

Twenty Years of God's Grace
at Beautiful Savior - Cincinnati, Ohio

by
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Church History, Profs. Westerhaus/Brenner
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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 W. Seminary Drive. 66W
Mequon, Wisconsin

During the summer of 1970, Oliver Lindholm, pastor of Peace of Our Savior Lutheran Church at New Carlisle, just north of Dayton, began to call on people in the Cincinnati area who might be interested in the formation of a Wisconsin Synod congregation. Several families expressed a great deal of interest, and Pastor Lindholm began a series of Bible classes to make certain that the beliefs held by the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans were those of the prospective members. At the conclusion of the series of classes, arrangements were made to rent the gymnasium of Taylor Elementary School for Sunday services. The first service was held at 8:00 a.m. on November 1, 1970. There were thirteen in attendance.

Exploratory services continued into 1971, and attendance continued to rise during the first half of the year, bolstered in part by a few Wisconsin Synod families which had been transferred into the area. Mission status was approved, and a call was issued for a seminary graduate to serve the congregation. Daniel Koelpin was ordained and installed as pastor on July 25, and served the congregation until February of 1985. In September of 1971 the congregation was formally organized, adopting a constitution and bylaws, and incorporating in the state of Ohio.

In March of 1972 the church property was purchased for \$15,000, and in May the Synod mission board allocated \$1,500 to begin planning for a building. In December of the same year the Synod's Board of Trustees approved both the building plans and the funding of \$135,000. Groundbreaking was held on June 17, 1973, and the building was dedicated the following year, on June 16, 1974.

Sunday School began in 1971, and the first Vacation Bible School was held that same year, with an average attendance of 45. The day school was opened in 1978 with one teacher. The fellowship hall was used for classes until the classrooms were added in 1980. Thomas Westra was ordained and installed on June 30, 1985. The day school has added another teacher in 1991, and has outgrown its present facilities. In April of 1990 the congregation approved the opening of kindergarten and a preschool.

After reading a brief history of Beautiful Savior, it seems like an average congregation started by the Wisconsin Synod in the 1970's. In many respects it is, but there are several features that make this church unique. Throughout this paper there will be references to the work of people, pastors and other "outside" factors, please keep in mind that all of this has taken place through the grace of God, and the people were only working in connection with the hand of God. With that in mind let's take a look at some of the features that make this church unique. They include: 1) a large number of people leaving the Missouri Synod, 2) a church which grew faster than most of the missions started in the WELS in the 1970's, 3) a church that started a Christian Day School only seven years after it began services, 4) a church that has seen the opening of two new missions in its neighborhood, 5) finally I will take a look at the challenges that lie ahead for this church.

Pastor Lindholm received a list of names to call on in the Cincinnati area from various sources - the Mission Board, members from his church in New Carlisle, an ad in The Northwestern Lutheran, and an ad in the Cincinnati paper advertising the initial Bible classes. Many of these people had one thing in common, they were unhappy with the Missouri Synod and the direction it seemed to be heading. The members ^{were} concerned about the liberal ^{direction} ~~shape~~ that they seemed to ^{be} going in. Some of them cited - doctrinal laxity at Concordia, St. Louis, and generally throughout the Synod, the LCMS fellowship with the ALC, a very liberal LCMS church in Cincinnati, and the final straw seemed to be the Milwaukee Convention when the LCMS did ^{not} break off with the LCUSA or suspend fellowship with the ALC. I asked one of the original members if he knew what he was

looking for, or did he just know that he was not satisfied with the Missouri Synod. He responded, "We knew what we were looking for, but we were running from something at the same time. The Bible classes which Pastor Lindholm conducted told us that WELS held to what we were looking for."

Pastor Koelpin talked about the influence that such a large contingent of dissatisfied Missourians had on the congregation. He said that a few of that "Missouri nucleus" were "sincere people, but embittered to the point where they wanted to turn every Bible class and every sermon into LCA, ALC and LCMS bashing. Not that the other Lutheran church bodies didn't deserve some of it, but people who are throwing out a constant stream of embittered criticism don't realize how selfish they appear to outsiders ... not that such doctrinal concerns are to be ignored or considered invalid; its just that many people who have not been raised to have a doctrinal concern and are without a good biblical foundation tend to perceive a critical approach to other church bodies as petty, divisive and loveless. Today we are better at knowing that perceptions can be just as damaging to our church as realities." When everyday matters are not addressed because of excessive concern with the doctrinal and confessional events, prospects can and do become frustrated. If the constant criticism of other church bodies remains unchecked and unsoftened in a new church, it will stunt the church's growth and has actually done so in a number of our WELS missions. Confessional concerns are always valid, it is the disproportionate emphasis on them that can hinder rather than help.

Pastor Koelpin talked about why they were receiving so many from the LCMS, "Their main complaint was that of being either ignored

or stifled by their own pastors and church councils when they sought to raise concerns about their church body's doctrinal purity." The leadership of these churches did not want to rock the boat with such "divisive" issues. The stalling and evasiveness taking place on the synodical and church levels ultimately bred mistrust. Pastor Koelpin states, "The members that exited felt that if they couldn't go to their own pastors and church leaders about doctrinal concerns where could they go? So some came to us. Others had personal and not so valid reasons for coming our way, but didn't always reveal them up front."

Beautiful Savior grew quite fast compared to other missions which opened at the same time. Pastor Koelpin gave some reasons for this, "I believe that the Lord really allowed many things to fall together for facilitating growth. We had a good field. We were in a conservative city which still had plenty of unchurched. For over ten years we were the only WELS church in a metropolitan area of over a million in population. At the time we were drawing not just from three counties, but from three states. We happened to get some real cream from LCMS and from WELS." The church was blessed with a good mixture of people whose hearts were moved by the Lord to reach out to others, a gift to make outsiders feel at home. Others were blessed with analytical and administrative skills which helped at crucial decision making times. There was a good mixture of experience and enthusiasm, white collar and blue collar, wealthy and middle income, elderly and youth. When I asked one of the original members why the church seemed to grow so fast he responded, "I don't know! - God moves in mysterious ways. Some factors seemed to be Pastor Koelpin's personality, emphasis on pure doctrine, enthusiasm

of the original nucleus, local canvassing. The bottom line is that we preached the gospel to as many people as possible - the rest is up to the Lord. The hand of God has done it."

Beautiful Savior started a Christian Day School only seven years after the church began having services. This is much sooner than most churches decide to open a school. There are several reasons for this. There were some forceful and influential members and one monied member who wanted the school badly. At the time most felt that it would help the long term growth of the congregation, but felt that they may be starting too soon. The monied member assured Pastor Koelpin that finances would not be a problem. It turned out that money problems were not a problem as long as that member was around. The school can be a good outreach tool. However, it is the most expensive form of mission work we know. For better or worse, our Synod has been sold on the elementary school and solid families see it as a major consideration in their choice of joining a church. Christian education is fine and important, but it does cause additional problems - trying to keep up with the public schools is a race that is costly.

The original member that I spoke to said that he was opposed to the school when it first opened in 1978. It was not an active opposition, but a matter of saying, "I think we are too small and don't have nearly enough of a financial base to do this. Wait a few years." But he told me the congregation proved him wrong by raising \$12,000 to \$15,000 over and above budget in less than a year. "In retrospect, I think we did the right thing, but we 'blew it' later, and it was only three years ago that we got back on the right track.

When he says that they "blew it", he is talking about preschools. At the time Beautiful Savior started the school, there were only a few preschools around. Today you can find them in many places, and young parents want their children in preschool. He states, "Sometime between 1977 and 1989 we should have been smart enough to see that it was the right time to start a preschool, and that date was far closer to 1977 than to 1989. Not having that element we struggled along with 12 to 16 kids in school, and no prospect that we would have more." When the preschool and kindergsrten were added the enrollment increased dramatically. The school went from 12 -14 students in grades 1 - 8, to 26 students in grades 1-8 in one school year. This^{is} when the school went from one teacher to two teachers.

How effective is the school as an outreach tool? It is hard to measure that, but it does give some useful information. The pre-school and kindergarten have made it more effective than it was, but at the time being, lack of space is a consideration. Once that hurdle is overcome there seems to be reasons to think that more children will join the school and more families will join the church. Some positive anecdotal evidence for this: a) One divorcee began by sending her two children to the school, then she joined, then her mother joined, then her boyfriend joined. b) Parents who have been members for a long time and did not send their children to our school are now doing so. c) This past summer, one family made the decision to accept a position in Cincinnati because of the school. d) Eric Brown (current principal) has received a number of calls from the community wanting applications, they had to be truned down because of a lack of space. The potential is definitely there, but the school is hindered right now because of a lack of space.

Beautiful Savior has also been affected by the opening of two new mission churches in the past ten years, in 1982 Abiding Word was started on the other side of Cincinnati, and in 1990 Amazing Grace was opened in Florence, Kentucky only half an hour from Beautiful Savior. Pastor Koelpin stated that the opening of Abiding Word by the mission board ~~was~~ received whole-hearted approval from the congregation. "We lost a few members, but the kingdom of God gained. It helped our church to see that our Synod was serious about reaching out to the entire Cincinnati area. I was glad to have a fellow pastor in the area as well. Names of all Beautiful Savior members on the east side were freely handed to Pastor Grundmeier at the outset, but not everyone wanted to leave a more established church to go to a brand new mission. It made things a little awkward, but we didn't force someone to go to a particular church because they lived in a specific area of town. We are not in competition with one another." One of the members of Beautiful Savior noted this about the opening of the two new missions, "Some people are always looking at the opening of new missions as a dark day for nearby congregations. Nonsense! In one case we lost a family which had been quite active in church and school affairs; in the other we lost an organist. We survived quite well. Others stepped in to take on additional responsibilities, the necessary money seemed to materialize - never as much as we want, but enough - and we acted as if nothing had happened. The Lord sent three organists to replace the one we had lost. I cannot recall a single decision where the fact that we were losing members to the mission congregation influenced the decision in any way. On the other side of the fence - over in the mission congregations some people who did little or nothing over here have become active members. People talk about win-lose situations; these are win-win situations."

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What lies ahead for Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church? What does the Lord have in mind for this congregation? Well the plans are in the works right now to add onto the school building so the upper grades do not have to hold classes in the fellowship hall. There also seems to be a desire/need to enlarge the sanctuary in the next three to five years. But according to Pastor Westra the school is the church's main priority right now. They see it as an effective outreach tool as well as a valuable tool for Christian instruction of the children of the congregation. The congregation would like to add a third and eventually a fourth teacher in the next few years.

The Lord has indeed blessed Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church over the past twenty years. It is our sincere hope and prayer that he continues to bless this congregation in the years to come as they go about the Lord's work and preach the gospel in the Cincinnati area.

Michigan Synod eyes expansion into Cincinnati

The Michigan Mission District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has begun exploratory work in the Cincinnati area to consider the establishment of a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Church in this area.

Plans call for services to begin Sept. 16 at 7:30 p.m. and to continue for five or six Sundays with the Rev. Oliver H. Lindholm of New Carlisle as discussion leader. Topics to be discussed include "The Inspiration of Scripture," "Church Fellowship" and "The Place of Women in the Church."

The WELS has churches in 34 states and operates one of the largest parish school systems among Protestant bodies and supports domestic and world mis-



REV. O. L. LINDHOLM

sions. The meetings will be non-obligatory and open to any person interested in this synod.

Enquirer 9/5/70



Study Leader

The Rev. Oliver H. Lindholm, New Carlisle, Ohio, will lead Bible study at 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays for five weeks beginning September 16 at the Taylor Elementary School, 3173 Springdale Rd., as part of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's first effort to form a congregation in this area. The Wisconsin Synod, said Rev. Mr. Lindholm, has been described as the "church most uncompromising in its dedication to confessional Lutheranism and to Scripture."

Church Group

Enquirer 9/12/70

WISCONSIN SYNOD BIBLE CLASSES

The Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod invites you to a series of Bible study meetings, beginning Wednesday, Sept. 16, at 7:30 PM, and continuing each successive Wednesday evening for 5 weeks. Meetings will be held at Taylor Elementary School, 3173 Springdale Rd.

Anyone interested in the establishment of a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran church in the Cincinnati area is urged to attend these meetings, as is anyone who is simply interested in studying the Bible. Topics which are timely not only to the Lutheran Church, but to all Christendom, will be discussed.

Enquirer 7/24/71

Ordination Set By Lutherans

Pastor-elect Daniel H. Koelpin will be ordained Sunday and installed as the first resident pastor of Beautiful Saviour Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The 7 p.m. service will be in the Taylor Elementary School gym, 3173 Springdale Rd. Officiating will be the Rev. Oliver H. Lindholm, New Carlisle, Ohio, who pioneered this first congregation here of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The Rev. Winfred Koelpin, Livonia, Mich., father of the pastor-elect, will preach.

The Wisconsin Synod is considered to be the "most conservative Lutheran church body" today, Pastor Lindholm said.

BONN — More than 2.4 million motor vehicles were registered in West Germany last year, 14% above 1969.

Mr. Daniel J. Koelpin will be ordained and installed as the first resident pastor of Beautiful Saviour Lutheran Church Sunday at 7 p.m. in the Taylor Elementary School gymnasium. The Rev. Oliver H. Lindholm of New Carlisle, O., will officiate. He has worked with local congregation since it formed less than a year ago. The Rev. Winfred Koelpin of Livonia, Mich., will deliver the sermon. He is the pastor-elect's father.

Information for this paper was obtained through letters, conversations, and phone calls with the following people:

Rev. Oliver Lindholm - pastor at New Carlisle, OH at the time services began at Beautiful Savior

Rev. Daniel Koelpin - first pastor at Beautiful Savior 1971-1985

Rev. Thomas Westra - second pastor at Beautiful Savior 1985 - present

Mr. Richard Engelmann - member of Beautiful Savior, 1970 - present