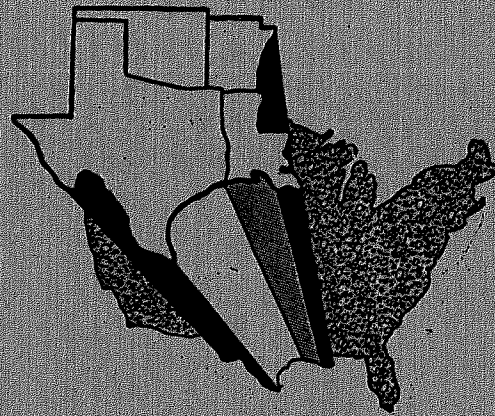


**THE CRY FROM THE MID-SOUTH:
The Beginnings and History of the South Central District**



by
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FOREWARD

This paper is an effort to gather the vast historical background of the congregations that now make up our beloved South Central District. I have tried to gather as many of the historical facts as possible. There are places where some of the details are definitely sketchy. I welcome any additions or corrections which will help make this history more accurate and helpful to the Church.

I am deeply indebted to all of the present and some of the former pastors of the district who have supplied me with the information needed. Special thanks are due to District President Vilas Glaeske who gladly took time out of his busy schedule to give me much of the background material and read the initial manuscript for accuracy. Also thanks to my father, Pastor John Gaertner for the information and help he supplied and for his constant encouragement. Finally, but not least, thanks to Mrs. Lois Burgdorf for her special interest in this project and the vast amount of information she supplied.

I pray that this history may serve to the glory of God and the good of his church.

Joel P. Gaertner

It would be an understatement to say that relations with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod have played a part in the history of the Wisconsin Synod. Anyone who has done any reading at all about the history of the WELS knows what the era of the 1950's and early 1960's and even our present time mean in the relation between the WELS and the LC-MS on a synodical level. But not everyone is fully aware of how this relationship and the troubles involved in it have filtered down to even the formation of new districts in the WELS. The South Central District of the WELS was formed less than ten years ago in 1983; but the roots that led to its formation go back to some of the disharmony in WELS/LC-MS relations over 25 years ago. We might do well to entitle this study of the beginnings and history of the South Central District of the WELS The Cry From the Mid-South.

There was a brief period of WELS activity in the greater Dallas, Texas area around 1953-54 under a Missionary Dorn. There are rumorous reports that they aquired land and a building (quonset hut) for \$4,000. This group, however, disorganized¹ after only a short time.

To begin the heart and core of our study, we might best focus in on two families who were members of the LC-MS congregation, Zion Lutheran, in Dallas, Texas. These are the Ted Burgdorf and Carl Doepel families. Through the 50's and early 60's these two families became more and more aware of the false doctrine that was allowed to go unchecked in their congregation. Concerned over this, Mr. Doepel wrote letter after letter to the

officials of the LC-MS and pointed out the problems. After this had gone on for a while, the Burgdorfs and Doepels "felt isolated in Dallas from those who still preached and taught from Scripture as we had learned from childhood"²

At this point, we see how, as always, the Lord works for the good of his people. The Burgdorfs had been receiving The Northwestern Lutheran as a gift from Mrs. Burgdorf's parents in Minnesota. In August of 1962, instead of receiving just their single copy of the magazine, the Burgdorfs received a bundle of 3 copies with the names of two other families in the area who were receiving the magazine (Ms. Ruth Hanson and the Joseph Lakus family). Mrs. Burgdorf contacted the two other families and found that they had sent correspondence to President Oscar Naumann of the WELS. The lady who had been the contact person with the WELS was Ms. Ruth Hanson. After Ms. Hanson's initial letter, President Naumann put her in contact with Pastor Walter Diehl, chairman of the Mission Board of the Arizona - California District of the WELS. After several letters between Ms. Hanson and Pastor Diehl, Pastor Diehl and Pastor Immanuel Frey, both of the WELS Arizona - California District Mission Board, came to Dallas on October 9th and 10th to survey the area and meet with several of the interested people. After several more letters between Pastor Diehl and Mrs. Hanson and a discussion by the WELS praesidium, a meeting was arranged between the Dallas nucleus and Pastors Diehl and Frey.

Mr. Ted Burgdorf describes the initial meeting this way: "On the evening of November 5, 1962, Carl Doepel, myself and spouses,

loaded into our little airplane at Garland Airport and flew across the city to Redbird Airport, where we were met by Joseph Lakus and driven to a meeting at his home with Pastors W. Diehl and Imm. Frey of the Arizona-California D.M.B. of the Wisconsin Synod. They had come to meet with what turned out to be the original nucleus of Calvary - the Joseph Lakus, Ray Swenson, Carl Doepel, and Ted Burgdorf families and two single ladies: Louise Strefuss and Ruth Hanson." After the meeting with the Dallas nucleus, Pastors Diehl and Frey carried a report to the WELS General Board for Home Missions which was meeting the same week. On November 11, the GBHM granted permission to establish a mission in Dallas. The first call to begin work was extended to Rev. Professor Lloyd Hahnke, then Dean at Doctor Martin Luther College in New Ulm. After Professor Hahnke returned the initial call, a second call was issued to Pastor Herbert Koehler who also returned the call. During 1962 and 1963, subsequent calls were issued to Pastor Arnold Mennicke, Pastor Harry Shiley, Professor Carl Leyrer, Pastor Armin Keibel, Pastor W.A. Wietzke, and Pastor Roy Hoenecke. In December of 1963 our gracious God provided this Dallas group with a shepherd in the person of Pastor Robert Neumann. Again the theme of WELS/LC-MS disharmony comes up as Pastor Neumann could no longer remain in agreement with the LC-MS and came to Dallas from a LC-MS congregation in Inglis, Manitoba, Canada.

Pastor Neumann and his family arrived in Dallas on January 16, 1964 a few days after a record 17" snowfall. The joyful first service that had been so long awaited was held on February

2, 1964 in the chapel of the Crane Funeral Home in Dallas with an attendance of 32. The following Wednesday, February 5, Pastor Neumann was installed in a service at the Cox Chapel on the campus of Southern Methodist University. In the first voter's meeting held on February 16, 1964, the group known as the Dallas nucleus chose the name Calvary Lutheran Church - Wisconsin Synod as the name of their church. You see how even the name of their church, with the inclusion of "Wisconsin Synod" demonstrated their strong belief in the truth of God's Word. Calvary Lutheran Church continued to meet as a mission of the Arizona - California District and in July of 1964 took two major steps forward under God's grace. On July 22, Calvary purchased a parcel of land at the Southwest corner of Trammel and Fisher Roads for their first proposed church site. This eager group of Christians was also quick to share their joy of the Gospel with others as is witnessed by the fact that Vicar Myrl Wagenknecht did survey work in the Duncanville area and on July 26th conducted the first service with an attendance of 31.

Also about this same time, shortly after Pastor Neumann arrived in Dallas, he began work in the Hillsboro, Texas area. Shortly after his arrival, "Pastor Neumann was contacted by a group of former Missouri Synod Lutherans from Malone and Hillsboro⁴". This was the beginning of Zion congregation.

While the Lord's Word continued to be faithfully proclaimed in North Texas, there was a discontentment with the LC-MS, similar to the one in the Dallas area, by a group in the Edna, Texas area. In February or March of 1965 a group of members of

St. Paul's (LCMS) in Edna stopped attending their church in a formal "state of protest" at the urging of their pastor, G.B. Seager.⁵ This came about because they could no longer tolerate the false teaching of their synod. Through business visits to the Dallas area, a member of the Edna group, Mr. Nolan Kesley, found out about the WELS and their work in the Dallas area. The Edna group then started carpooling to WELS services being held by Pastor Neumann in Hillsboro. On May 9, 1965, Pastor Neumann conducted services for the group in Edna. The group numbering 93 met in the parish hall of Trinity Episcopal Church. Pastor Neumann encouraged this group to contact the Arizona - California District Mission Board. Pastors Diehl and Sitz of the board met with the group and as a result of the meeting, Redeemer Lutheran Church of Edna was formed and requested to be served by a WELS pastor. Until a resident pastor was called, Pastor Neumann drove 300 miles every Sunday to bring the Word of the Lord to this eager group. The group agreed to accept the assignment of a seminary graduate and Seminary graduate Vilas Glaeske was assigned to serve them.

Pastor Glaeske also began to explore the areas of San Antonio and Houston. Following the directive of the Arizona - California DMB, Pastor Glaeske and some ladies from the Edna group conducted a canvass of the Houston areas of Westbury, Edgebrook, and Tanglewood in the summer of 1965. This canvass drew some favorable response as did articles in The Northwestern Lutheran.

At the same time work was begun in the San Antonio area.

The first efforts in this area were directed at serving WELS members in the military in the area. Because of the overwhelming numbers, it was decided to set a date for a first service. Pastor Glaeske conducted the first worship service in the Wayfarer's Motel in San Antonio in June of 1966. Later that same year, the group officially organized and became known as Our Savior Lutheran Church. Pastor James Neffendorf followed Pastor Glaeske and served Our Savior in 1967 and 1968. Pastor Neffendorf was followed by the now-sainted Pastor William Krueger. Under Pastor Krueger the congregation erected a worship facility in 1971. Pastor Donald Stuppy followed Pastor Krueger in 1975 and in 1984 Our Savior established a Christian Day School. In 1986 under their present pastor, James Tauscher, the congregation praised God for their 20 years of being able to share His grace.

Building on the work that Vicar Wagenknecht had done in the Duncanville area and continued services by Pastor Neumann, St. Mark congregation of Duncanville was officially organized in the summer of 1965. With the organization of this congregation, Calvary in Dallas transferred one third of their membership to St. Mark. Among those who transferred from Calvary to St. Mark were the Swensons and Louise Streckfuss, members of the Calvary founding nucleus. Pastor Robert Hartmann was installed as the first resident pastor on January 9, 1966. Pastor Hartmann also served the group in Hillsboro. 1968 marked a year of much growth for St. Mark congregation. In January they dedicated a parsonage and on December 15 they dedicated their first worship building.

On July 26, 1984, exactly 20 years after their first service, St. Mark celebrated their 20th anniversary and dedicated thier school building.

Meanwhile, back at Calvary, the Lord's work grew and the congregation took several more major steps forward. On September 3, 1965 the original church site was sold back to its original owners and on September 14th the present church property was purchased. With property in hand, plans were made for a building and on August 16, 1966 construction began. The finished church building was dedicated to the Lord's work on January 8, 1967 with WELS President O.J. Naumann preaching the sermon. In 1967, Calvary bade farewell to Pastor Neumann and welcomed Pastor Walter Diehl in 1968.

The gracious Lord of the church also continued to prosper Pastor Glaeske's work in Houston. With all the contacts that he had been put in touch with, he put out advertisements for a first worship service to be held in the summer of 1966. Pastor Glaeske describes the initial worship service this way: "With the Lord's blessing on the advertisement and with the help from the pastor's Houston contacts, the first service of what was to become Christ the Lord was held on July 24, 1966 at the Ramada Inn on the Gulf Freeway. Expecting nine souls, Pastor Glaeske was overwhelmed by the 29 in attendance. Not until he saw the Platzers did he believe that he was in the right meeting room." Pastor Glaeske's work continued with twice monthly services in Houston until December. On Christmas Day 1966 the Houston group took their first major step as they organized and incorporated as

Christ the Lord Evangelical Lutheran Church with 11 charter members. Christ the Lord also grew under the Lord's grace and in November of 1967 purchased their present church property on Kirkwood Road. This was followed by 1968 approval to build and March 1969 groundbreaking. The Glaeskes moved into the parsonage in April of 1969. The first service in the new chapel was held on August 17th with dedication on September 7th.

Within weeks after dedication of the new chapel, the first new growth sprouted from Christ the Lord. Pastor Glaeske had a number of contacts on the north side of Houston and was given permission by the Mission Board to hold to hold exploratory services. On September 16th the first service was held at Christ the Lord's north side sister congregation, Abiding Word.

Calvary in Dallas not only grew itself, but it also spread its growth to others. Beginning in 1967 Pastor Diehl and several other pastors from the Dallas - Fort Worth area began holding services in Tyler, out in east Texas. For the next thirteen years services continued to be held by many different pastors. Finally, in 1980, exploratory status was granted in this area where the WELS had persisted for so long. February 21, 1984 saw mission status granted to Lone Star Lutheran Church of Tyler and on June 11, 1989 they were privileged to dedicate their WEF unit.
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With Pastor Glaeske as the resident pastor at Christ the Lord, Redeemer congregation in Edna received Pastor James Neffendorfas their shepherd in 1967. Under his guidance the congregation worked toward their church building which was

dedicated on April 13, 1969. A parsonage followed in June of 1972 and Redeemer's Christian Day School was opened in 1983.

In November of 1969 Pastor Diehl began holding services in the Fort Worth area. His work continued until August of 1970 when Myrl Wagenknecht was installed as the first and until now only resident pastor of Immanuel congregation. Immanuel also grew and in 1974 added a Christian Day School.

At this time, work was also being carried on out in Witchita Falls. Pastors from Dallas, Duncanville, and Fort Worth served the group for many years. The congregation members came mainly from Shepard Air Force Base. This group was granted exploratory status and even mission status in 1978, but membership soon declined and the congregation was later dissolved.

Pastor William Krueger of San Antonio began work in the Austin area in 1969. In 1970 mission status was granted to the work and Holy Word congregation began to function. 1971 saw Holy Word have its first worship facility, a portable structure. In 1974 the present church building was constructed. Holy Word added their school building in 1981.

In 1971 work was begun in the Desoto area, later to become Glory Lutheran Church.

Calvary in Dallas continued to grow under God's blessing. 1971 brought the addition of an educational wing/fellowship hall. This addition proved well planned as Calvary began their Christian Day School in 1972. Due to growth in the Christian Day School and the addition of 9th grade, an addition to the school was built in 1980. The year 1989 was one for many memories and

much thanks as the members of Calvary observed 25 years of their privilege of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The LC-MS theme also showed up in far south Texas. A couple in the Weslaco area that was concerned about the laxity of their church's (LC-MS) teaching requested to be served by the WELS. "Pastors flew or drove from San Antonio, Edna, Houston, Austin and even from Dallas. Services were held once a month in 1970 and 1971, twice a month in late 1971 and 1972, and 8 weekly in late 1972 and 1973." The group was given mission status in November of 1973. Abiding Savior congregation continued to grow and purchased land and built a parsonage in 1974. For many years Abiding Savior was served by the now - sainted Pastor Walter Diehl. As Pastor Diehl himself said of Abiding Savior, "It is likely the most unusual misbalance of any congregation in the WELS".⁹ What Pastor Diehl was referring to was the large fluxuation in attendance at Weslaco. It is a congregation of only 60 or so for the majority of the year. But from January through March the attendance increases to over 300 with a large number of winter visitors.

Pastor Glaeske's work in south Texas also continued to prosper under the Lord's blessings. On August 12, 1969 he began services for a group in Angleton Texas. Angleton became the home of Christ Our Saviour which continued as a mission congregation until 1981. In 1981, the congregation lost its synodical mission subsidy and has been without a resident pastor since. The congregation has continued to worship being served by various area pastors and part-time pastors.

On September 13, 1970 Pastor Glaeske started yet another mission in south Texas. This marked the beginning of services in Friendswood. Lord of Life congregation grew and in 1979 was privileged to begin a Christian Day School.

As the Lord's Word spread and fed the souls of his children south of the Red River, the WELS/LC-MS theme was again popping up, this time in Oklahoma. In the mid 1960's the members of Missouri Synod congregations in Oklahoma City began asking the same questions that had been asked in Dallas and Edna. "They had many questions to ask and their own pastors would never answer them." ¹⁰ While these people were asking questions, a Wisconsin Synod family in the area was planting the seed for a WELS congregation. The Bob Hahn family had moved to the area and they along with two servicemen were being served by taped WELS services. Pastors from WELS congregations in Kansas and Nebraska then began taking turns on weekly trips to serve the group. On August 10, 1967 the Nebraska District Mission Board gave the group mission status and permission to call a pastor. After numerous calls were sent and returned, prayers were answered as Pastor Paul Knickelbein from Milwaukee accepted the call to serve. He was installed on December 8, 1968. To begin with, Gethsemane, as the congregation would later be called, met in the Sooner Elementary School. In January of 1969, their meeting place was changed to the Guaranty National Bank and on February 2nd, Gethsemane was officially organized. The Lord showered his blessings upon this group and it grew so that on September 28, 1969 Gethsemane broke ground for their new education/worship

facilty.

The same evening, there was evidence of the growth of the Lord's Church as the first service was held in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This was brought about by ads that Pastor Knickelbein had placed in the Tulsa newspaper. Exploratory services continued to be held at various sites until March of 1970 when the WELS GBHM granted the group mission status. The group formally organized on June 18, 1970 under the name Mount Olive Lutheran Church. In November of the same year, permission was also granted to call a resident pastor. The calling process continued for well over a year until the congregation requested a Pastoral Candidate from the 1972 graduating class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Candidate Gerhard Schapekahn was assigned to Tulsa and was installed in a special worship service on June 25.

Gethsemane continued to prosper in its spread of the Gospel. June 21, 1970 was an extremely special day. A special morning service honored Pastor Knickelbein's 25 years in the ministry. In the afternoon a special service was held to dedicate Gethsemane's new education/fellowship wing. This new addition was soon put to use as Gethsemane opened their Christian Day School in September.

As evidence that the Lord was showering his blessing upon the work of the WELS in Oklahoma, another congregation was begun in Oklahoma City. November 20, 1973 marked the beginning of Holy Cross congregation. The congregation was given a boost with the transfer of 21 souls from Gethsemane. In July 1975 Andrew Domson became Holy Cross's first resident pastor. The congregation went

off of synodical operating subsidy in 1981 and began a Christain Day School in 1982. Due to decling enrollment, the school was closed in June of 1987. Holy Cross observed a joyful milestone on February 19, 1989 with the dedication of an Allen Digital Computer organ.

While all the joys of the Gospel were going on in Oklahoma, the WELS was also being called into northern Louisiana. In early 1971 Pastor Douglas Weiser who was serving Crown of Life congregation in New Orleans received a letter from a family in Columbia, S.C., who was planning to move to Alexandria, LA. This family became the contact for that area and in September of 1971 Pastor Weiser conducted the first service in a local home. In December of the same year, Nebraska District missionary Sam Kugler began conducting monthly services. When Pastor Kugler accepted a call to serve elsewhere, Mission Board Member Pastor Paul Soukup held services for several months. In November of 1972 Pastor A.L. Schmeling accepted the call as Nebraska District Missionary and was assigned to the Alexandria area to begin exploratory work. The first service was held December 3, 1972 at the Rapides Bank and Trust Company. The work continued in the area with contacts to the large number of servicemen in the area and also 2500 canvass calls made by Pastor Schmeling, members of the exploratory group, and Vicar Timothy Meier. Mission status was granted in November 1972 and King of Kings congregation was organized on March 3, 1974. Average attendance at services was between 30-40, but the congregation saw a large turnover due to the large number of servicemen. In January 1975 land was

purchased with a parsonage built in 1976 and a worship facility in 1978. King of Kings has continued to reach out to lost souls in Alexandria with various evangelism efforts.

In the midst of this flurry of activity, Our Savior in San Antonio sowed the seed for what was to become their daughter congregation. In June of 1971 Our Savior's pastor, William Krueger, began holding services in Fredericksburg. This Fredericksburg group organized as Shepherd of the Hills congregation. From 1975 - February of 1986, Pastors James Radloff, Donald Stuppy, William Brassow, James Tauscher and Floyd Mattek lead services for Shepherd of the Hills. In February of 1986, Shepherd of the Hills received permission from the District Mission Board to call their first resident pastor. Pastor Floyd Mattek was installed on September 28, 1986.

The early 1970's brought other new congregations to Texas. In early 1974 Pastor James Radloff of Holy Word in Austin began work in the Temple area as a mission of the Arizona - California District. After initial calls and contacts, a series of seven Bible classes entitled "What's happening in the Lutheran Church today?" were held. After these Bible classes, the first worship service for the Temple group was held on March 31, 1974. In May of the same year the group was granted mission status and on Sunday May 12th organized as Trinity Lutheran Church. On August 4th, Pastor Mark Krueger was installed as Trinity's first resident pastor. The congregation completed their parsonage in January of 1978 and dedicated their worship facility in 1980. Members and friends of Trinity gathered on November 12, 1989 to

thank the Lord for 15 years of his blessings in Temple. The celebration included a tree planting.

There was an effort to begin an offshoot of Trinity congregation for Fort Hood and in the Killeen area. Because of the variable number of people, this mission effort was closed and reunited with Trinity.

Alexandria was not the only Louisiana area where WELS work was being started at this time. 1973 marked the beginning of work out of a preaching station in the Shreveport area. The work in this area has never progressed past the stage of a preaching station. Many area pastors have traveled to serve this group. Most recently the work has been done by the pastors serving the congregation in Tyler, Texas. Presently Pastor David Lau serves 8 WELS members with services on the second Sunday of the month.

While all of this growth was being experienced outside of Texas, the WELS continued to grow inside the Lone Star state. In May of 1973 Iglesia Luterana Getsemani congregation began in the Corpus Christi area. The work had actually begun a year earlier when Carl Leyrer, who was at the time a 4th year Seminary student, flew down once a month to serve a group of Hispanic Lutherans who had left their former church for doctrinal reasons. Iglesia Luterana Getsemani began as an all Spanish mission when Carl Leyrer was assigned to be the first pastor. In the late 1970's English services were begun and the name was changed to Gethsemane Lutheran Church to better reflect the population of the church. 1977-78 brought the purchase of land and the building of a parsonage. In 1982 plans were begun for

a permanent worship facility. After a series of unfortunate mishaps, Gethsemane was privileged to dedicate a house of God on November 30, 1986.

In 1974-75 a preaching station was opened in the Abilene area. This continued for over 10 years. Pastor Jeffrey Londgren took over the duties in 1983 and in 1985 Holy Scripture's even received mission status. Due to financial difficulties, Holy Scripture's was closed in 1986. Work was reopened in the area in 1989 with an Easter service attended by 150. Exploratory work continues out of Living Hope in Abilene.

1975 brought the beginning of what was to become the western - most congregation of the South Central District. This marked the beginning of Shepherd of the Plains in Lubbock. Business and military personnel have already been mentioned as factors which helped provide groups to start congregations. Shepherd of the Plains was fed by these two groups and also Texas Tech University where they today have a Campus Ministry group.

With all the success that the Lord gave to his Word and work in the mid-South, talk of forming another district began in 1972 - 73. It is self-evident from the previous accounts that to travel to their present districts (Arizona-California and Nebraska) was a long and unnecessary trip for the pastors and delegates in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. The Texas-New Mexico Pastoral Conference of the Arizona-California District sent two memorials to the 1973 WELS Synod Convention. The first memorial included 10 whereas's and then stated "that we oppose any redistricting of present mission boards into regional

boards." The second memorial was the first formal proposal of a new district - "that whenever future growth warrants the formation of a Southern District, it should include Texas and Oklahoma from the New Mexico border on the west to the eastern border of Oklahoma and Texas on the east." Exactly ten years before the South Central district was approved by a Synod Convention, the seeds were being sown.

But Sam Kugler, Paul Soukup, Arlyn Schmeling, and Gerhard Schapekam were not only serving their Lord in the areas mentioned above. As Nebraska District missionary, Pastor Kugler also began efforts to start work in the central Arkansas area in 1969. "By 1971 most of the nucleus had left central Arkansas and the mission was closed." In 1973 another attempt was made to begin work in this area. At first, Pastor Soukup made monthly trips from Overland Park, Kansas. When Pastor Schmeling arrived, he then began serving Little Rock with monthly trips from Alexandria, LA. When Pastor Schmeling was called to Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, Pastor Schapekam came from Tulsa. Weekly services began in July of 1976. In July of 1977 Pastor Schmeling returned to take up residence in Little Rock and in November the group was granted mission status as King of Kings Lutheran Church. With this turn, the Lord began to abundantly pour out blessings. 1978 saw the aquisition of land and the congregation's first resident pastor, Pastor John Gawrisch. In 1981, the congregation dedicated their WEF building.

1977 brought the next big push to organize the now growing congregations of Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma into a

district. In the November 1977 issue of The Lone Star Lutheran, the publication of the Texas Conference of the Arizona - California, Pastor Glaeske wrote an editorial urging the area congregations to seriously consider and gather their thoughts on the matter of a new district. His pleading did some good as the matter was discussed at their January Pastor - Delegate Conference. Many of the congregations in the area also drew up memorials and proposals to solve the distance problem.

At this time Pastor Sawall was making twice-monthly 240 mile round trips from Lubbock to serve a group in Midland, Texas. In 1978 Pastor Robert Neumann was installed as the first resident pastor of Good Shepherd congregation. The congregation was granted mission status in 1981. In 1981 Good Shepherd purchased a mobile chapel from Trinity congregation in Temple and in 1986 they celebrated the erection of their WEF building.

The Lord has also blessed the work in the Midland area in another way. Pastor David Krenke currently serves a preaching station in San Angelo. The group has chosen the name of Our Redeemer and have committed themselves to spreading the message of the Gospel with the purchase of a building with their own funds. Confident of the Lord's blessing, Our Redeemer is also seeking their own pastor.

Picking up on the push for district status that was made in 1977, more action followed in 1978. Congregations in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, & Oklahoma of both the Arizona - California and Nebraska Districts sent memorials to their respective district conventions encouraging a push for district status for

their area. In November of the same year, the Texas Teachers' Curriculum Study Group drew up a memorial encouraging the Texas conference to make "formal application to the 1979 convention of the WELS for district status". All of this led to the matter being brought to the 1979 WELS Synod Convention. The floor committee charged with the discussion of the matter brought a negative report to the floor of the convention. Before the report was voted on, Pastor Glaeske, as chairman of the Texas Mission District Mission Board, made a presentation to the convention. Using an overhead projector presentation, he showed the convention the reasons why a new district should be formed. Factors pointed out were: distance, culture variation, and more involvement and representation in the synod. As a result of Pastor Glaeske's presentation, a motion was passed to send the floor committee back for further study. The committee then brought back a favorable resolution. This favorable resolution was defeated by a minority report. As a result of this, there were further memorials and studies. Two memorials encouraging the continued push for district status were passed at the 1979 and 1980 Texas Mission District District Pastor - Delegate conferences. Nothing however was brought to the 1981 Synod convention.

While further study and push for district status was being carried on, the Lord continued to prosper the growth of his Word. Again, the daughter congregation concept was used. In May of 1979, the work of the members of Holy Cross of Oklahoma City led to exploratory work in Midwest City. The first service was held

on September 16, 1979 at the Country Estates Elementary School. The group was granted mission status on February 20, 1980 and Divine Word congregation was on its way.

In January of 1981 King of Kings in Little Rock began what would be the first of its daughter congregations. At that time Pastor Gawrisch began holding services in the Russelville area. In May of the same year this work was granted exploratory status. Pastor Douglas Lange was installed as the first resident pastor of Faith congregation in June of 1982. The members of the congregation constructed their own WEF unit which was dedicated on May 17, 1987. One week later the congregation bid farewell to Pastor Lange. Present Pastor, Philip Pitt was installed in August of the same year.

This was also a time for other growth in Texas. November 22, 1981 marked the first worship service of Abiding Faith congregation of Pinehurst. This congregation which has up to this time been served only by Pastor Gordon Waterman became an official member of the WELS in August of 1983. The unique feature of Abiding Faith is that they have never been supported by WELS mission dollars, including the building of their worship facility in 1985.

Sparked by a college students at Texas A & M desiring to be fed by the word, work was begun in College Station in 1982. Beautiful Savior congregation was officially organized in April of 1983. The congregation marked dedication milestones of a worship facility in 1986 and a parsonage in 1989.

Also at this time, Pastor Thomas Valleskey began work in the

north Dallas suburb of Plano. The first services began in April of 1982. Pastor Timothy Peterson followed Pastor Valleskey in July of 1983. Atonement congregation has met in several different locations and struggled because of location and land costs. Under God's grace and the leadership of their new pastor, John Liebenow, they look forward to soon starting construction of their first worship facility. Atonement also shares the good news of the Gospel with the people of neighboring Sherman through their pastor's work at the preaching station - Abiding Shepherd.

This was also a time for expansion in the Austin area. Pastor David Clark began work for Risen Savior congregation. The first services were held in January of 1983. The congregation has been pursuing land for over five years. In January of 1989 they observed a milestone with the dedication of a parsonage.

Also at this time, the Gospel was being rooted in the Lewisville/Flower Mound area of Texas. Prince of Peace congregation was officially organized on October 31, 1982. With an ideal location for outreach, the congregation continued to grow under Pastor Thomas Valleskey. 1986 marked the building of Prince of Peace's first facility.

Working on the recommendations of the Dallas - Fort Worth area pastors, two other exploratory seeds were planted at this time. On April 18, 1982 Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht of Immanuel in Fort Worth conducted services in south Fort Worth for what was later to become Abiding Faith congregation. Pastor Edwin Lehmann was installed as the first resident pastor on July 18. Abiding Faith was granted mission status three years later.

After a land purchase in 1986, the congregation broke ground for their WEF unit in October of 1988.

At this same time Pastor Gary Pieper of St. Mark in Duncanville began work in the Arlington area. Initial services were held in October of 1982. Pastor Pieper served the Arlington area group until February of 1983 when Pastor Stanford Espedal became the resident pastor. Our Savior congregation of Arlington was officially founded in July of 1983. Pastor Espedal was followed by Pastor Bruce Bitter. Under Pastor Bitter's direction the congregation dedicated their WEF unit on October 12, 1986. Pastor Earl Kriewall today serves St. Mark.

In May of 1983 Pastor Michael Albrecht was called to begin exploratory work for Prince of Peace congregation in Northwest Houston. Ten people attended the first informational meeting held on September 14th. 41 people attended the first worship service held on October 23rd at the Libby Stelly Dance Studio. On May 1, 1984 the congregation was granted mission status. After a land purchase in 1985, Prince of Peace dedicated their first worship facility on November 8, 1987.

With several years of study and discussion behind them, the Texas - Conference of the Arizona - California District presented a memorial for district status to the 1983 WELS Synod Convention. With a polished presentation and the fact that there were over 2000 communicants involved, the convention unanimously approved the formation of the South Central District.

With approval for district status, the congregations involved planned for a constituting convention. On October 19,

1983 the constituting convention of the South Central District met. Appropriately enough, the convention was held at the district's oldest congregation, Calvary in Dallas. Synod President Carl Mischke preached for the opening service. After the opening service, President Mischke called the convention to order and 38 congregations were received in as members of the South Central District. After President Mischke appointed Pastor Donald Stuppy as secretary - protem, the convention elected its district officials. Pastor Vilas Glaeske was elected as the district's first president with Pastor Douglas Bode as first Vice President and Pastor James Radloff as second Vice President. Pastor Stuppy was elected as the district's first secretary. Devotions for mealtime and closing were conducted by the presidents of the two parent districts, President Marcus Nitz of the Arizona - California District and President Gerald Free of the Nebraska District.

After the formation of the new district, further blessings of growth were seen in Texas.

In 1984 Pastor William Brassow began work on one of the first "new mode" missions of our synod. The Lord blessed his work with 55 present at the first service. Cross of Christ congregation was officially organized on September 23, 1986. In September 1988 Cross of Christ was privileged to dedicate a parsonage and worship facility.

Through the combined work of Pastor Lange from Russelville and Pastor Thomas Schmidt from Tulsa, another congregation was begun in Arkansas, this one in Springdale. After these pastors

did the initial work with the beginning group, Pastor Charles Huebner was called to do exploratory work as the first resident pastor in the summer of 1985. Grace congregation received mission status in the spring of 1987. The congregation is being blessed with rapid growth and expects 100 members by the spring of 1990.

In 1986, Pastor Larry Zweig began work in Atascocita, Texas. After months of exploratory work, he began services at John the Baptist congregation. In November of 1989, the district mission board saw it best to discontinue work in this area. The congregation asked for an extension because of a sudden spurt of growth. After further discussion, the Synod's General Board for Home Missions decided that as of March 31, 1990 work in Atascocita would be ended.

In a special service on August 10, 1986 held at Prince of Peace in Houston, Candidate John Kuske was ordained and installed as a missionary to the Beaumont/Missouri City area. This was the beginning of what is now Grace in Missouri City. Grace looks forward to further growth with their newly-called pastor, Pastor Larry Zweig.

Mt. Olive of Tulsa worked for further expansion when they conducted a survey of the Owasso area in 1987. The survey determined that there was indeed sufficient interest in the Owasso area to begin a church. In response to this potential, Candidate David Sellnow was assigned to do exploratory work for Living Hope Lutheran Church. After a special installation service at Mt. Olive in Tulsa on July 31, 1988, Pastor Sellnow

began his "new mode" exploratory work. The efforts culminated in the first worship service being held on February 26, 1989.

King of Kings in Little Rock has also helped start several daughter congregations. In 1983 services were started in Mountain Home, Arkansas as an offshoot of King of Kings. This group saw their blessings increase when Pastor David Kapler was assigned as Trinity's first resident pastor in July of 1988.

In 1989/90 there was yet another offshoot of King of Kings in Little Rock. Another rather sizeable group formed the nucleus for Living Water congregation in Hot Springs. This congregation sprung from initial efforts by Mr. Joel Nitz already back in 1986. Bible study sessions were started in the area in 1988. In October of 1989 President Glaeske and the District Mission Board visited the area and encouraged the group to formally organize. The Lord has continued to shed his blessings on Living Water congregation as they are about to be received into the district as a full - fledged member. Living Water is another congregation that is entirely self-supporting and is calling for a retired pastor to serve them in a part -time capacity.

From a small group of believers in Dallas, Texas fighting for the truth of the Gospel in 1962, the South Central District of the WELS has today grown to over 40 congregations spread over 4 states. This survey of the history of our beloved district clearly points to the bountiful blessings our God has poured out on his Church in the mid - south. We note the number of congregations that have been established to preach the Gospel to all the world. But also noteworthy is the large number of

Christian Day Schools which are serving our Lord's little lambs.
May He who began this spread of the Gospel continue to bless its
work until he comes again in glory.

ENDNOTES

1. Pastor Walter Diehl. "The Coming of the WELS to the South". p.1.
2. Ted Burgdorf. Written History of Calvary Lutheran Church, Dallas, Texas. p.1.
3. Burgdorf, p.3.
4. South Central District News. Vol. I, #IV, p.2.
5. Written History of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Edna, Texas in 10th Anniversary Booklet.
6. President Vilas Glaeske. Written History of Christ the Lord Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas. p.3.
7. History of Lone Star Lutheran Church, Tyler Texas in 6/11/89 Dedication Booklet.
8. Diehl, op cit, p.5.
9. ibid.
10. Letter from Emily Knickelbein - 2/21/90.
11. Pastor David Putz. Written History of King of Kings Lutheran Church, Little Rock, Arkansas.

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INTERVIEWS

- October 1989 with President Vilas Glaeske
- various telephone conversations with Pastor John Gaertner

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Lone Star Lutheran. Vol I #4.

OTHER WRITTEN SOURCES - listed alphabetically by congregation's city within their state

Note: In addition to the listed sources, each congregation was asked to fill out a standard information sheet. This is assumed as information for each congregation.

Living Water - Hot Springs, AK

- January 30, 1990 letter from Mr. Joel Nitz
- October, 1989 Information sheet compiled by Mr. Joel Nitz
- December 20, 1989 letter from Mr. Joel Nitz to Pastor Harry Wiedemann

King of Kings - Little Rock, AK.

- written history by Pastor David Putz
- 150 word capsule history by pastor David Putz

King of Kings - Alexandria, LA

- written history by Mr. Mel Niemeyer

Preaching Station - Shreveport, LA.

- February 13, 1990 letter from Pastor David Lau

Gethsemane - Oklahoma City, OK.

- February 21, 1990 letter from Emily Knickelbein
- written history

Living Hope - Owasso, OK.

- Owasso Reporter - July 28, 1988 p.6a

Mount Olive - Tulsa, OK.

- 10/17/82 Tenth Anniversary Booklet

Our Savior - Arlington, TX.

- March 1990 telephone conversation with Pastor Earl Kriewall

Holy Word - Austin, TX.

- March 1990 Congregational Profile

Gethsemane - Corpus Christi, TX.

- 11/30/86 Dedication Booklet

Calvary - Dallas, TX.

- outline of history by Ted Burgdorf
- written history by Ted Burgdorf
- Manuscript of Ted Burgdorf speech for Calvary's 25th Anniversary

St. Mark - Duncanville, TX.

- 1990 congregational profile
- 12/15/68 dedication booklet
- 7/26/84 10th anniversary booklet

Redeemer - Edna, TX.

- 5/11/75 10th anniversary booklet

Shepherd of the Hills - Fredericksburg, TX.

- 5/15/89 dedication bulletin

Christ the Lord - Houston, TX.

- written history by Pastor Vilas Glaeske

Prince of Peace - Houston, TX.

- 11/8/87 dedication booklet

Good Shepherd - Midland TX.

- written congregational history

Abiding Faith - Pinehurst, TX.

- 11/24/85 dedication booklet

Trinity - Temple, TX.

- written congregational history

Lone Star - Tyler, TX.

- 6/11/89 dedication bulletin

Abiding Savior - Weslaco, TX.

- Pastor Walter Diehl - "The Coming of the WELS to the South"