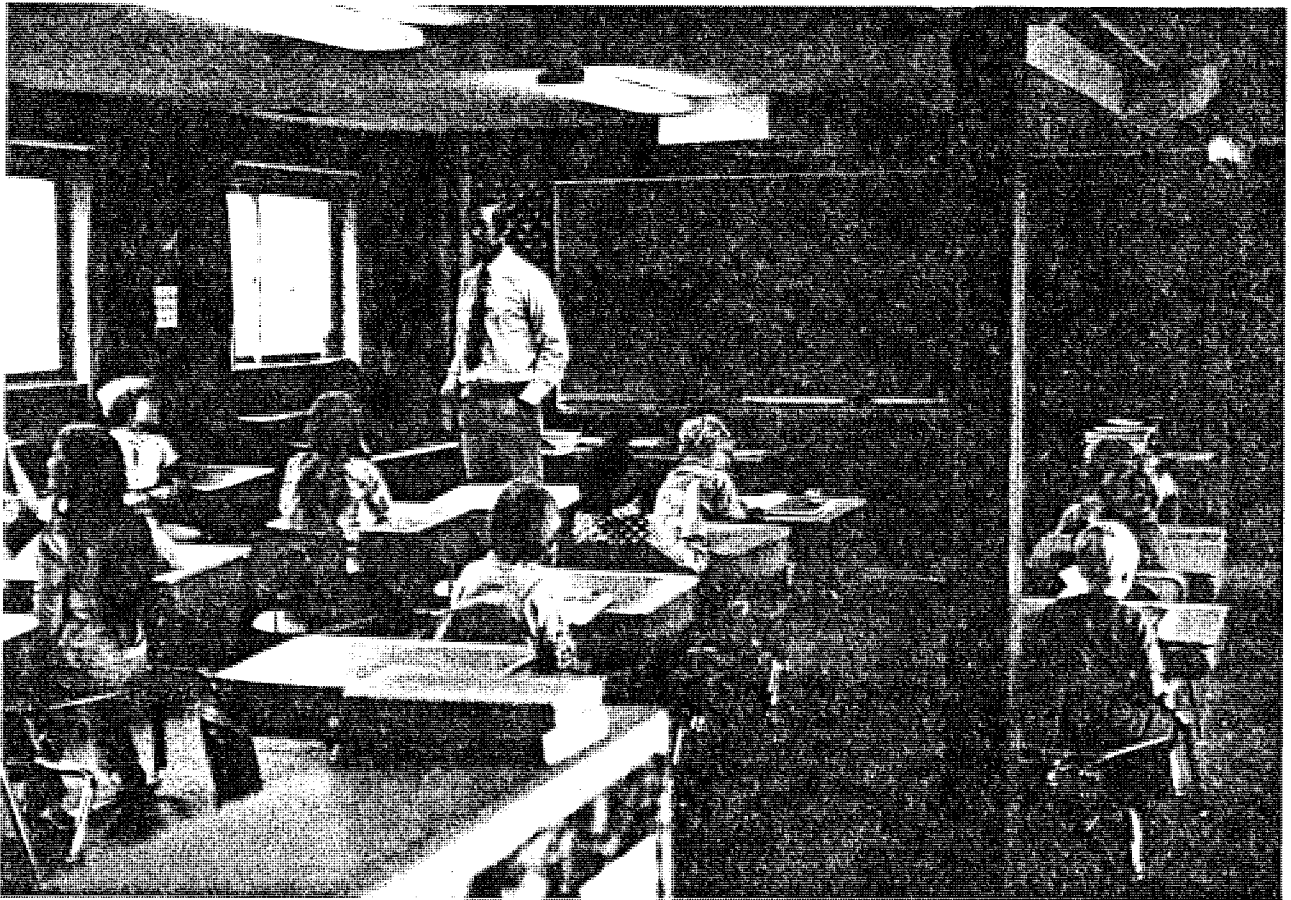
Was it the lure of the frontier that brought them up to Alaska? Perhaps in part, for Lance is not unlike Pastor Zietlow in his affection for the outdoors. Yet this anticipation was linked to the land of opportunity--an environment laden with untapped resources in the form of children. With enthusiasm Zietlow wrote:

There are many things that you should know about Alaska, and when you get to know me and Alaska, you will wonder why I haven't written you a book. This is a great land! The people are young and energetic. Many, many are moving here, mission work is unlimited and we will also be having a summer vicar here this summer doing expository work for a third mission of our Synod in Alaska and the second in the Anchorage area. The congregation has a 17 acre bible camp on a private lake, it has an active teen league, had boy and girl Pioneers and is very interested in its youth. As for Alaska itself... you will also love it. Hunting and fishing are out of this world, scenery is spectacular and it still is frontier country, inspite of the fact that Anchorage is a very modern city of 135,000 people.<sup>14</sup>



With haste, Lance and Annette sold many of their belongings, bought a new Ford pick-up and laid out their pathway across Canada. After four thousand dusty miles on the AlCan highway, they arrived in Anchorage on July 31, 1975. One month later school began with eighteen children in grades one to eight. Since the basement of the chapel was hardly adequate for the prospected increase in enrollment over the next few years, planning for the new school addition began immediately.<sup>15</sup>

By spring the enterprising Alaskans had already poured the foundation on the north side of the chapel and proceeded to frame in the three classroom expansion. The unique stonework that forms the frontispiece facing Lake Otis Parkway was the bonifide Alaskan signature of the construction. The native-grown granite was chipped off of Sheep Mountain in the Matanuska Valley, some seventy miles north-east of the city, and hauled (Whew! What a job! I still remember the grumbling of some Swedish acquaintances we had brought along to help. They thought Americans were lazy...until that day!) back on two flatbeds.



At the time the new school building hit the cover of the Northwestern Lutheran (March 6, 1977), the school board under the direction

of Marie Wilson was preparing to extend a call to DMLC for a graduate teacher. As a result, Tom Zarnsdorf became the second Lutheran elementary school teacher in the 49th state, and his wife Cindy eventually became the third full-time member of the staff. Frequently, they have utilized Mrs. Hartzell and two other assistants on a part-time basis.

We will return once more to Anchorage to pick up the current and future prospective on mission work there. But for now we journey north, past the greatest North American mountain--20,320 foot Mt. McKinley--to the border of the Arctic Circle and Fairbanks.



Late in the year 1972 several WELS families contacted Missionary Zietlow and asked him to explore the possibility of establishing a congregation there. In his report to Rev. Ralph Baur, Chairman of the Pacific Northwest DMB, Zietlow shared his enthusiasm for a potential mission in the second largest city:

I say, let's go full steam ahead! I spent two nights there. The first evening we baptized a baby of a Catholic-Lutheran couple and the second evening we had a communion service with the James Wynen family. Their youngest son, Patrick, is also completing confirmation instruction and will be confirmed this spring.<sup>16</sup>

Full throttle appears to be a motto with Pastor Zietlow. When he discovers souls, he bands them together quickly and gets them moving in their service toward God and fellowman. But in this instance the ship broke out of the bay into open sea a bit too early.

Utilizing the Wynen family as his contact point, Zietlow discovered that several WELS military men had just been transferred from Elmendorf (airforce base at Anchorage) and Fort Richardson (army base) up to Fairbanks. Just after the first of March, Pastor Zietlow visited Fairbanks and returned with a resolve to make a go of it. That Sunday he ran the following comment in his bulletin:

Your pastor's trip to Fairbanks this week was a gratifying experience. On the last Sunday of this month we will hold our first church service in Fairbanks at the home of one of the members, Mr. & Mrs. James Wynen. Their son will also be confirmed with the class here in Anchorage in May. Two other boys from another family will be starting confirmation classes too. We plan to hold services once a month until June, when we are expecting one (and we hope) two vicars from our Seminary who will be placed in Fairbanks for the summer and who along with the pastor will then be able to hold weekly church services. By the end of summer it is our prayer to call for a full time man for the Fairbanks congregation. Remember these people in your prayer for the church.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, the DMB had not been able to obtain an exploratory status for the area as quickly as had been assumed. When a copy of Zietlow's March 14th letter to the Wynens in Fairbanks slid across the executive Secretary's desk it caught fire...well, just about. Here was one of those classic communication breakdowns, perhaps accentuated by the fact that it was stretched apart by 4500 miles and the postal service "slows." At any rate, it was news to Pastor Berg that services were beginning in Fairbanks, since the permission had not been granted. The news rebounded to Pastor Baur out in Washington with red flags attached. The GBHM would hesitate to grant approval and commitment of the Synod to Fairbanks.

So it often goes with the zeal of missionaries out on the frontier. Inspired by the warmth of people who long for a settled spiritual atmosphere, they often find themselves calling for "full speed ahead" before the engines (the DMB, or maybe the GBHM) are ready to deliver the power to the prop. On the other hand, the GBHM oversees the entire fleet, struggling to keep all the "ships" on a unified course. What happens when they begin to converge all toward one spot "full speed ahead?" With sincerity of purpose, the question is battled bravely by both sides, "Who handles the throttle?"

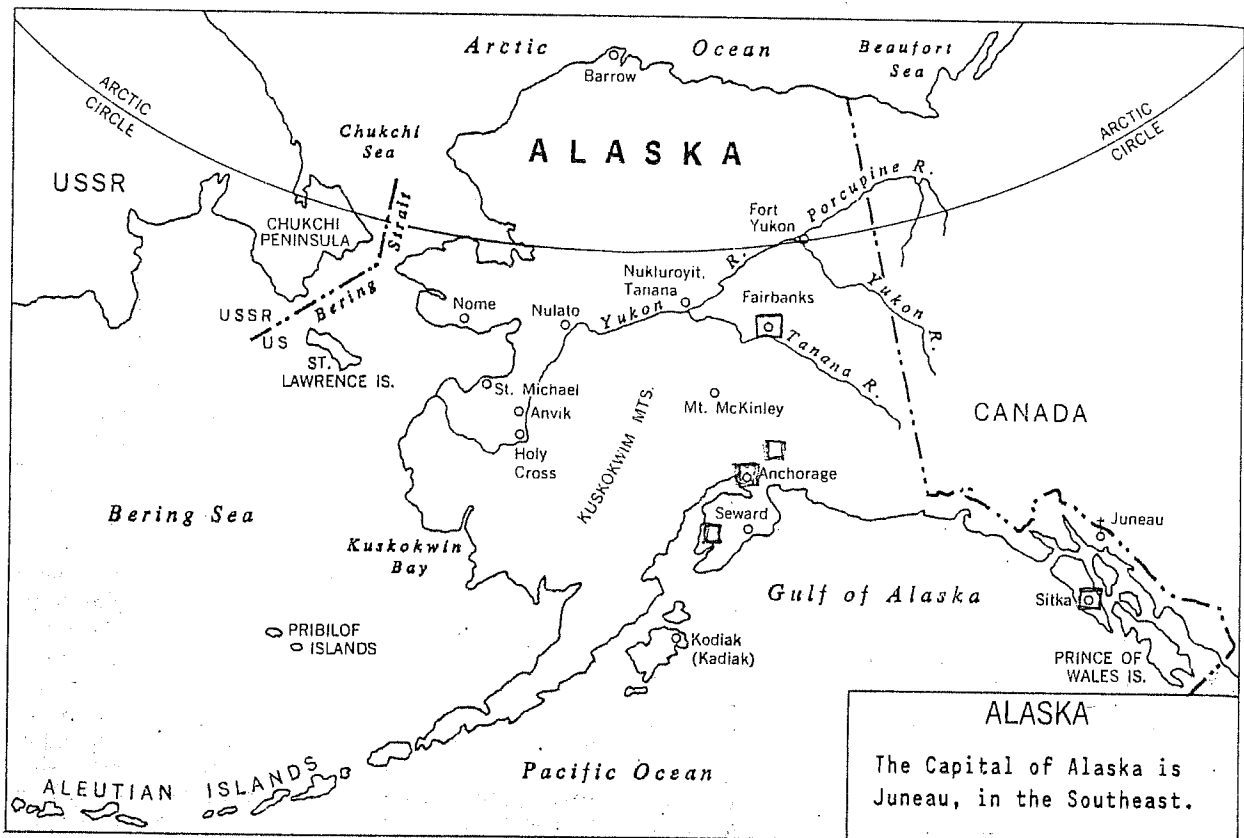


Fig. 1. Map of Alaska showing sites important in the development of the Church in the area.

Well, history took a shaky but favorable course for Fairbanks, Zietlow held that first service in the 10 X 12 foot living room of a trailer: twenty-two people attended, eight communed, four adults indicated a desire for instructions, two teenagers for confirmation, and a couple that had been living together for eight months previously, pledged themselves to be married and have their child baptized. With such compelling promise, exploratory status was granted and Fairbanks received a vicar for the summer.

When Pastor Zietlow wrote to the vicar chosen--Kieth Kuschel from North Fond du Lac--he let out his exuberance with a bit of humor:

You'll be working with me part of the time when I am in Fairbanks and some of the time you will be on your own. Your work will not be much along the canvassing line, but rather following up leads, some dealing with the military, and then some personal mission work where we just, by the power of God and His Word, convert the milkman, mailman and the clerk at the corner drug store. And that work is easy.<sup>18</sup>

Vicar Kuschel's work brought the small group stability and after he returned to school, Zietlow jetted in and out every two weeks to continue services.

The incline of soul-discovery held through the long, cold winter months (in Fairbanks cold really means COLD...it can hit 60 below). Even before the next spring had succeeded in breaking through the surface of the permafrost, man power was granted and a call sent out. The Report to the Nine Districts revealed Alaska as the highlight of mission activity in the Pacific Northwest:

Alaska's bustling with activity. Anchorage projects a population of 183,730 by 1980. Fairbanks is bracing itself for the long awaited pipeline boom. How thankful we should be that the Lord moved us to begin work in Alaska in 1967. Today we are where the action is. The congregation in Anchorage is almost self-supporting. The second man for Alaska has accepted the call and will be stationed at Fairbanks. A good sized nucleus has already been gathered during the past year.<sup>19</sup>

That second man who entered the field seven years after Zietlow was a former neighbor in the Dakota-Montana District, Norbert Meier. He had been a missionary all the way: first in Billings, Montana and then, for ten years, in Japan. Pastor Meier had kept current with the progress in Alaska with each of his furlough's back to the states. The flight to and from the orient just happened to make a stop at International Airport in Anchorage, so it was not difficult for them to visit with the Zietlows.

The building of the Alaska forty-eight inch crude oil pipeline north to south across the state--Prudhoe Bay to Valdez--gave great impetus to the area. With the influx of five to eight thousand workers

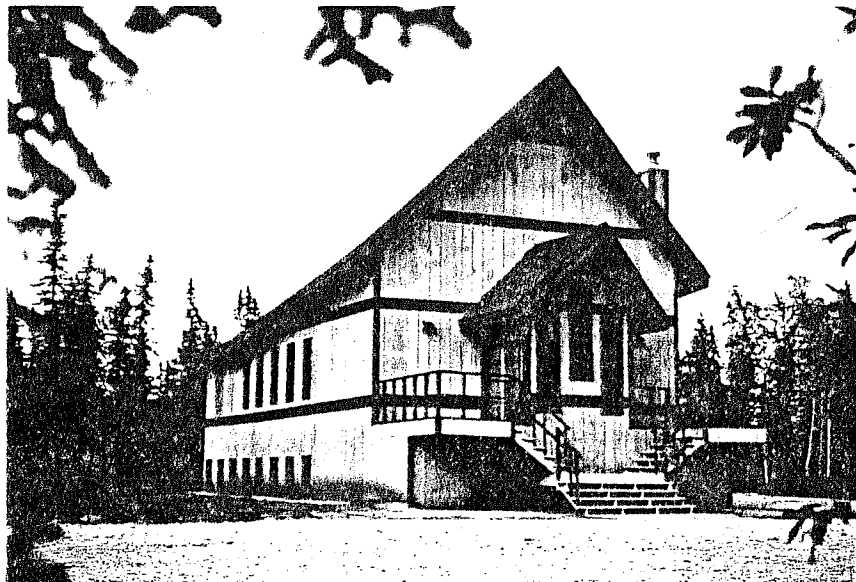


plus their families, Fairbanks and the congregation literally boomed.

Toward the end of 1975 all things looked favorable for land purchase. Pastor Berg flew in to help with the final decision, and Pastor Meier was encouraged when he reported back to the DMB:

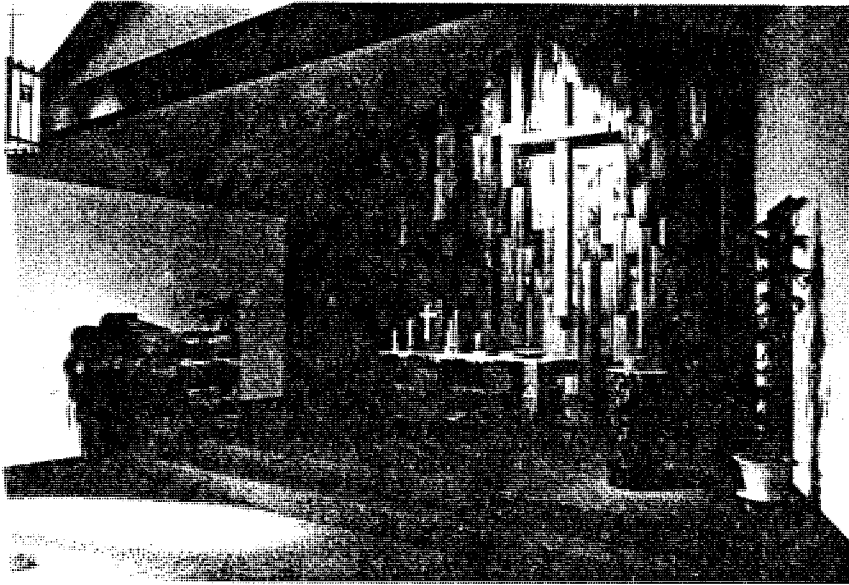
The Executive's visit came at a most opportune time. Everyone here was encouraged and impressed with the concern shown the congregation. His various explanations of the mission board, CEF funding, scheduling, etc., were easily understood and well received. He was quite frank in speaking of the financial obligations of a mission congregation, but instead of turning them off he turned them on even more.<sup>20</sup>

However, the sweetness turned sour all too soon. Because most land that became available was being gobbled up by the native corporations and speculative land development companies. A chance to buy a nine acre parcel from a California woman was quickly settled upon with earnest money. Forecasting the resale of up to six acres, the DMB suggested that the congregation incorporate and close the deal. When the congregation did so, they didn't realize that this would turn out to be a step in the wrong direction on two accounts: first, one of the leaders of the congregation, in whose name the land had been deeded (along with two or three others), had some problems in his private life and left the congregation. Secondly, the contractor's name had to be removed from the property also because of tax, insurance and lien problems. The legal battle that resulted slowed progress to a halt and dismayed everyone involved. When the difficulties were finally straightened out, they got on with construction and the parsonage was completed by August, 1977.



Syndoulos Church at Fairbanks

When the pipeline was completed, Syndoulos (taken from the Greek, means "serving together") Ev. Lutheran Church lost almost half of its membership. Yet the Lord blessed Pastor Meier's work through the struggles to survive, and the new church was eventually dedicated on July 1, 1979. The completion of the building helped to stimulate growth in excess of the previous high figure.



The inside of the church.

The chapel is another example of Alaskans working together in the frontier setting. Most of the furnishings in the new church were handmade by members and friends. A friend of the congregation hewed the altar and pulpit from large logs cut in the area. The baptismal font and the large chancel cross were also made by members using local timbers. Another member carved the beautiful altar

cross, candle holders, and baptismal bowl from native Alaskan soapstone, and still another made the lighting fixtures.

Heading south again, we encounter the third WELS mission at Eagle River, about twelve miles northeast of Anchorage. Some of Faith's strong supporters who happened to be from the Eagle River/Wasilla area composed the nucleus of original members. Pastor Zietlow was convinced that this was a core group who were committed and eager to serve. His evaluation for the GBHM was:

Is this a nucleus!! Some drive 65 miles to church each Sunday. Included are many of my finest members, very good people--a former president of the congregation, a present elder, present financial secretary, present school board member and a WELS minister's son.<sup>21</sup>

Since Anchorage was hedged in on three sides by the ocean, mountains and military bases, much of the "spill-over" population took up residence in the vicinity of Eagle River where real estate was a little cheaper. Plans to relocate the state capital at Wasilla, some thirty-five miles north meant that a migration of state officials and their families could soon be expected. All the signs looked advantageous for a mission in Eagle River in the near future.

Zietlow secured another summer vicar to help him survey the area. Vicar Mark Braun arrived in June of 1975, borrowed the "mighty mission Volkswagon" and set to work. After his return to Mequon, Pastor Zietlow continued to conduct services each Sunday, striving toward the goal of receiving a Seminary graduate that next summer. Due to a shortage of manpower, their request was deferred by the assignment committee, and the position was temporarily filled with a full-time vicar. For Mark Braun, to whom the call was extended, it was like a trip back home.

This time around, Mark lived in a rented trailer house right there in Eagle River. As Nate Radtke reports in his evaluation of the vicar program in Alaska, "The mission in Eagle River remained stable even though two of the original families moved out of the area. This was due to two adult confirmations and the reactivation of a rather lax couple." In April 1977, the congregation submitted their articles of incorporation to the state under the title Peace Ev. Lutheran Church and called Pastor Thomas Spiegelberg from the field.

Through a concerted effort on the part of Pastor Zietlow and because of the cooperation down at synod offices, Peace purchased a split level parsonage before Pastor Spiegelberg and his family arrived. Beginning somewhat like a daughter congregation, Peace finally received full mission status and established her independence from the larger Anchorage congregation.

As a result of inflated construction costs, the congregations has so far been unable to obtain their own worship facility. As with many missions, not having a permanent chapel has been the proverbial "gravel in the shoe" along the dusty road. At the present time, the congregation is faced with their seventh temporary location. This has been discouraging...but they have learned to endure with patient determination. Not everything in Alaska blossoms overnight!

Yet there are always flowers along the way. Perhaps this interesting experience can best describe that kind of discovery from the missionary's perspective:

The owner of Forks Roadhouse had been planning a special wedding for his son during July one summer. It was to be outdoors on a hill near the Roadhouse. As the date approached, we cleared the area and built an altar and cross out of spruce trees. Everything appeared to be progressing smoothly...until that week before.

It rained that whole last week, transforming the twenty miles of back-roads into gullies of knee-deep mud. I packed my family into our four-wheel drive Toyota Landcruiser and we arrived a day early. Many of the invited guests didn't make it because of the roads.

On account of the weather conditions our only alternative was to hold the wedding inside the Road-

house itself. I suppose I never suspected that I'd someday see such a classic frontier matrimony, much less be the preacher. But there I was, standing over the lunch counter (now the altar) at this back-woods-combination-bar-restaurant-bunkhouse-gasoline station-country-store log cabin. The place was packed. There were trappers, dog-mushers, miners, homesteaders and the well-dressed relatives of the bride from Minnesota--suits and ties amid a sea of greasy, muddy jeans. When the time came, I whistled...two of the boys passed out the printed sermon text and the wedding began.

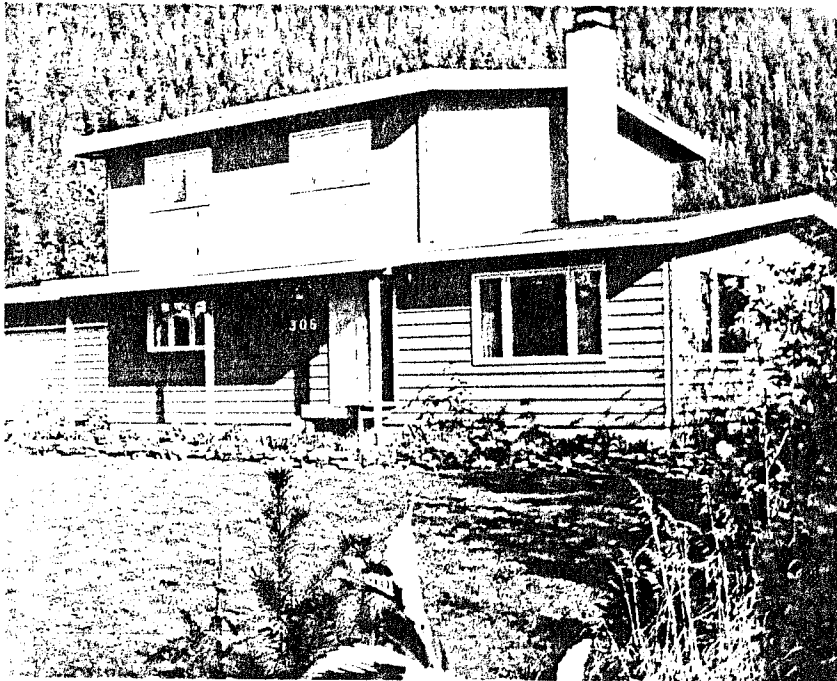
I won't soon forget my opportunity to share the Word of God from I Corinthians 13 with these people. That whole motley gathering heard the good news that day. I guess that's the Holy Spirit's way of reminding me what my ministry is all about. We've started an adult instruction class out at the Roadhouse now and even though it's a cold twenty miles in by snowmachine, I'm getting used to being a modern "circuit rider."

His experience reminded me of the first time I had the chance to attend the special outdoor Sunday Service that Faith sponsors up at Camp Luther. Although it had been a drizzling weekend, the sun broke through the clouds on Sunday morning. As I sat there on the split log bench looking toward the home-made spruce cross and Pastor Zietlow, I marveled at God's magnificent creation. Pastor Zietlow pointed to a snow-capped mountain in the Matanuska Valley and spoke of God's majesty and holiness shared with sinners like us through his son, Jesus Christ. I knew then that the Gospel message does indeed uncover a treasure store of precious souls wherever it is proclaimed, even in this remote place called Uncle Sam's attic. So too at Eagle River.

The beginnings of Grace Ev. Lutheran Church in Sitka go all the way back to 1960, but Southeastern Alaska did not undergo serious study for a mission opening until 1977. The small group was then served and organized by DMB chairman Ralph Baur out of Seattle. By early 1978 a promising report was given to the Ten Districts:

Southeastern Alaska consists of smaller towns spread throughout a myriad of islands in a beautiful setting of water and trees, reached only by sea or air. Highways are minimal. In Sitka whose history dates back to the days of the Russian rule, there are only fourteen miles of highway. But there are people and there is activity. In Sitka, Ketchikan and Juneau we have a total of 28 communicants. These towns are about a half hour apart by jet. In addition, the ministry among the natives of the area would prove most challenging.<sup>22</sup>

The fascinating development of this fourth Alaskan mission has already been well documented by Martin Baur in his church history paper, 1981. Sitka will, however, be included in the evaluation later.



The parsonage in Sitka

children because of a job offer at the area Petro-chemical plant. Since there was no WELS church on the whole peninsula, they began to attend the Missouri Synod church near their home.

The minister at the church for several years was Rev. Ernst, who later also joined the WELS daughter congregation. Pastor Ernst had already been in Fairbanks for a number of years before he moved to Kenai in 1967. For reasons I am not quite sure of, he chose to remain in this area as a lay member of the Missouri congregation. At any rate, he constructed his own log cabin in the back-woods about sixteen miles out of town.

During the early 1970's, the pastor of this Missouri congregation took a call and left Kenai vacant. They called six or seven times over the period of that first year, finally requesting Pastor Ernst to oversee the mission. Not long before the Stricklers and some of the founding members of the Missouri church asked Pastor Zietlow to fly in, Rev. Ernst had a "run-in" with his congregation and their DMB over a discipline case. Apparently, he had encouraged some of his people to drop their lodge membership more quickly than they were inclined to do. The DMB felt that he should proceed more slowly, which advice he refused to follow. After it became necessary for him to resign his position, he and his family remained members for over a year to show that they were not just setting up a disgruntled "opposition camp" but were serious about their confessional principles.

When the next pastor turned out to be quite liberal and preoccupied with getting the finest area talents--members or not--to "perform" as organist and choir director, many of the original members were disenchanted. The Stuarts decided to join the Stricklers at the first WELS service held December 10th in a Seventh Day Adventist church.

The final corner of history in Alaska that we can currently examine is located in Kenai, on the Kenai Peninsula 150 miles south of Anchorage. This small but enthusiastic congregation got its start in December 1978 as a daughter to Faith Lutheran in Anchorage. Some ten years prior to that first worship service, one of the families that helped found the mother congregation moved down to Kenai. Les Strickler relocated here with his wife and his

Pastor Zietlow promptly responded to the call and flew down for that Sunday on an 18 passenger bumpy twin Otter operated by the Alaska Aeronautical Corporation. Once again he followed the plea for help ahead of DMB approval, and this time they were not convinced of the area's potential for a mission. Since the word never reached the GBHM level, the small group at Kenai failed to receive mission status.

Nevertheless, Pastor Zietlow continued to commute there every other weekend, donating the flight costs himself. Sunday afternoons he would hold Bible classes and worship services and the next morning he then followed up on contacts that he himself had made during his years in Alaska, or those that the people suggested to him. Spurred on by their determination to make the mission work, Zietlow informed his home congregation of the outstanding progress and commitment of these fellow Christians. The council at Faith voted to accept the challenge to support Grace at Kenai as a daughter congregation. They arranged a schedule of decreasing subsidy to encourage the daughter to develop its own stewardship.

It was also decided that Faith should again call a full-time vicar to serve with Pastor Zietlow in expanding the outreach at Kenai. As Nate Radtke's paper establishes, this procedure enabled Grace (as also Peace and Syndoulos) to get its feet planted firmly. By the end of Vicar Paul Ibisch's year there, the congregation was incorporated, and accepted as a self-supporting congregation of the WELS. During the following year with Vicar Nathan Radtke, the flock nearly doubled its size and with joy called seminary graduate Carl Busse as their first pastor. On July 19, 1981 he was installed and of the 74 people present more than half were from the dedicated mother congregation.

### III

What I have sketched thus far is only a thread of the complete history for each congregation; though the thread stops here today, it will lead somewhere else tomorrow: perhaps back to the greater Anchorage area, or to Wasilla, Ketchikan or Juneau. As you have heard, "Things are active out on the frontier." The discovery of souls in Alaska continues on the pages of history day by day.

An evaluation of mission philosophy and approach could certainly be drawn from the material presented. But by making a survey of those personally involved at all levels of the mission work, I have attempted not only to observe these interesting insights of history, but also their past and present attitudes. What we can truly carry into our future ministries as a result of this kind of correlation remains in the Lord's hands, since he opens doors that we have never seen before and closes others that we may think show promise.

All too often the perspective of our laity does not affect the future of our missions as much as it could. Perhaps a look at where these people came from, how they became involved, how they perceive the overall objectives and approaches of the mission and what they have experienced in their ministry will help give us an objective

view of what our WELS has done and might do in Alaska.

Out of the eleven people surveyed only one person was involved in a WELS mission before arriving in Alaska. Nor were all of them WELS by their upbringing. However, several of them did carry into other parts of Alaska the experience and excitement they shared in the original mission at Anchorage. Considering the zeal with which these people have put on the Gospel armor, I think we'd be safe in saying that previous experience in a mission congregation does not make them better suited for a mission congregation. That quality shows itself as a response to the saving message of God's Word. Yet it is clear that the Gospel is being proclaimed powerfully in our missions in Alaska because our people carry their enthusiasm with them wherever they move. And this might well be considered the primary concern of our mission outreach--to train our people to be witnesses unto the ends (literally) of the earth. But more of that in a moment.

Some of the people followed the "call of the wild" to Alaska, like Jim Perham who came "to get away from the crowded cities of Illinois and establish a new lifestyle." Others came either because of military service or job transfers. After they had lived in Alaska for awhile, the independence and freedom of this frontier society appealed to them (as well as the economic possibilities) and they decided to stay.

Since many of the people came from WELS backgrounds (or at least the spouse did), their doctrinal training led them to prefer the ministry of the WELS when it was offered. However, more than half of them attended other Lutheran services until they were invited or encouraged by the missionary or one of his members to join our mission. This seems to substantiate what Pastor Habben had told Pastor Zietlow: the discovery of souls comes through personal contact. Calls have to be made on members and prospects frequently, even when it may take the form of salmon fishing at Anchor River or snowmachining up at Hatcher Pass. The point is; you have to be where the people are.

Not so typical is the story of the Goldschmidts down at Sitka. Mrs. Goldschmidt related their fight for confessionalism in this way:

We have always been Lutheran and have always attended whatever Lutheran church happened to be in our community. We did not realize how different the synods were: we have been members of LCA, ALC, Missouri and now WELS. As liberalism crept in and took over, the other synods became very difficult to tolerate.... When we came to Sitka, from a wonderful conservative Missouri Lutheran Church in Gallup, New Mexico, we went immediately to the Lutheran Church in downtown Sitka. It was LCA, and the very first Sunday we attended, we knew this was not for us. Everything our children (boys just confirmed in New Mexico) had learned to be true, was taught to be untrue...totally confusing. So, after two years, we and several other families left, not knowing what we would do for a church. We called the LCMS first, and they said we needed seventy people before they would

be able to serve us in any way. We called the WELS, and Pastor Baur said, "I will be up to see you next week." WELS has served us faithfully ever since that first week.

Certainly, Sitka shows the open door and the opportunities that emerge when we follow the Lord's call and enter.

In an effort to try to analyze whether or not the people considered themselves "pioneers" (socially and religiously), and to determine what effect the frontier has had on mission outreach, I asked them to consider the terrain where they live, the background of the people and the image of the WELS. Some of their replies were intriguing as well as informative. Generally, the territory has not been a hindrance for making contact, "I don't think this has been a factor. When there was a need, a way was found to fulfill that need." That might be reasonably true for the northern four congregations, but the exception would be Sitka, which is more isolated, and which is 2000 miles away from the nearest WELS congregation.

When setting up objectives for the missions the laypeople felt that it was necessary to take a penetrating look at those who live in the unusual environment:

The people of the area seem to be of an adventure-some, independent nature and in the winter go skiing, camping, snowmobiling to prevent the feeling of being "closed in" by the weather and limited nine months of the year. Then when summer comes they say there's so few "nice" days that they fish and camp or go to their cabins all weekend and not to church.

There are so many things of a volunteer nature that are viable to the economy of the area--such as CAP (Civil Air Patrol), community Schools, different hospital guilds, music leagues, politics, Arts Council, etc., all competing for time between voluntary church activities and special interest groups, of which there are so many. This seems to play a big part since these groups are continuously seeking out people.

The background of the people is so varied and the people are very mobile. It's harder to set long range goals and to get commitments from people who don't expect to be around more than a couple of years.

The people here have minds of their own, they seem to do only what they want to do.

I think it is fair to estimate the average Alaskan as a modern version of the frontier person. There is a spirit of independence and individuality that shows up in the way people do things. Just for example, the Alaskan (both native and white, though we have been concentrating on the white American) likes to make his own things, whether it is a log cabin, a boat, or some canned salmon or even ice cream.

The image of our synod has little impact, if any on the people:



Nobody has ever heard of WELS. People in the area are just beginning to find out about us and realize we are different than the LCA downtown. Our pastor is a very good teacher and is now teaching a group of downtown business women that will probably help in getting the word out about our church.

The laypeople varied in opinion on what might increase the mission effort the most. In Sitka and Eagle River, it was, understandably, a place of worship. In Anchorage, where there are more social opportunities, it was time or manpower. There is an expressed trust in the missionaries, "I think Alaska shows what can happen if they are provided with missionaries to meet the needs of the people in our state," but a strong personal commitment as well, "We still need to work hard on this area...all of us. The word needs to get beyond our doors. The people need to know we care about them."

It is in carrying out Christ's commission that these people seem most unified. This again fits the rule of "visitation/invitation" which is mentioned in these ways:

The majority of the people attending were invited by the members.

Our people have been influential in the mission outreach to our community by inviting friends and neighbors to worship. We welcome those who come on their own too, and try to involve them in our activities.

The laypeople in this congregation got it off the ground before we had a pastor. They worked zealously. And they still do.

The greatest joy indicated was in the "closeness of the members" or "fellowship" centered around God's Word. For most it has been a satisfying spiritual life:

My greatest joy has been to watch God's guiding hand and the gifts he has bestowed on us. He answered our prayers for a church that taught God's Word. The fine preaching and teaching--that is our joy. Knowing we have something genuine to offer this spiritually starved community. Nearly every day I give thanks for WELS. They have truly met our needs in every way.

With growth some of the original mission zeal and unity was lost in the original mission at Anchorage:

As our congregation grew, I think we lost some of the "closeness" we felt as a small, struggling mission. In the early days, I could tell you all the members' names and now I think I would have a difficult time naming 25% of them. I think we lost the feeling of really belonging when we became a large congregation. It makes you feel that you are

just a name on a membership list.

Striving for growth has brought some disappointment also, in the delays to get a facility and permanence:

A great disappointment for us has come in dealing with synod on the building program. We feel that the delays have been unnecessary.

Yet the attitudes toward synod are positive on all fronts.

When asked to characterize the qualities that they felt were important for a missionary in the Alaska field, the people expressed their needs most clearly:

The minister and his family should have a real desire to live in Alaska!

He has to understand the people and why they came to Alaska. I think most Alaskans are a different breed of people that you don't see in the lower 48. The "old-timers" who came to get away from the Depression are tough and rugged, others just like the northern climate and the sparse population.

He should be:

1. A good preacher and teacher. People up here don't know the pure word of God.
2. Loving for the people and friendly.
3. Head of a strong family...strong enough to endure long times without going home...he needs a strong supporting wife.
4. Adventurous, able to be satisfied with simple things and home entertainment.
5. Outgoing. Here virtually no one comes directly to us...we have to find them.

In short, the people of Alaska feel that they are in a unique frontier situation, that they need a pastor who is willing to "ride circuit" and visit them at their level, and that they desire synod support with "understanding" of frontier essentials.

Obviously, it is not easy to be the multi-talented creature called the frontier missionary. But with the love of Christ compelling them, five pastors and three teachers have undertaken the challenge, and by God's grace serve faithfully with the talents and abilities they have been given.

Beyond the basic objective of surviving, these comments characterize the goals they have established:

My original objectives were to establish a congregation that would provide for and encourage each other in faithfulness and growth in the love of God

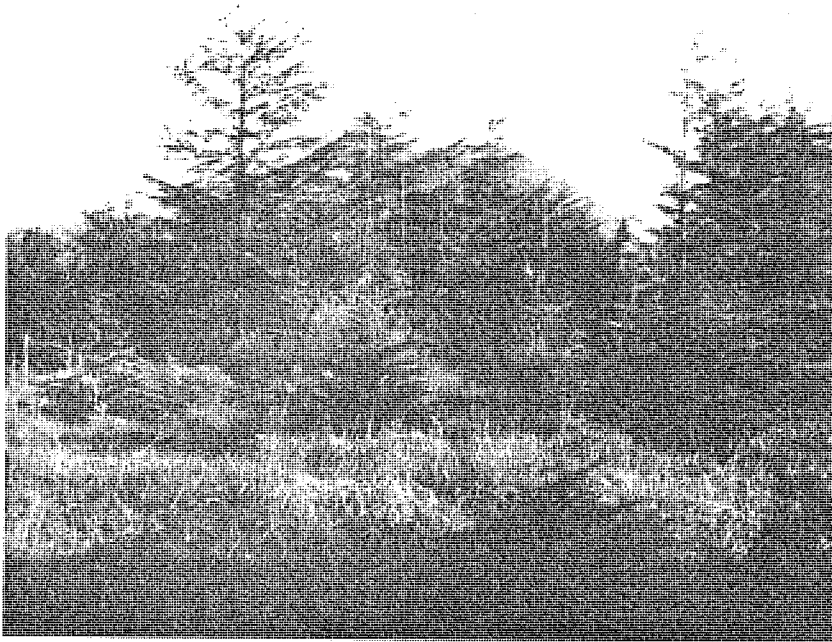
through Jesus, and which would then share that message and the fruits of His love with each other and with others in the community.

Mine and the mission board's seemed to differ. Mine was to nurture and bring a loosely organized nucleus into a working congregation. The mission board wanted me to do more exploring in other area communities. My emphasis has definitely been on the home mission.

My goal was to get self-supporting as soon as possible. I hate filling out those forms!

Have they seen these objectives fulfilled? Well, for some only time can tell the story, "My objectives are in the process of being fulfilled. I doubt if they ever will be (nor should they be) completed." Yet God has blessed many of the efforts even more than they themselves expected:

You bet those objectives have been fulfilled. I hesitate to start another mission because of it. Although in Alaska I've had a hand in starting two missions beside Anchorage. The daughter congregation may grow faster knowing that we stand behind them, ready to help.



Yet one goal seems to be more illusive than the others, witnessing Christ among the Alaskan natives:

I have had opportunities and have spent a lot of time holding instruction classes weekly with natives. And, I have accomplished very little. I do know, by the grace of God, one soul went to heaven. I don't know how many others may have been gained for the kingdom. They

have a real problem with immorality and alcoholism.

We have had one black girl in school and about a half-dozen children who were part native. The rest were and are all white.

Our outreach to local natives is somewhat limited because of the limited social mixing between natives and non-natives. We are confirming our first native member, an eighteen year old girl, this Easter. We have had a number in Sunday School, VBS, etc.

For three of the congregations the road from infancy to adulthood still awaits the day of confirmation--that is, the dedication of their own worship facility. Anchorage achieved that goal quickly, yet for the others it has been a long, tiring struggle uphill. Quite naturally, some spirits have been dampened by the systematic and sometimes tedious procedure outlined by the DMB and GBHM. One comment bears the mark of a genuine frontier attitude:

The procedure for completing a chapel should be more flexible to fit the area. A long drawn out process is discouraging, as is a huge debt. How do you solve it? Some areas may need to use a less conventional facility--in Alaska we could get by nicely with a log cabin, dirt floors and an outhouse!

Permanency at the cost of dignity? That is hardly the problem in the Alaskan surroundings. Perhaps the regulations ought to be reviewed for the frontier areas. But...an unordained, inexperienced defense attorney I contend that I am not, and so must leave this one alone.

As the missionaries themselves see it, the growth of our missions is a personal commitment. I asked them the same kind of question Pastor Zietlow had asked Pastor Habben during his first years in Alaska, "What would make the congregations grow faster?" (Actually it was, "Our mission efforts would greatly increase if we only had \_\_\_\_\_.") They responded:

A building of our own!

More love for lost sinners, and perhaps more confidence that through us they can be saved.

A GREATER MEASURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The ability to overcome our human shortcomings in reaching out with the Gospel. You don't have to look very far or be here very long to see a white field. But to devote the time and energy to the harvest is humanly more difficult. Physically speaking, we lack little.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is working in and through these men to reach others.

Interestingly enough, the veteran of our Alaskan missions replied, "A vicar." That kind of attitude is part of his practical nature. After trying many different approaches, he has settled on this one. Apparent-

ly, the "tomcat" in Anchorage likes company when he goes out to "sit on the fence" and make calls. That this method has already been effectively used in Alaska and may have potential for other areas as well; has been proven by history. But that is another story.

The future looks bright for the discovery of more spiritual treasures in America's attic. The Kenai/Soldatna area is about to explode, when either the Exxon or Shell Oil Company constructs a new Petro-chemical plant there. Wasilla still is projecting an influx of business and population when the state capital is moved into the valley. And who knows what may develop at Juneau or Ketchikan in Southeastern Alaska?

Many of today's Alaskans are opportunists who work long, hard hours. But they have also learned how to play hard in their rugged frontier habitat. Will they put their energy into mission work when they hear about the freedom of forgiveness in Christ? The history of our WELS missions and the opinion of the missionaries seem to indicate that they will. Although the environment may affect the approach we use, our goal is always going to be the same--to sit on the fence and make those calls that lead to soul-discovery. The frontier hypothesis, as far as I can tell, still holds true to the extent that these people are more "unreligious than irreligious"...but only because they have not yet heard the good news that they are the treasure for which Christ died on the cross.

E N D   N O T E S

<sup>1</sup> Frontier was then defined as not less than two people and not more than six per square mile. According to Alaska statistics, there is less than one person per square mile, even today. But this population is communal, due to the mountains, and most live in villages, towns or cities.

<sup>2</sup> William Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> I am including the school in Anchorage, not as a mission, but as a significant step in the development of Faith Lutheran Church.

<sup>4</sup> For the complete story see Paul Ibisich's paper, The First Chapter in Alaskan Lutheranism: Russian America.

<sup>5</sup> GBHM minutes, 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Pacific Northwest DMB notes, 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1967.

<sup>9</sup> This came about as the concerned response of the area parents after one of the congregation's teen-agers drowned in a stock dam.

<sup>10</sup> David Zietlow, letter to the GBHM, February 17, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> David Zietlow, letter to Mr. Herbert Speckin, February 26, 1968.

<sup>12</sup> BORAM, August 1971.

<sup>13</sup> David Zietlow, letter to Lance Hartzell, May 5, 1975.

<sup>14</sup> loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup> The lighting and the lay-out of the basement didn't help much either.

<sup>16</sup> David Zietlow, letter to Ralph Baur, Jan. 14, 1973.

<sup>17</sup> David Zietlow, bulletin for Faith Ev. Lutheran, March 4, 1973.

<sup>18</sup> David Zietlow, letter to Kieth Kuschel, April 10, 1973.

<sup>19</sup> Report to the Nine Districts, May 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Norbert Meier, letter to Ralph Baur, December 29, 1975.

<sup>21</sup> David Zietlow, letter to the GBHM, April 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Report to the Ten Districts, May 1978.

*Received and  
acknowledged  
2/28/78*

A

STATISTICAL REPORTS

ALASKA MISSIONS

1987 - 1991

| Year | City        | Status | Pastor             | MEMBERS |     |    | MINISTRATIONS |    |     | EDUCATION |      |      | CONGREGATION |     |    | CONTRIBUTIONS |    |    | Overall A.P.C. |      |        |         |        |        |        |       |       |        |        |        |        |
|------|-------------|--------|--------------------|---------|-----|----|---------------|----|-----|-----------|------|------|--------------|-----|----|---------------|----|----|----------------|------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|      |             |        |                    | Bap     | Com | Ch | Ad            | Ch | Ad  | Ch        | Ad   | Ch   | Ad           | Ch  | Ad | Ch            | Ad | Ch |                | Ad   | Ch     |         |        |        |        |       |       |        |        |        |        |
| 1987 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 37      | 20  | 2  | 2             | 3  | na  | 6         | 4    | -    | -            | -   | 17 | 3             | -  | -  | -              | 93   | 4.85   | 23      | 1.15   | 45     | 1.55   | na    | na    | 5.20   |        |        |        |
| 1988 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 55      | 29  | 2  | 2             | 3  | na  | 208       | 8.2  | 2    | -            | -   | 15 | 3             | -  | -  | -              | 2911 | 100.38 | 638     | 21.90  | 45     | 1.55   | na    | na    | 123.83 |        |        |        |
| 1989 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 80      | 37  | 6  | 1             | na | 290 | 8.0       | 3    | -    | -            | 22  | 3  | 18            | 2  | -  | -              | 4710 | 127.30 | 1051    | 28.40  | 85     | 2.30   | na    | na    | 158.00 |        |        |        |
| 1976 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 110     | 48  | 6  | 2             | 3  | na  | 320       | 8.0  | 4    | 1            | -   | 32 | 4             | -  | -  | -              | 4828 | 115.70 | 1223    | 36.58  | 1619   | 40.47  | na    | na    | 186.75 |        |        |        |
| 1971 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 130     | 55  | 13 | 4             | 9  | na  | 408       | 7.4  | 6    | -            | -   | 40 | 4             | 42 | 5  | -              | -    | 10,128 | 184.15  | 1524   | 27.73  | 192    | 3.49  | na    | na     | 215.35 |        |        |
| 1972 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 140     | 60  | 3  | 2             | 8  | na  | 384       | 4.6  | 16   | -            | -   | 40 | 5             | 39 | 5  | -              | -    | 14,309 | 178.88  | 2700   | 33.75  | 312    | 3.90  | na    | na     | 216.51 |        |        |
| 1973 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 180     | 95  | 24 | 2             | 7  | na  | 412       | 4.3  | 18   | 1            | -   | 45 | 5             | 55 | 6  | -              | -    | 14,345 | 151.06  | 3445   | 36.28  | 825    | 7.86  | na    | na     | 187.26 |        |        |
| 1974 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 200     | 105 | 16 | 4             | 7  | na  | 403       | 7.8  | 14   | -            | -   | 45 | 5             | 62 | 7  | -              | -    | 23,898 | 225.88  | 5131   | 43.06  | 825    | 7.86  | na    | na     | 282.61 |        |        |
| 1975 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 200     | 120 | 17 | 8             | 14 | na  | 442       | 12.6 | 28   | 1            | 18  | 1  | 80            | 7  | 76 | 9              | -    | -      | 38,090  | 300.75 | 7507   | 62.50  | 825   | 7.86  | na     | na     | 43.597 |        |
| 1976 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 270     | 135 | 13 | 1             | 9  | na  | 5         | 7.9  | 12   | -            | 46  | 2  | 80            | 7  | 87 | 8              | -    | -      | 51,201  | 278.27 | 8682   | 64.18  | 825   | 7.86  | na     | na     | 44.43  |        |
| 1977 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 290     | 170 | 21 | 7             | 4  | na  | 3         | 14.5 | 7.9  | 12           | -   | 46 | 2             | 80 | 7  | 87             | 8    | -      | -       | 80,009 | 352.99 | 10,107 | 58.45 | 825   | 7.86   | na     | na     | 412.49 |
| 1978 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 210     | 138 | 6  | 4             | 8  | na  | 145       | 12.6 | 22   | -            | 51  | 3  | 50            | 8  | 62 | 9              | -    | -      | 78,053  | 351.11 | 10,000 | 72.46  | 825   | 7.86  | na     | na     | 86.053 |        |
| 1979 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 200     | 170 | 16 | 4             | 7  | na  | 140       | 5.1  | 16   | 1            | 48  | 3  | 55            | 7  | -  | -              | -    | -      | 80,786  | 425.08 | 11,344 | 66.72  | 229   | 1.39  | na     | na     | 823.57 |        |
| 1980 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 225     | 145 | 10 | 4             | 7  | na  | 138       | 8.6  | 16   | -            | 37  | 3  | 45            | 3  | -  | -              | -    | -      | 88,500  | 413.10 | 12,919 | 89.10  | 1800  | 11.03 | na     | na     | 543.17 |        |
| 1981 | Anchorage   | MS     | David Zietlow      | 240     | 180 | 9  | 6             | 7  | na  | 135       | 18.8 | 22   | 1            | 47  | 3  | 42            | 4  | -  | -              | -    | -      | 128,059 | 600.37 | 13,421 | 85.13  | 2810  | 18.31 | na     | na     | 713.23 |        |
| 1975 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 56      | 38  | 3  | 2             | 1  | na  | 19        | 13.9 | 2    | -            | -   | 25 | 6             | 45 | 4  | -              | -    | 9518   | 250.47  | 871    | 22.92  | 310    | 8.16  | na    | na     | 281.55 |        |        |
| 1976 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 57      | 28  | 7  | 2             | 1  | na  | 7         | 14.0 | -    | -            | -   | 23 | 5             | 30 | 5  | -              | -    | 13,640 | 487.14  | 1893   | 87.61  | 1893   | 87.61 | na    | na     | 544.75 |        |        |
| 1977 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 54      | 34  | 3  | 2             | 1  | na  | 3         | 17.9 | 1    | -            | -   | 25 | 7             | 53 | 5  | -              | -    | 10,081 | 286.50  | 924    | 27.17  | 618    | 18.12 | na    | na     | 341.79 |        |        |
| 1978 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 55      | 36  | 1  | 2             | 2  | na  | 44        | 12.1 | 2    | 2            | -   | 21 | 4             | 28 | 4  | -              | -    | 17,690 | 498.94  | 1386   | 37.94  | 1386   | 37.94 | na    | na     | 534.88 |        |        |
| 1979 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 56      | 40  | 7  | 1             | 2  | na  | 1         | 11.2 | 5    | 1            | -   | 26 | 5             | 68 | 6  | -              | -    | 21,614 | 525.38  | 1325   | 33.13  | 1325   | 33.13 | na    | na     | 558.48 |        |        |
| 1980 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 70      | 45  | 7  | 2             | 3  | na  | 7         | 53   | 11.5 | 4            | -   | 25 | 6             | 54 | 6  | -              | -    | 21,854 | 481.20  | 1500   | 33.33  | 210    | 4.87  | na    | na     | 519.20 |        |        |
| 1981 | Fairbanks   | MS     | Herbert Meier      | 68      | 49  | 3  | 3             | 5  | na  | 3         | 12.4 | 12   | 2            | -   | 22 | 6             | 41 | 4  | -              | -    | 25,325 | 516.84  | 2537   | 51.77  | 285    | 5.82  | na    | na     | 574.43 |        |        |
| 1976 | Eagle River | MS     | Vicor Mark Braun   | 18      | 12  | -  | -             | -  | na  | 4.3       | -    | -    | -            | -   | 5  | 3             | -  | -  | -              | -    | 2393   | 199.42  | 545    | 45.41  | -      | -     | na    | na     | 244.83 |        |        |
| 1977 | Eagle River | MS     | Thomas Spitzelberg | 25      | 12  | 6  | -             | 2  | na  | 10.0      | 2    | -    | (2)          | -   | 12 | 2             | 23 | 4  | -              | -    | 8,188  | 515.67  | 1388   | 115.50 | -      | -     | na    | na     | 632.17 |        |        |
| 1978 | Eagle River | MS     | Thomas Spitzelberg | 35      | 17  | 6  | -             | 4  | na  | 8.9       | 2    | -    | (8)          | -   | 26 | 5             | 81 | 6  | -              | -    | 5,221  | 338.53  | 2085   | 123.23 | 37     | 2.18  | na    | na     | 461.99 |        |        |
| 1979 | Eagle River | MS     | Thomas Spitzelberg | 32      | 21  | 3  | -             | 1  | na  | 2         | 8.1  | -    | -            | (2) | -  | 25            | 4  | 60 | 8              | -    | -      | 7,234   | 444.48 | 2247   | 107    | -     | -     | na     | na     | 551.48 |        |
| 1980 | Eagle River | MS     | Thomas Spitzelberg | 65      | 28  | 7  | 2             | 4  | na  | 5.7       | 3    | -    | (2)          | -   | 28 | 4             | -  | -  | -              | -    | 31,789 | 421.04  | 2984   | 102.11 | 400    | 14.28 | na    | na     | 542.43 |        |        |
| 1981 | Eagle River | MS     | Thomas Spitzelberg | 84      | 32  | 2  | -             | 1  | na  | 4.2       | 5.8  | 2    | -            | (9) | -  | 35            | 6  | -  | -              | -    | 14,536 | 454.25  | 3868   | 120.88 | -      | -     | na    | na     | 575.13 |        |        |
| 1979 | Sitka       | MS     | Dave Leash         | 44      | 30  | 11 | 2             | 4  | na  | 4.1       | 7.5  | -    | -            | -   | 24 | 7             | 24 | 4  | -              | -    | 19,121 | 637.37  | 782    | 28.40  | -      | -     | na    | na     | 663.71 |        |        |
| 1980 | Sitka       | MS     | Dave Leash         | 42      | 37  | 1  | 5             | 3  | na  | 37        | 7.4  | -    | -            | -   | 25 | 8             | 21 | 7  | -              | -    | 24,500 | 862.16  | 1774   | 47.95  | 508    | 13.67 | na    | na     | 723.78 |        |        |
| 1981 | Sitka       | MS     | Dave Leash         | 70      | 41  | 3  | -             | 2  | na  | 6.2       | 2    | -    | -            | -   | 24 | 6             | 40 | 8  | -              | -    | 28,919 | 656.56  | 2370   | 57.80  | 1068   | 28.05 | na    | na     | 740.41 |        |        |
| 1980 | Kenai       | MS     | David Zietlow      | 48      | 22  | 2  | 1             | 1  | na  | 5.5       | -    | -    | -            | -   | 14 | 7             | -  | -  | -              | -    | 16,800 | 783.64  | 600    | 27.27  | -      | -     | na    | na     | 790.91 |        |        |
| 1981 | Kenai       | MS     | Carl Busse         | 48      | 29  | 3  | 5             | -  | na  | -         | -    | -    | -            | -   | 15 | 4             | -  | -  | -              | -    | 25,060 | 384.14  | 678    | 23.38  | 375    | 12.93 | na    | na     | 910.79 |        |        |





possible. This was the life for Lantree—he had little desire to paint landscapes or nature as the Impressionists did, for, as he said, “nature betrayed me.” Yes, the innocence of nature was far removed from Lantree. His figures are depicted with an accuracy that is almost cruel. He sought out and depicted people stripped of their protective masks by drugs or drink, ill-living or sensual pleasure. In fact, a good many of Lantree’s works were actually drawn in the bordellos he frequented.

On the other hand, Lantree was quite capable of producing more positive art, as his fine collection of equestrian and circus canvasses would point out. But the medium that Lantree excelled in was the poster. With an extraordinary control of line and bold, flat areas of color, he made the poster as important a form of graphic art as any

other. He also gained public recognition. Parisians saw his work and were captivated. Many peeled the posters from walls and carried them off for their own collections. Unlike that of many artists, Lantree’s art was accepted in his own time.

In 1901, when he was 36, time ran out for Lantree. Partially paralyzed, almost deaf and suffering from a dozen ailments, he had paid the price for reckless living and went home to die. His death was heralded as a victory for “pure” art by those critics who objected to the seamy side of his work and as a loss by those who recognized his talent for brilliant character study. Whatever the case may be, as time passes on Lantree has been labeled neither a moralist or a muckraker, but as an individual who simply painted what he saw.

JOEL LEYRER

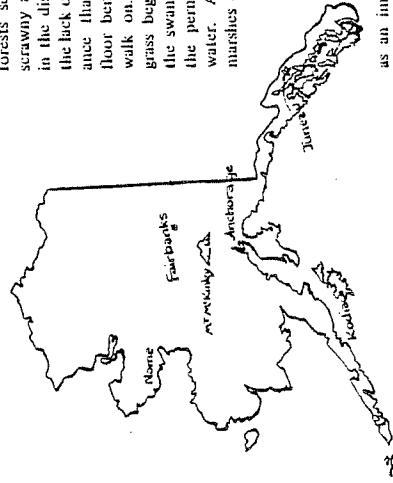
## Alaska!

On March 30, 1867, the United States made an intelligent purchase. For only \$7,200,000 Russia gave us 586,000 square miles of wild and woody real estate called Alaska. That land was destined to become the 49th state of America’s union in 1958. And with its approval for statehood it shattered most every geographical record conceivable.

Alaska took all honors in size, hands down. The Texans, who had formerly boasted of their broad expanse of land, now gulped in awe at an acreage that more than doubled their own. Alaska, all included, covers an area equal to one fifth of the rest of the United States. Placed over the lower 48, it would stretch from north to south across the rest of the Union from Mexico to Canada, and across the contiguous states from Florida to California. Alaska is the northernmost state. It is the westernmost state. And... believe it or not, it is also the easternmost state since part of the Aleutian chain stretches past the 180 degree meridian. It has the most islands and the largest coastline (this incidentally gives Alaska another 560,000 square miles of land). I guess one doesn’t even have to include the multitude of rivers, mountains, glaciers, etc., to make the point clear.

ern Hemisphere. She can be seen for miles, even from Anchorage, which is over 200 miles away. The closer one approaches, the more intense that “snow cone” appears. In fact, even from a distance of thirty miles, a considerable craning of the neck is necessary to see the top. Her summit is so far up that more often than not it is concealed in the clouds. Happy is the tourist who happens to see the whole mountain. Years ago the natives here had named her “Denali” meaning “the great one.”

Interestingly, some modern men are not content to look from afar; they consider her 20,300 feet impressive enough to warrant closer inspec-



tion. I suppose that’s why climbers attempt to write their names in fame by scaling her icy heights. Most lose courage after days of brutal effort bring them to huge crevasses in the ice. Some unfortunates lose more than that when they try to continue.

These crevasses are part of a living mass of ice. It’s as if half the mountain itself was moving, causing new chasms and gaps to open up out of nowhere. Classified by the scientists as glaciers, these gelid vehicles are made of flowing ice which is sometimes hundreds of feet thick. They exist in the uppermost reaches of the mountains—cold and unfriendly. They stretch forward and backward down the mountains, like giant tentacles that are lethargically and ponderously extending. Their normal movements are imperceptible to the eye, yet at times huge chunks will cave in suddenly and tumble down the mountain with a thunderous roar. The agony of a glacier as it splits up

from the heaving and buckling within, is a phenomenal sight. It seems as though the tremendous white monster is in its death throes, suffering unbearable pain.

Almost every part of Alaska offers some such extraordinary sight. That’s why this state presents so much to the tourist and traveler, to those who are willing to go a long way for a lot. Things are really different way up in Alaska. The rugged and wild terrain is far enough north to feature some arctic characteristics, such as permafrost and tundra.

Permafrost is frozen ground that lies a few feet under the surface of arctic regions. Because of this, no real solid flora can establish itself. The forests seldom have large pines or oaks, only scrawny and mangled spruce trees, spread about in the disarray of the years passed by. Here it is the lack of symmetry and the undisturbed appearance that substantiates a natural beauty. The floor beneath is spongy, soft, cool, pleasant to walk on. The line where the meadows of tall grass begin seems to designate the beginning of the swamps. For wherever the sun has a chance, the permafrost melts enough to leave standing water. And never during summer do these marshes disappear, since the ice below functions

as an immense container. Tundra, which covers the northern third of the state, is the result of a higher level of permafrost. In this area there are few if any trees. Most of the undulating territory is covered with small bushes and wild flowers. The variation in topography, as one travels south to north, makes this scenery seem fresh and inviting.

In order to sketch Alaska’s geography with more clarity, the state has been divided into six general areas. The boundless expanse of land is not just an endless wilderness of mountains, trees and glaciers.

Southeastern Alaska is often called the Panhandle, that area between the sea and Canada’s western border which stretches southward like a finger beckoning to those who live in the lower 48. It is a rain-washed and scenic area extending from Ketchikan on the south to Haines and Skagway on the north. Most travel in this area is by aircraft (the daring bushpilots!) or boat. Only

Haines, which is far enough north to be on the Alaska Highway, can be reached by automobile. Juneau, the capital city is located here as well as the population centers of Sitka, Petersburg, Wrangell and Yakutat. The terrain is similar to Norway, with towering mountains reaching upward directly from the saltwater beaches, hillsides that are literally studded with verdant Sitka spruce, and waters alive with salmon, trout and other fishes.

Southern Alaska is at the head of the Gulf of Alaska, protected from the cold northern weather by the Alaska Range and washed from the south by the warm waters of the Japanese current. Anchorage, the state's largest city, is located in this region, but it must share the beauty with such cities as Seward, Palmer, Valdez, Soldatna and Homer. Most of Southern Alaska is along the sea, but the inland area does include the famed Matanuska Valley, where a short but fantastic growing season helps produce huge vegetables. This area contains most of Alaska's roads and is the easiest to tour.

Southwestern Alaska is the longest and narrowest of Alaska's regions, stretching some 550 miles along the Alaska Peninsula, and another 1500 miles along the Aleutian Island chain. The major population is on Kodiak Island, but small communities dot the region all the way to the end of the chain at Attu Island. The Aleut Indians are the main inhabitants of this inaccessible area. The major wildlife forms are the fur seals of the Pribilof Islands and the famous brown bears of Kodiak. The Katmai National Monument is a part of Southwestern Alaska, as are the twenty-four active volcanoes that surround it.

Western Alaska is one of the remaining Eskimo areas of the state. It is a land of gigantic river deltas, small villages, fish camps, milk summers and windy winters. Nome is the chief city, built during the gold rush of 1898 and surviving today on commerce and visitors. It is a rough tundra area with fewer mountains than southern Alaska.

Interior Alaska is the 49th state's second most populous area. The city of Fairbanks (350 miles north of Anchorage) accounts for most of the people. For a once doomed gold rush town, it has experienced a phenomenal growth since the start of the pipeline project. There are many picturesque hot springs in the rolling hills, punctuated by mountain ranges and covered with forests teeming with game. The entire region is an outdoorsman's haven with a weather pattern quite

similar to that of Wisconsin's. Gold flecks are still found in prospector's pans, moose challenge automobiles—and occasionally win—and trappers still go for months without seeing other humans as they run their far-flung lines.

Alaska's Arctic North is the place most people think about when they conjure up visions of Alaska. And even then they usually are at least half wrong. The Arctic regions do have snow in the wintertime, but very little, since the Arctic is actually a mammoth desert! Summer melts the white blanket and begins to turn on the oven. Temperatures often soar to 90°, since there is little vegetation to protect the earth. And one must also consider that for two full months the sun never sets. Six months later the opposite occurs, and the sun hides its face for two months. It is then that the cold returns and temperatures nose-dive: Winter, to be sure, is long throughout the state. However, once the spring break-up is over in early June, the country bursts to life and opens up countless exciting places to see and explore.

This is Alaska—the land. To paint the complete picture one must study more than just these geographical aspects of the state. The people there are interesting; the stories they tell are worth relating to others. In future articles I would like to finish the painting by directing your attention toward such details, to tell you about some of these people, to show how their lives are rooted

to the environment, and to explain about the wildlife, hunting and fishing that this land provides. Alaska is a great place, as these words Governor Hammond once addressed to a group of tourists indicate:

"Welcome to Alaska...the unique experience.

As you travel our roads, our waterways, our airways and our trails, take time to look about you and enjoy the moment. For in this fast-changing world, Alaska remains much as it was. Alaska is the place man had in mind when he invented getting away from it all.

Climb our mountains, but keep them free of debris. Fish our streams, but leave fish for others. Sail our waters, but leave them unpolluted. Help keep our Great Land unspoiled.

When you are once again home, you will find that the Alaska experience continues to grow, and grow, and you'll not be satisfied until you return once more.

And then you'll begin to understand the *real* Alaska, not only a great state, but a great state of mind as well."

MARK WAGNER

## REVIEWS

### the best of brahms

The name of Johannes Brahms is most frequently associated with his popular lullaby. This bit of music, however, occupies only a niche in the vast expanse of the master's *Second Symphony*, and there only in disguised form. We must not discount the artistic giant of the Romantic Age because of the oft-voiced complaint, "He puts me to sleep."

The historical importance of Johannes Brahms (born 1833) lies in the fact that he employed the


classical forms of Mozart and Haydn but used modern components. First of all, an expanded harmonic vocabulary in his compositions took music to the limit in its chorded relationships. The relationships of one chord to another and their mutual effect is called harmonic *function*. Function in harmony is like the verb in language. It gives the music direction and meaning. Without harmonic function the line of music is like a string of nouns and adjectives. In the second

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near to the Northwest lies that last frontier, Alaska. Mountain heaped upon mountain, river joined to river, it is a vast land—a rugged, defiantly indomitable wilderness. Huge areas remain unscathed by man; his only real foothold is on the narrow coastlines. And he is barely in control of these, a small grasp on the whole at best. Penetration inland is possible, but usually short-lived. In the backwoods, even the "old timers" have turned wearily from the relentless trials that beset them.

In a land of such fierce climate and challenging topography, it is no surprise that the Alaskans themselves are, by necessity, an extraordinary group of people. The typical Alaskan is likely to be a young man, one who has the physical endurance to make it under the severest of conditions.

The average age of the population is twenty-three! These are men who have dreams that they see can be fulfilled, men with a deep desire for individualism.

Their desires and goals are generally uniform. The bulk of the Alaskans came from the lower 48. They are typical U.S. citizens with the same ancestors and customs. What did Alaska offer that enticed them to forsake their old society and scramble for a new one? The answer is that almost anyone can go farther and faster here than anywhere else in the nation. Good reporters become editors ten years ahead of time, young lawyers reach the top of the heap in a single step, new doctors are accepted and overloaded at once.

The call of fortune has found many adher-

few years. Last year the first WELS Christian Day School in Alaska opened. The church and school facilities are being enlarged. Synodous Lutheran Church in Fairbanks also is a mission church, with some 75 communicants. There is no church building yet; high prices

have hindered building projects. But a parsonage has just been constructed, and a chapel is in the making. Exploratory services are being conducted in the Eagle River-Chugach area this year, in the hopes of opening another mission.

MARK WAGNER

ents. Some who have come seeking \$10-an-hour jobs in construction, end up making twice that much as electricians. Others find themselves working with their hands rather than at a desk, but are content with the sizable paycheck that accompanies the change. Garbage disposal men make \$18,000 a year, city workers \$20,000 and skilled laborers far more. For instance, an emergency call for a plumber cost one landlady \$85 an hour for a man who couldn't solve the problem!

But hold on a moment! You probably envisioned the normal Alaskan wearing a parka, sitting on the ice trying to drag his food up through a hole. You pictured a dark-skinned, black-haired man who delights in rubbing noses. Well, to a certain degree that is true. Primitive villages still dot the coastline and riverbanks. Here the natives still do live off the land, hunting and fishing, content with their livelihood. Modern technology has confronted them, maybe changed their lives a little. Perhaps they use a motor on their boats now; perhaps they have rifles to hunt with. But for the most part, the natives of these outlying regions have thrown up a sturdy wall to civilization, saying "no thanks" to American culture. They want to remain part of the land as their ancestors did.

Yet not everyone can withstand the onslaught. Change is a way of life for the white Alaskan, and the accompanying impact of change on the state's native population—the Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians—has been little short of revolutionary. Within a single generation, jet aircraft has come to a people whose lives had been conditioned by the speed and range of a dog team or reindeer herd. The nuclear age has burst over cultures rooted in the Stone Age. The cash economy has dealt a mortal blow to the subsistence economy and the old ways of living off the land. As a result the Alaskan native is now entangled in so many social, political and economic problems that he doesn't know which way to turn.

A recent report to the President of the United States by the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska declared: "We find the native population surviving on a mixture of subsistence economy supplemented by a few jobs but principally by relief checks. Housing standards are deplorable and clearly the lowest in the nation." Often I saw natives just sitting in a city park. They seemed lost, as if be-

wildered at their own existence. There were those who lay drunk night after night in the gutter. As with their southern relatives the fire-water takes its toll. They have little physical tolerance for alcohol, and less resistance when it comes to using it. Another check from the government poured down his throat, the native Alaskan wandered down the street. Fancy lights glow distastefully in his inebriated brain. He steadies himself by leaning heavily against a parking meter, yelling obscenities at every car that passes by, cursing the white man for stealing his land. Another bar, another drink, down Fourth Avenue where the action is. He is constantly fighting, fighting the white man, fighting his brother, fighting himself, struggling to get out of the trap that has caught him between two very different cultures.

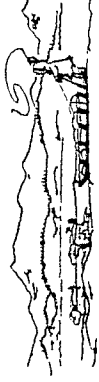
He needs help! Sure, the government is trying to rectify the injustice by giving natives more money. Great! So now the dark-haired fellow is going to go out and pour his reality down the drain. (The easy money buys liquid fire and immorality. Money is simply not the solution.)

There are those who must think that it is. Money has become part of the character of the North; wealth has caused many of the problems. In recent years the economy of Alaska has skyrocketed. The modern-day gold rush, known as the Transalaskan Pipeline, has opened up many job opportunities. For those who were lucky enough to be hired, a thousand-dollar paycheck is waiting after every week's work. Minus seventy degrees, broken hands and fingers cannot stop these young adventurers from getting their hands on that kind of money. Thrill-seekers, you might call them. They love the wild life, whether it's alone up in the Arctic or on Fourth Avenue. They cash checks with a passion. Man for man they cash more checks proportionate to total bank deposits than any other group of Americans. Big money, that's their game. And it attracts others too, as the last issue of *Time* magazine exclaims, "Nearly everywhere, prostitutes, con-men and gamblers have swarmed in to help them spend their weekly paychecks."

I met many people like this during my summer in Alaska. One fellow was twenty years old. He owned three cars, two houses, land in Alaska and in Virginia, and was just coming back from a three-month vacation in California. That's how the pipeline corporation, *Alfyaska*, operates. They send their workers out on the job for nine weeks, then give them some time to recuperate. It is

then they look for fun. They leave money to burn, money which gives them a careless and self-sufficient attitude.

Many Alaskans subscribe to the notion of "Social Darwinism," the economic survival of the fittest. Those who have lots of money, leave lots of influence. Those who are willing to climb to the top of the totem pole by any means become the former people's handymen, the kind that stab their mother for a dollar. This is a distressing fact. Crime is on the rise. In Anchorage, robberies are up 100% since 1973; in Fairbanks, 200%. Hundreds of cars are stolen, the valuable parts



taken off and then dumped in vacant lots.

"The love of money is the root of all evil," you may say as you sit back smugly. "That's what they get for being greedy!" If you haven't been there, you can probably say this quite calmly. But the temptation is there in Alaska, and few can resist its enticements. In the native's shoes you might be hard-pressed to act differently.

There is an answer... one which is yet in an embryonic stage of development. It began in 1967 when Missionary Habben did exploratory work in Anchorage. Today the seed which he planted is blossoming through the work of Pastor Zietlow, Pastor Meier, and Vicar Braun. These men are extending a helping hand to all who seek it. They represent the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod. They

Remember the opening paragraph where I stated that man has a very shallow foothold in the "Great Land," a small grasp of the whole at best? The same holds true for the spiritual Alaska. We have barely begun to solve some of the problems there, to save souls from sacrificing themselves to the god of riches. Our foothold is a small one. But the Gospel is at work there, and it needs our prayers for support. This is where our money goes, to counter the money of the world. This is why we study today, to save the souls of tomorrow.

Faith Lutheran Church in Anchorage is a mission church with approximately 100 communicants. It has grown mightily in the past

# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

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Thursday, March 11

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Greetings from the northern sector of the lower 48! We may not have the mountains and tundra that you can boast of, but we certainly have had our share of snow here in Milwaukee this winter.

Permit me to briefly introduce myself and the purpose of this letter. I'm Mark Wagner, a senior at the Seminary in Mequon, and also a part-time vicar in the Milwaukee WELS Campus Ministry. During the past several years I have had the opportunity to spend four summers in your state, (as some of you probably remember), and it didn't take me too long to fall in love with the "Land of the Midnight Sun." Since I do lay claim to being Annette Hartzell's brother (her husband Lance is the principle at Faith in Anchorage), you can most likely get my connection with your territory. My first summer was spent in Anchorage, and then the other three were spent out at a cannery in Naknek, on the peninsula. Needless to say, I miss the blooming fireweed, the Chugach Mountains, or Denali in the distance on a clear day. And I miss the salmon too, even though we saw so many dead fish at the cannery that we tend to count fish instead of sheep in our dreams.

The purpose of this letter and questionnaire is related to my schooling at the Sem. One of the requirements for our degree is to complete an original research paper for Church History. The best option for that, is ofcourse, to work in an area where you have had personal experience or at least personal interest. Both Nate Radtke (last year's vicar at Kenai) and I have chosen to do this on an aspect of Alaska mission work in the Wisconsin synod. And if I am going to dig out the information needed, I have to have someone else--like you--be my eyes and ears.

The questionnaire explains that I am going to try to write about the WELS Mission philosophy that has been used in Alaska. This is especially interesting because it is a "frontier" field for America and has grown rather rapidly. I want to know why. And the best way for me to determine how the hand of God has directed his work up there is to obtain the facts and feelings of those who have been involved...and that's you!

If any of you would like to see the end result of this endeavor, I do plan to send each of your pastors a copy of the manuscript when it is finished. Oh, and for that very reason (since this also goes on file in the Sem library), if there is anything you would rather not be quoted as saying, please let me know.

Many thanks, my brothers and sisters in the faith! May the Lord bless you and your families with an ever increasing measure of his love.

In His Service,

*Mark*  
Mark Wagner

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MISSION PHILOSOPHY EMPLOYED IN ALASKA

Pastors

What? Another questionnaire?? Sorry...it's an impersonal, relatively unexciting way to dig out historical information, but desperately needed.

No brothers, this is not another S I or CI-S,E,L,B form. However, I'm hoping that you will hit me with direct and complete answers, since these won't be found in the next issue of BeReM (unless, of course, they immediately call me into an executive position...please warn them, for me, of the impending danger of giving a young man too much power...a second thought, don't warn them, I will).

Please accomplish this task within two weeks and return. "Oh joy!" I know...but do your best. Thanks, and let me know when I can return the favor.

PERSONAL

1. Have you had experience in other mission fields? If so, where and for how long?
2. What was your initial reaction to your call into the Alaskan mission field?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. If you do not have a written history of the congregation that can be copied and sent back, please sketch in briefly some of the highlights of your mission's history?
2. Please send recent bulletins, brochures etc.--anything which may have pictures or drawings of your members and/or building.
3. Describe an interesting experience that you had or person that you met in the course of your ministry here. (ex: repeated visits to a stubborn neighbor turn out fruitful, a peculiar happening during a service...humor appreciated/!)

MISSION PHILOSOPHY

Defined: the way in which you plan to carry out Christ's commission in your specific area.

A. Objectives

1. First, what effect have the following had in determining your goals:
  - a. Territory (city, mountains, climate, physical limitations etc.)?
  - b. Background of the people whom you serve?
  - c. The image of our synod?
2. As sort of an overall summary (and I hope that this proves to be easier than it sounds to me) answer these questions:
  - a. What were your original objectives when you arrived at your call?
  - b. How have these objectives been fulfilled?
  - c. How have these objectives changed from then till now?

B. Approach: Putting the objectives into effect.

1. What methods of contact do you utilize in outreach? (Evangelism, canvassing, work acquaintances etc.)
2. What role does congregational fellowship play in your mission endeavors?
3. What group(s) of people seem to respond the best to this outreach?
4. How many opportunities do you have to witness to natives (or minorities)? Have any been integrated into the congregation?

5. Please react to this statement:

Give your people a chapel and then give them the goal of filling it, rather than making the completion of the building their ultimate goal.

6. What are some of the pro's and con's of establishing the congregation (or a member) as the general contractor in building?

FINALLY

1. Complete: Our mission efforts would greatly increase if we only had... \_\_\_\_\_ ?

2. What has been your greatest joy in this ministry?

3. What has been your greatest disappointment in this ministry?

OTHER COMMENTS

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE WELS MISSION PHILOSOPHY EMPLOYED IN ALASKA

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What? Another tedious questionnaire? Sorry...it's impersonal and a relatively unexciting way to dig out historical information, but desperately needed.

Please answer the following questions as directly as you can, giving your own personal perspective on the growth of your mission congregation in Alaska. Whatever you cannot answer, feel free to skip (but please...not the whole thing!). If you can work together with your spouse as a team, all the better. However, I do not hereby intend to initiate any household wars...and I realize that there may well be limitations that won't allow both of you to supply answers. At any rate, I will be more than satisfied with the answers either one of you have the time (and energy) or is in the best position to give.

Please accomplish this task within two weeks and return in the self-addressed envelope. "Oh joy!" I know...but do your best. And thanks ever so much. Let me know when I can return the favor. Again, my thanks and appreciation...!

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. Have you been involved in a mission congregation before? If so, where and for how long?
2. What brought you to this particular place in Alaska? How long have you been there?
3. How did you get started with this WELS congregation? (as brief description of your church background, ties with other members or any additional information not supplied already in question # 2 above).
4. How did you react when you finally learned that you would get your first pastor?
5. To what degree do you feel that those expectations of congregational life (at the time of Q. # 3) have been fulfilled?



MISSION PHILOSOPHY

Defined: the way in which you plan to carry out Christ's commission in your specific area.  
Cf. Matthew 28:18-20 -- make disciples of all nations.

A. Objectives

1. What effect do you think the following have had in determining your congregation's outreach:

1. Territory (city, mountains, climate, physical limitations etc.)?

2. Background of the people in this area?

3. The image of our synod?

2. Complete: Our mission efforts would greatly increase if we only had...\_\_\_\_\_?

B. Approach

1. In what ways have the lay-people of your congregation been influential in the mission outreach to your community?

2. In what ways do you think the lay-people could be used even more effectively in this outreach effort?

3. What role does congregational fellowship play in your mission endeavors?



## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

### Periodicals

Alaska: The Magazine of Life on the Last Frontier. Volumes XXX to XLVIII.

Book of Reports and Memorials, for the Biennial Conventions of the WELS,  
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Faith Lutheran Christian Day School Bulletin, edited by Lance Hartzell.

### Northwestern Lutheran Articles:

- a. October 1, 1967 -- "Pacific Northwest Report."
- b. March 17, 1968 -- "Alaska: One of God's Last Frontiers," Pastor David Zietlow.
- c. September 28, 1969 -- "Pacific Northwest Report."
- d. March 15, 1970 -- "What Mean These Stones?" Pastor David Zietlow.
- e. January 3, 1971 -- "Alaska Missionary uses Soul Conservation," Pastor David Zietlow.
- f. August 26, 1973 -- "A Letter from God's Man in Anchorage, Alaska," Pastor David Zietlow.
- g. December 29, 1974 -- "Pacific Northwest Report."
- h. December 14, 1975 -- "A Letter Tells a Story of Faith," Pastor David Zietlow.
- i. March 6, 1977 -- "First Lutheran C.D.S. in Alaska," Pastor David Zietlow.
- j. April 27, 1980 -- "Dedication Near the Arctic Circle," Pastor Norbert Meier.

Report to the Ten (9) Districts, of the WELS, May 1968 through May 1980.

Statistical Reports: for major Lutheran bodies--LCA, ALC, LCMS and WELS.

### Church History Papers

Baur, Martin. The Early Activity of WELS in Alaska, with Special Emphasis on the Southeastern Region, April 15, 1981.

Ibisch, Paul A. The First Chapter in Alaskan Lutheranism: Russian America, April 15, 1981.

### Questionnaires

Information was obtained from the following people:

|                                  |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Pastor David Zietlow (Anch)      | Miss Barb Hanel (Anch)   |
| Pastor Norbert Meier (Fbnks)     | The Wilsons (Anch)       |
| Pastor Thomas Spiegelberg (E.R.) | The Perhams (Anch)       |
| Pastor David Laabs (Sitka)       | The Heustons (E.R.)      |
| Pastor Ralph Baur (Seattle)      | The Goldschmidts (Sitka) |
| Teacher Lance Hartzell (Anch)    | The Stricklers (Kenai)   |
|                                  | The Stuarts (Kenai)      |

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

-continued-

GBHM Files, on each of the mission congregations.

Personal Interviews

Pete Zietlow, son of Pastor Dave Zietlow: Junior at WLS

Nate Radtke, former vicar at Kenai: Senior at WLS

Histories

Ahlstrom, Sydney E. A Religious History of the American People, New York: Image Books, 1975, Vol. 1.

Sweet, William Warren. Religion in the Development of American Culture, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.