

THE MISSION SEMINAR BOOKLETS OF 1961-1984

THE CRYSTAL BALLS OF WELS' FUTURE IN HOME MISSIONS

Richard Warnecke  
Church History Paper  
1984

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W  
Mequon, Wisconsin

THE MISSION SEMINAR BOOKLETS OF 1961-1984

THE CRYSTAL BALLS OF WELS' FUTURE IN HOME MISSIONS.

Dear Professor Fredrich,

They were right ! I am refering to all the past Mission Seminar booklets. Remember 1984's booklet entitled, COMPEL THEM TO COME IN, SO THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FULL ? In session one, page one of that booklet, session leader Kurt Lueneburg said in his introduction, "Up to 50% of us will receive exploratory calls." Well, here I am in an exploratory mission at Somewheresville, Texas, population 13,711. I am writing this letter to you in order to ask you a favor. Would you please encourage every future seminary class to pay close attention to their Mission Seminar booklets?

I hope you do not consider me foolish for making such an odd request. But I have a valid reason for making such a request. Let me explain to you why I find it extremely important to pay close attention to each year's Mission Seminar booklets. I firmly believe that Mission Seminar booklets are really crystal balls which reveal the future of home missions in the WELS. I feel they act as crystal balls in two basic ways. First of all, they reveal the trends of our Synod's home mission outreach. And secondly, while discussing these trends in our home mission outreach, these booklets also disclose some of the practical methods used to reach out with the Gospel of Christ. I would like to discuss some of these things with you.

Maybe you are wondering what led me to have such a strong desire in researching the past 21 years of Mission Seminar booklets. It started in 1984, my last year at the Seminary. I played a major role in the 1984 Mission Seminar, as I was asked to chair one of the sessions. I do not know why I accepted the challenge. I knew very little about our Synod's home mission outreach efforts. I guess I considered myself to be a pretty good pastoral candidate for a small rural congregation since my background exists in a small congregation in Minnesota. Somewheresville, Texas was far from my imagination.

But I accepted the challenge. And am I ever glad I did. For from the time of the 1984 Mission Seminar, my "small rural congregation dream" was darkened by the possibility of a "large city mission field nightmare." I was scared. And at the same time I was filled with questions. One of the questions I decided to answer at that time was this; why did such a trend toward reaching out with the Gospel get started in our Synod? The answer to this question led me to search heavily into all past Mission Seminar booklets. After examining these booklets, I am thoroughly convinced that every Mission Seminar reflects the future of WELS' home mission outreach.

My research led me to the first Mission Seminar booklet which was written in 1961. The theme of this Mission Seminar was, THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND WORLD MISSIONS. Since this seminar seemed to deal extensively with world missions, I almost neglected to read it. Then a nota bene caught my eye at the bottom of the first page. "The term 'World Mission' in this contest is not to be restricted to foreign heathen mission; it is, rather, to be understood as

the activity at home and abroad of bringing into membership with Jesus Christ and fellowship with His Holy Christian Church by the power of God the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments those who have not known, or heard the Salvation which is in Christ the Savior." To my surprise I discovered that a trend was set already at this time. This trend was a mission to take the Gospel to the uncured at home in America. This meant reaching out not only in German rural areas, but every area and ethnic background of America's melting pot of people.

This zeal for home missions existed in our Wisconsin Synod before 1961. This was pointed out by many booklets. Yet this zeal extended into only a few Midwestern states. According to Pastor Norman Berg, Executive Secretary for the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM), our home mission outreach was very conservative. As a Synod we worked in very few states. At that time our mission efforts were primarily extended to only German speaking people, or to people with a Germanic background.<sup>1</sup>

I was completely surprised to see that our WELS' home mission zeal really took off after 1961. Why did it? After digging into the Mission Seminar booklets, I immediately placed all the blame on God and the Missouri Synod. Why God? He has given us the commission to spread His word. Why the Missouri Synod? Here is the reason. "The real birth of Wisconsin Synod home missions occurred in 1961 when we severed bonds with the Missouri Synod. We had taken a doctrinal stand and now we had to defend it. Calls came from many areas where our people had scattered, but our Synod had never followed. Calls came from other concerned Christians, who sympathized with our confessional position. In this way, through the years, it had become

increasingly apparent that circumstances and opportunities have now compelled us to go to all men."<sup>2</sup>

"At present, the center of mission activity has shifted. Europe is no longer the rich source of the Gospel for so many in America. The United States has taken over for itself. Lutheranism as been one of the leaders in the home mission field. The Missouri Synod, in particular, benefitting from the early start afforded by its association with the Leipzig Missionary Society, has many missions, and a very active mission program. The Wisconsin Synod, lulled into a somewhat less zealous attitude by their association with the Missouri Synod, is now feeling the power of the urge to preach the Gospel throughout all of the United States."<sup>3</sup> After breaking our ties with the Missouri Synod because of fellowship factors, we were alone. Big brother was no longer there to lead us in outreach. What was WELS to do?

Indeed the end of fellowship with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod had a tremendous impact on the home mission program of the WELS. In 1961, WELS had 829 congregations. These congregations existed in only 16 states. And WELS worked in only 54 cities. WELS mainly was considered to be Midwestern in its home mission endeavors.<sup>4</sup> Without Missouri by our side, it was time to reach out as a Synod by ourself.

Some of the first home mission attempts by WELS were very weak endeavors in mission work. By 1964 WELS was finally examining the extent of actually founding a mission and supplying a pastor. "Indeed we have a very great obligation to preach the Gospel to all men everywhere because of Christ's command. However because of the limitations of money and manpower, this obligation must

necessarily become limited in its application."<sup>5</sup> The only obligations that the Synod tended to consider were the obligations to follow WELS people into areas where they moved to make their homes and then to respond to their requests for our type of church services in such areas, when a small nucleus of our people extended a call.

It was about this same time that the Synod established a Soul Conservation Committee whose duty it was to accept from local pastors the names of families who moved to areas where we had no Wisconsin Synod churches. The Synod then coordinated this information and kept in touch with these people. Mainly the Synod hoped that in this way these people would continue in the true faith and spread the Gospel throughout the areas in which we had not to that point been able to explore.

At this time in 1964, three goals were accepted by GBHM. They were required to be fulfilled if a successful mission was to be set up according to WELS' standards. First of all, there had to be a number of prospects. These prospects had to express a desire for our type of services. Secondly, there had to be a chance for future growth in one of our new missions. A study of the area was suggested to determine the nationalities in the area, the economic structure of the area, and the churches already in the area. Finally, the Synod considered the nucleus of members already in the area. The GBHM asked many questions before entering a mission field. What was the size and effectiveness of this nucleus? Did the people seem willing to work hard to establish this congregation, or did they expect the Synod to send a man who would take care of everything?

By 1963 the mood of WELS' home mission outreach had changed extensively. Before 1960, our Synod was concerned about outreach, but we never really demonstrated it since Missouri did most of our home mission work. Our chief concern then seemed to center around doctrinal affairs. Even though the years following demanded even more doctrinal strength and unity in the WELS, yet it was at that time that the Synod really showed its concern for reaching out. We can see our mood change with some of the changes in our goals. Mottos were made such as, "Every state by 1978." "One WELS church in every major metro area of our country." Why in the South Atlantic District a goal was established that every mission pastor would start at least one more mission.<sup>7</sup> Again by 1964 our Synod had taken steps in the direction of positive action through the establishment of the Soul Conservation Committee, which I mentioned previously. By the end of 1964 WELS was working in 19 states and 2 provinces of Canada. Our outreach work as a Synod was being rewarded.

In 1965 a new effective trend began to work within our Synod. It was called the "Mission-a-month" plan.<sup>9</sup> This plan set a minimum limit to the number of missions which we hoped to establish each year. In 1964 we doubled our previous year's goal. So in 1964, the Synod attempted to average two missions a month. The question of finance would later prove to be a great problem in setting such a goal.

Somewhere between 1965 and 1966, WELS could not live up to its new goal. A problem came along in the area of manpower and the number of requests which came to us for possible new mission

openings. This apparently was an unforeseeable problem.

To solve the problem, the Synod divided the United States into eleven areas of responsibility which were based on the various existing districts of the Synod. " The task for the GBHM is to implement missionary activity in these areas of responsibility in an orderly fashion, and also within the limitations presented by the availability of manpower and monies."<sup>10</sup> Since there was limited manpower available in 1966, the GBHM had to handle these new requests in the best manner possible by taking into account such things as the proximity of the proposed mission to an established congregation, the number of people to be served by the new mission, and the future growth--potential in the mission. It may not have been a fair answer to these mission requests, but these factors had to be considered.

There was also another aspect in the plans of the GBHM which really applied to my situation as a home missionary. This was the aspect of locality. Which areas of population were the best locations for missions? During 1966 people were still moving off the farms and out of the rural areas to metropolitan cities. Another feature in population movement was the fact that people, who had at one time lived in the cities, were now starting to move back out to the open areas of the suburbs. After studying the population patterns in 1966, the GBHM decided to emphasize city missions while keeping an eye on growth in the suburbs.

This truly was a time of expansion for WELS in 1966. By the end of 1966, WELS churches were established in 24 of the United States. The goal set for 1978 still looked very reachable at this time.



Due to the lack of manpower in establishing one new mission per month, in 1967 the GBHM planned to establish 15 missions. They planned to use a large number of Seminary graduates for this purpose. At that time the GBHM planned to establish 15 missions in 1967. They also agreed to increase that figure to 18 in 1969. They agreed to increase that figure again until 1971. Then in 1971 two missions would be established each month.<sup>17</sup>

As WELS entered the 1970's, new guidelines, ideas, and goals were incorporated into the home mission program. The Synod's expectations for our home missions actually were no different from before. But now they were switched in priority. The goals were: "1. To reach primarily the unchurched by the establishment of mission congregations. 2. To conserve the membership of WELS." The guidelines for this activity were even more specific. "1. We want to concentrate on major population centers (50,000 or more). 2. We hope that within 10 years a mission will go self-supporting. 3. We hope to establish contact congregations in such a regional pattern as to cover all the continental United States with representative congregations. 4. We hope missions will make their plans with the possibility of setting up Christian Day Schools eventually."<sup>12</sup> Specific goals were set up for 1970-1975. WELS was looking for a communicant membership increase of 2000 each year. We planned on setting up 16-18 new missions. We also hoped to expand into 32 states and 3 provinces. By 1975 the GBHM projected that we would exist in 9 new states.

By 1971 the GBHM realized that a home missionary would meet two sorts of people as he did his work. He many times would work

with a nucleus make up of WELS people or those who have left other synods for confessional reasons. But the priority of the home missionary was to work with the unchurched of an area, especially in larger cities. In order to reach out into these unchurched areas, the pastor was to make good use of WELS people already in his area. "The GBHM's projected goals show that we hope to serve 164 major population centers by 1975. For many years WELS families have been moving out of the Midwest area into regions void of confessional Lutheranism. Accordingly, the GBHM established regional 'outposts' of confessional Lutheranism, in order to conserve WELS souls with its mission efforts. This 'regional church idea' is carried one step further when these 'outpost' churches are given responsibility for mission work in their areas. This concept of mission strategy has made it possible for our WELS pastors to serve more effectively larger regional areas of our country, and provide a jump-off point for other mission work in a certain regional area".<sup>13</sup>

By the end of 1975, a new era became apparent. An era which directed us mainly to the unchurched areas of the United States. By 1978 WELS gave an old program a new name. We called the new program the "Exploratory Program". The objective of this program was to determine the feasibility of establishing a permanent WELS congregation in this locality to serve the unchurched, WELS members, and concerned Christians with the Gospel of Christ.<sup>14</sup> There were also three basic goals set up for the Exploratory Program. The exploratory's chief goal was to obtain mission status in six months after exploratory status was granted. Its second goal was to gain a committed nucleus of 25 communicants. Its third goal was to obtain a minimum, average financial commitment of \$300 per

communicant per year.

By the end of the 1970's there were 1133 congregations in the Wisconsin Synod. WELS had congregations in 48 states and in almost every major metropolitan area of the United States. Everything seemed to be running so smoothly. Yet great problems developed as the WELS entered into the 1980's. The greatest problem was summed up in one word--inflation. Spiraling inflation necessitated a decrease first in the extent of mission activity. Since the money was not there, neither was the effort to reach out. As the cost of living for the missionary increased, the amount of Synod subsidy also had to keep pace. Since the Synod finances were not keeping pace with the rate of inflation, it was logical that adding to the existing number of home missionaries also proved to be impossible.

With the rise of inflation, the price of land also soared to outrageous prices. Then the price of chapel construction also was too costly to continue at the present rate of establishing chapels. "When land soars to such exorbitant prices at \$100,000 plus per acre, when a rather modest chapel can cost well in excess of \$400,000 one begins to wonder whether or not it will remain feasible in the future to continue our present practice of building mission chapels."<sup>15</sup>

But inflation was not the only factor that affected our home mission outreach. The population of our country was shifting to the sunbelt. "If the Wisconsin Synod is to keep abreast of this situation, it will require further expansion away from the "heartland" of the Synod, further broadening of social and cultural awareness as we come into contact with more and more people far-

removed from our own German Lutheran heritage and mindset."<sup>16</sup>

No longer would our home missionaries have the assurance that people would be familiar with the Lutheran Church and its teachings. Instead, they would be confronted with the prospect of meeting people who were completely ignorant of salvation through Jesus Christ, or even of the name, Jesus Christ.

Yet even with this burden of inflation, the Lord continued to bless the Wisconsin Synod's effort by sending over 30 graduates of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary into an exploratory mission field in the last two years. The commission of our Lord to reach out with God's Word is still there for us. The United States is potentially ripe for the Lord's harvest. This is the direction that the Lord has taken us as a Synod. This was the Lord's answer for me. If I would have only paid closer attention to what was really written in these past Mission Seminar booklets, I would have seen this trend of mission outreach from the beginning. What a valuable mirror into WELS's future home mission outreach these Mission Seminar booklets proved to be.

Now that these Mission Seminar booklets answered my questions as to why I ended up in Somewersville, Texas, I also had another question that frightened me. How was I to reach out to this community?? I knew that the Gospel I believed was no different than Pauls' Gospel--the Gospel of salvation through Christ. Yet, I was scared. I was unsure of how this outreach task should be handled.

Here again the past Mission Seminar booklets gave me extensive aid. For the booklets gave many practical methods which were developed over the past 20 years of WELS outreach. These Mission Seminar

booklets first of all suggested that I research the area in which I would be working in order to gain an overall picture of the community. With the aid of some prior research also, I discovered that Somewheresville was a mixture of many cultures and races. I learned also that most of the people in this city had very little affiliation with any church body. Oh, there was a Baptist and a Methodist church located in this city. But attendance there was a very small percentage of the overall population. This also meant that few people would probably recognize any difference between religions, especially when it came to organizing a Lutheran body in town. What was I to do? What a challenge!

Well, in reading over these Mission Seminar booklets, I also recalled that much time and material had been centered on possible suggestions and methods of reaching out with God's Word. I would like to share some of the thoughts that developed over the years in our Synod which were reflected in these Mission Seminar booklets.

The idea of evangelism was first discussed in the Mission Seminar of 1963. Although this Seminar had no organized booklet, it was this Seminar that evaluated the methods and techniques of mission work which were used by the Third Force. (I believe that the Third Force would be the religious cult groups which do not center their beliefs in Christ, such as the Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, etc.) They discovered that such methods and techniques as publications, personal mission work, communications, educational systems, instilling zeal, and contributions played an important role in reaching out.

This Seminar suggested we could learn many techniques from the Third Force in evangelism. They also highly suggested that our Synod train future pastors at the Seminary in evangelism. (I guess that they will finally get their wish as of the 1984-85 school year. A practical evangelism program will finally be started. It only took 21 years!) They also suggested that material be created for evangelism by our Publishing House. This Seminar also recommended highly the use of radio and television as a tool in evangelism. They also looked at the roles of the pastor and the layman in evangelism.

In 1964, the Seminar emphasized the obligation which we have to reach out to all with God's Word. It especially emphasized the pastor and his role of educating his people concerning what was the prime importance in the work of the church. "In this connection we might ask ourselves if one mission festival a year is sufficient to stress the importance of missions."<sup>17</sup> It was also in this year that the idea of canvassing and the techniques of door-to-door canvassing were highly stressed.

An interesting highlight in 1964's study was that of inter-racial mission work. Since I knew that there were a number of black and Mexican people in the surrounding area, I was curious to see what was said concerning this line of mission work. The first point that was developed was the fact that integration should not be a goal. Integration should not be a problem in a Christian church, but it is made a problem. "The goal of a congregation should be to serve its community, to see to it that all its neighbors are aware of the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ, and

to invite them to share the means of grace with fellow Christians."<sup>18</sup>

I also learned that integration has been made a problem by our attitudes. Our attitudes have failed when we look at men socially, as individuals, and not spiritually, as souls. The goal that I as a pastor must have is to serve the community as Christ's witness. The same thing must also be practiced by the congregation. How do we accomplish such an attitude? "One thing is absolutely necessary---education. The simplest and most natural solution is to face the problems as they may arise. And since the pastor is the person who would face any such problems, there is only one person to educate toward the quickest, most natural, and most effective solution---the pastor. So to you as pastors of His lambs and sheep, Jesus says, "the fields are BLACK also unto the harvest."<sup>19</sup>

Evangelism was still growing in 1966 within our Synod. By this time, we began to see the importance and joy in communicating the Gospel person to person. "The greatest aspect of person to person language witnessing lies in the fact that through this media of communication, one can best approach the whole man. A speaker can use a great number of positive aspects and many effective means to best communicate his message. He does this when he gives attention to: his appearance, attitude, personal conviction and enthusiasm, his concern, choice of words, emphasis, gestures, inflection, personality, and persuasiveness. In our case, the speaker's motive should be a sincere desire to communicate the Gospel. Our message is basic to the salvation of men's souls."<sup>20</sup>

But person to person communication was not the only method possible to share the Gospel. Through the use of the media we were

now able to expand into a much broader field in order to reach many more people. The use of the radio, tape recorder, TV, telephone, literature, and even laser beams was finally being considered for home mission work. "Auxiliary media of communication are gifts of God. There is a wide range of possibilities in this field of communicating the Gospel. The need is evident; the means, or shall we say, the media is self-evident. The time has come for our church to 'break into print' and to let its voice be heard."<sup>21</sup>

1970 was the year that Mission Seminar really stressed the need of evangelism. "We must approach the Super 70's not with a new message, but making full use of the message God has given us, moving together, encouraging, exhorting. All mission work is personal; one man sharing the Gospel with another. This is the best service we Christians can render to the world in an age that cries out for the church to be active and to speak to the needs of the people. And this work is not just the Synod's job. Each pastor has his call to do mission work no matter what the circumstances of his call. In the same way this work is not just the work of the pastor. Each Christian has the joyous duty to share Christ no matter what his vocation, his talents, his means, or his age. Every call is a mission call."<sup>22</sup>

Although the need and the enthusiasm for evangelism could be seen, yet the methods in effective evangelism training and guidance for the average Seminarian still seemed to be lacking in the Mission Seminar booklets. Finally this need seemed to be answered in 1982 and in 1984. It was here that the Mission Seminar booklets reflected the Synods efforts in effective evangelism training when



WELS formed the Travel/Canvass/Witness program. The purpose of this program was to give college and Seminary students training in evangelism outreach. At the same time these students would be serving congregations of our Synod in their outreach efforts. To help train these TCW workers, in early 1984 the Synod finished work on a set of evangelism training films. These films will also be made available to all congregations so that effective and practical evangelism methods can be seen firsthand.

Outreach in personal evangelism or through the media continued to grow throughout the 1970's and early 1980's. The number of new home missions set up during this period testified to this fact. But with the growth in the methods of outreach, there also came the need to reach out to people in special areas of our country.

A direct result of our Synod's evangelism push was the need to reach out into special ministries. One of these special ministries dealt very extensively by the Mission Seminar booklets was the ministry to students on college campuses across the country. A big push for campus ministry started in 1971. By 1981 WELS had 39 part-time and 2 full-time campus pastors. Their one mission was to preach and witness to the Gospel of Christ. In the beginning of the WELS campus outreach, we were primarily concerned about the students who belonged to our own congregations while attending these schools. But by 1981 the primary goal of the campus ministry became mission outreach. "The future mission of campus ministry will be a concerted drive to bring an uncompromised Gospel to the unchurched on campus."<sup>23</sup> This information proved to be a big help for me since there was a college campus not more than 20 miles from Somewheresville.

After working with these students, the students also helped me to reach out into the community of Somewheresville to reach many people who still did not know Jesus as their Savior.

Indeed, information in these Mission Seminar booklets has greatly benefitted me in my ministry. I hope some of the examples which I have mentioned will bear out the importance of these booklets which I feel must be made known to the Seminary students. The information in these booklets will give anyone a glimpse into the direction of his ministry no matter where he may be called.

There is nothing new under the sun when it comes to the message of our ministry. But the need to share that message with the millions in America who do not yet know Christ as their Savior is still very great. Reaching out will never end. But if we are to reach out effectively into America, we need to know where we are going as a Synod. We must also continue to instruct and revise our methods in reaching out to fit each area and group of people we meet. Our past Mission Seminars have made very adequate maps in their booklets of each route that our Synod has traveled as far as home mission trends and methods.

Please encourage others to use these booklets to guide them in the thinking of our Synod as to where it has been and to where it going. You will not only be doing me a favor, but you will also be performing a tremendous favor for our future ministers as they start their work in reaching out to all with the Gospel of Christ. This is a crystal ball that is worth looking into!

In Christ,  
Richard Warnecke

ENDNOTES

1. Berg, Paster Norman. Compel Them to Come. 1984, session 1, pp. 4-5.
2. A Growing Mustard Seed. 1971, p. 17.
3. Filter, Herbert. The Lutheran Position on Missouri. 1964, p. 9.
4. Laborers Together With God. 1980, p. 2.
5. Epiphany Mission Fair. 1964, p. 27.
6. Ibid., p. 28.
7. op. cit., 1980, p. 1.
8. op. cit., 1964, p. 26.
9. A Mission Fair. 1965, p. 20.
10. Communicating the Gospel. 1966, p. 79.
11. Ibid., 1966, p. 80.
12. A Growing Mustard Seed. 1971, p. 8.
13. Ibid., 1971, p. 18.
14. With Many Hands, With Many Voices. 1978, p. 57.
15. "...Send Forth Your Light!". 1981, p. 5.
16. Ibid., 1981, p. 15.
17. op. cit., 1964, p. 7.
18. Ibid., 1964, p. 75.
19. Ibid., 1964, p. 76.
20. op. cit., 1966, p. 19.
21. Ibid., 1966, p. 32.
22. Mission Seminar 70. 1970, p. 1.
23. op. cit., 1971, p. 4.