

God's Grace in the Tarheel State

A History of WELS Work in North Carolina (1890—Present)

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**This paper is dedicated to the faithful men and women,
through whom the Lord planted and established WELS congregations
in the great state of North Carolina,
devoted to preserving the truth of His Word
through the proclamation of that Word to the lost.**

Above all, this paper is dedicated to the glory of our gracious God.

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”¹

What was it that brought the WELS to North Carolina? Was it the pristine beaches of the Outer Banks or the autumnal glory of the Blue Ridge Mountains? No. Was it the barbequed pig or the hush puppies? Not even that. Was it the technological and industrial boom in places like Raleigh and Charlotte? Getting closer, but not quite. What was it that brought the WELS to North Carolina? That question can be answered with one word – souls.

From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, the Wisconsin Synod received numerous calls to “Come over to North Carolina and help us!” In places like Asheville and Raleigh or military bases like Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), Camp LeJeune and Fort Bragg, calls went out to the WELS to bring the Gospel to WELS members who now lived in North Carolina for commercial or military reasons. So how did the WELS answer that North Carolinian call? Today, eight organized WELS congregations labor to spread the Gospel across North Carolina. How the Lord accomplished this through the WELS is the basis of this thesis.

God-willing, this history of the WELS’ work in North Carolina will reveal the joys and challenges of planting confessional Lutheran congregations in the midst of the evangelical “Bible Belt”, where a Baptist, Methodist or Non-Denominational church stands on nearly every corner. This history will recount how the Lord took small nuclei of WELS members across North Carolina and grew them into living congregations. Above all, we will see how the Lord’s hand of grace guided the spread of his Word in North Carolina and used the progress and setbacks of each congregation to carry out his will.

May the Lord bless you, dear Reader, as you discover how the Lord poured out his grace through the efforts of the WELS in the Tarheel State!

¹ Acts 16:9-10.

I. Early Efforts in North Carolina (1890-1970)

The Synodical Conference Comes to North Carolina (1890-1961)

The first record of Wisconsin Synod-supported work in North Carolina happened nearly seventy-five years before any WELS church would be planted in the state. Even at that time, Lutheranism was no stranger to North Carolina. In fact, North Carolina was the home of one of the oldest Lutheran church bodies in America – the North Carolina Synod.² However, by the end of the 19th century, there was little confessional Lutheran presence in the state. An opportunity arose in 1890 for the confessional Lutheran church bodies of the Synodical Conference, which included the Wisconsin Synod, to gain a foothold in North Carolina.

From its 1872 founding the Synodical Conference had sought to do mission work among America's black population. Work had begun with mixed results in the 1880s, but when an appeal for help came from three black pastors in North Carolina, who had heard of the Synodical Conference's "Negro work", the Conference jumped at the chance. In 1889, the Synod of North Carolina had allowed four black pastors and their congregations to independently form the "Alpha Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Freedmen in America." This not only made the black pastors independent, but it also meant that the North Carolina Synod freed itself from its financial responsibility to these men and their congregations. This inevitably caused dire

² North Carolina Synod (ELCA), *About Our Synod* [article on-line] (Accessed 11 December 2004); available from http://www.nclutheran.org/about_lutheran_synod.asp; Internet.

Concordia Historical Institute, *This Day in History—May 2* [article on-line] (Accessed 11 December 2004); available from <http://chi.lcms.org/history/tih0502.htm>; Internet.

Founded 1803 – Lutheran Germans had emigrated to North Carolina during the 17th and 18th centuries and had formed small congregations years before the group organized into a synod. In 1773, Rev. Adolphus Nussman and Gottfried Arends (a teacher who was ordained in 1775) emigrated from Germany to establish and organize the Lutheran church in North Carolina, primarily in what is now Cabarrus, Davidson and Rowan counties. Arends, in particular, led the organization of the Lutheran church in North Carolina to form the N.C. Synod. Its synod constitution made no mention of the Lutheran confessions and, in 1820, led to the withdrawal of a large number of people, including the Henkel family (early leaders in conservative Lutheranism in America) and the formation of the Tennessee Synod. The North Carolina Synod continued in its liberal tendencies and was a major player in the formation of the General Synod-South, which became part of the United Lutheran Church in America in a 1918 merger with the General Synod and the General Council. In 1962, it participated in the merger to form the Lutheran Church in America and in 1988, became a member synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

financial circumstances for these congregations, which soon led the pastors to appeal to the Synodical Conference. The Synodical Conference saw the promise of this mission field and called Pastor N.J. Bakke from New Orleans “to instruct the preachers and superintend the field.”³

Even though two of the three black pastors resigned shortly after he arrived and the third started an opposition congregation a few years after his arrival, Bakke supervised, from his congregations in Charlotte and Concord, the creation of a dozen stations in and around the Charlotte area. By 1900, the number of missionaries had increased to seven, including one black pastor, Stewart Doswell, who had attended Missouri’s Springfield seminary.⁴

In 1902, the Synodical Conference resolved to create a school to prepare “colored ministers and teachers”. This led to the establishment of Immanuel Lutheran College in 1903. Immanuel had a high school and normal (teacher-training) and theological (pastor-training) departments “designed to train the necessary Negro pastors and teachers for a growing mission.”⁵

Bakke supervised this Concord, NC-based school over and above his work as a missionary and continued as the director/professor of the school in 1905, when it moved to Greensboro. In 1925, Dr. Henry Nau was called to Greensboro and served as Immanuel’s president for twenty-five years. However, there were problems with Immanuel Lutheran College. It’s location in North Carolina, which was the smallest of the “Negro mission fields”, made it very difficult for students to travel from Louisiana, Alabama and other states, since it was the only school for black pastors in the black mission. Attempts were made to increase Immanuel’s small enrollment with an “open door” policy, where a general education was provided for black

³ Armin W. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

youth no matter if they were Lutheran or not. This led to enrollments that were often less than half Lutheran, but even so, this policy still did little to improve enrollment. Immanuel continued, however, to be a blessing to the black missions by providing well-trained black pastors, albeit small numbers of them.⁶

By 1925, the work in North Carolina had expanded to twenty-two congregations throughout the Southeast. By the 1940s, however, the nation had changed. There was a growing desire to integrate the mission work among the black population with that done among the white population. This desire moved the Synodical Conference to reconsider how it was working with these “Negro missions.” At the time, most missionaries to these missions were white and few black pastors were staying in the ministry. During this period of reconsideration, it was also noted that Immanuel Lutheran College was not doing well with low Lutheran enrollments, high cost to the Synodical Conference and little potential for the future. This led to the 1944 recommendation that students enroll at the colleges and seminaries of the Synodical Conference’s schools. This recommendation was denied, but by 1956, the need for a separate black seminary quickly vanished as integration led the Synodical Conference to hand over the mission work among the Negro populations to the local districts and their congregations.⁷ At the time in North Carolina, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) was the only church body able to take responsibility for this mission work among the blacks. Following the resolution of the 1960 Synodical Conference, Immanuel Lutheran College closed its doors 30 June 1961.⁸

⁶ Schuetze 139, 148-149.

⁷ Ibid., 150-158. Schuetze offers a detailed and interesting account of how the “Negro missions” were integrated into the Synodical Conference in this section of his Synodical Conference history.

⁸ Ibid., 139, 152-153, 157-158. The legacy of Immanuel Lutheran College continued decades later when Star of Bethlehem in Winston-Salem was organized in 1998. For further information on this, please see pg. 56.

Up until this time, as a member of the Synodical Conference, the Wisconsin Synod had supported the mission efforts among the black population in North Carolina, but had established no presence of its own. It had left the mission work out on the east coast to its big sister, the Missouri Synod. That was all to change with the official break in fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and the LC-MS on 17 August 1961. At that time, the Wisconsin Synod consisted of a nucleus in the Midwest from the Dakotas & Nebraska to Michigan with outposts in the Pacific-Northwest. She was quite small on her own and some even said that Wisconsin would fall apart after the split, but the Lord had other plans for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

A Door Opens to the WELS – Early Missions to the Military (1967-1970)

The year was 1967. Lyndon Baines Johnson was president and the nation was in turmoil. Racial violence burned in cities like Detroit and New York City. Anti-war demonstrations broke out all over the nation, because our boys in uniform were fighting an “unjust war” in the rice paddies of Vietnam. Young men were getting drafted into the military daily and our nation’s military bases were filled with new draftees and recruits. Among these soldiers were many WELS members, in need of spiritual care in areas where there was no WELS church nearby. How would the WELS reach her scattered military men, particularly on the east coast in places like North Carolina? The first WELS congregation on the East Coast had opened in Falls Church, VA, near Washington, D.C. in 1963. Others had followed and could serve the bases in Virginia and Maryland, but the WELS still had no presence in North Carolina. The men serving at the Marine, Army and Air Force bases scattered across central and eastern North Carolina had

no shepherd or congregation nearby to serve them. In 1967, their call for help was finally answered in the person of the 72-year old, Pastor Luther Voss.⁹



Pastor Luther Voss in 1966¹⁰

Looking back on how the Lord used Pastor Voss shows that much of his ministry focused on the spiritual needs of our servicemen. Voss himself had served as a sergeant in the U.S. Artillery in France during World War I, before he graduated from the Seminary in 1922. During the Korean War, he was given a leave of absence to minister to WELS men in the Minnesota National Guard stationed in Alabama and Georgia. Again in 1965, Pastor Voss answered the spiritual needs of WELS servicemen by serving a 21-month tour as our Synod's civilian chaplain over in Vietnam. What's unusual about this call is that he served the far-flung outposts of American soldiers across South Vietnam at the young age of 70! In a *Milwaukee Sentinel* article from 1965, Voss stated, "These lads in the army want to talk to someone who has been through it and is like a father to them."¹¹ Luther Voss was that spiritual "father" that they needed.

Upon his return in 1967, Voss' experience compelled the Synod's Spiritual Welfare Commission to minister to servicemen in Norfolk, VA and points south. This meant that once a

⁹ "In Memoriam – Luther M. Voss," *The Colonial Conference Crier* 9, no. 2 (April 1975): 1.

¹⁰ Photo Courtesy of *Evangelisch=Lutherisches Gemeinde=Blatt*, January 1966, 14.

¹¹ James Johnston, "Lutheran, 70, to Minister in Vietnam," *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (13 November 1965). This article from the *Sentinel* was a photocopy of the original and was placed in the biographical file of Luther M. Voss contained in the WELS Archives, located at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI. No page numbers were recorded with this article.

month, Pastor Voss drove 900 miles through North Carolina visiting those serving in the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC and those serving in the Marines at the MCAS in Cherry Point, NC or at Camp LeJeune in Jacksonville, NC.¹² As he traveled, he made his motel room into a temporary church and pastor's office as he communed and counseled WELS servicemen and their families.¹³ When we look ahead to the years that followed, both Fayetteville and Jacksonville would eventually sprout WELS congregations of their own, primarily consisting of military men and women with their families. By 1972, the *Colonial Conference Crier* was reporting that there were "over 100 souls in [North Carolina] who claim membership in our synod."¹⁴ The Lord was opening a door to North Carolina!

Following Pastor Voss' retirement in 1970, the Michigan District assigned Paul Ziemer to take over Voss' congregation at Norfolk and his work with the military in Virginia and North Carolina. Ziemer was the first among those missionaries who served in North Carolina to make use of air transportation to reach groups of WELS people. In a 1972 article in the *Colonial Conference Crier*, Ziemer introduced the groups that received his pastoral services at the three bases at the three North Carolina bases. At the time, it seemed that of the three groups the group from the Cherry Point MCAS at Cherry Point and the nearby coastal town of Havelock offered the greatest potential to become the first organized congregation in North Carolina. He wrote,

This small group of marines and their families have recently been fortified by the addition of a number of families who took a firm stand against doctrinal indifference, and severed fellowship from their former church body. These

¹² Walter Beckmann, "Marching Through Georgia—Once a Month," *The Colonial Conference Crier* 3, no. 1 (March 1969): 2-3. Voss also traveled as far as Georgia and Mississippi to serve small groups of military men and their families. At the same time, he organized a mission in Norfolk, VA. The Lord blessed this venerable man with tremendous energy and zeal to serve God's people!

¹³ "More than Fifteen Years of Grace: Serving the WELS Military People in North Carolina," *The Colonial Crier* 18, no. 2 (June 1984): 5.

¹⁴ Paul Ziemer, "Introducing the WELS in North Carolina," *Colonial Conference Crier* 5, no. 3 (June 1972): 4-5.

Christians live with one goal always in mind—a congregation of their own! Every Sunday afternoon they meet for worship and Sunday School at a chapel on the base. Since a pastor is available only every other Sunday, taped services are used on alternate weeks. These Christians are not afraid to witness for Christ and the truth of His Word. This “living their faith” has already brought about a number of inquiries and visitors from the surrounding area.¹⁵

By 1971, this group made a request of the Michigan District Mission Board to pursue exploratory and mission status in their area. Things looked promising for the Havelock group. The Lord had different plans, however, because around the time that Pastor Ziemer arrived in Virginia, a small nucleus of WELS members was settling in the Raleigh area.

II. The WELS Congregations of North Carolina (1970-Present)

The Lord Plants a Garden in the Triangle -- Gethsemane, NC

Starting in 1965, IBM and other technological companies drew job seekers from the Midwest and the Northeast to what became known as “the Triangle” region of central North Carolina – the cities of Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. Job opportunities in the field of technology drew a number of WELS people to the Raleigh area. By 1970, the Michigan District Mission Board was already considering Raleigh as a “Projected Area for W.E.L.S. Missions”.¹⁶

Under the leadership of laymen Roger Kaus and Dr. Arthur Eggert, a nucleus of WELS members formed in the Raleigh area.¹⁷ They began holding Sunday worship services and Sunday School classes in their homes. On 31 January 1971, Pastor Ziemer presided over the first WELS communion service in Raleigh held in the Kaus family room.¹⁸ The group continued to worship in the Kaus family room with Ziemer visiting monthly. Roger Kaus, in an e-mail survey, writes

¹⁵ Ziemer, “Introducing” 4.

¹⁶ Daniel Gieschen, *Michigan District Mission Board Report*, 1970, Michigan DMB Collection, 3.

¹⁷ Norman Berg, “1000 Blessings for God’s People,” *The Northwestern Lutheran*, (7 October 1973), 313.

¹⁸ “Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church: Raleigh, North Carolina,” *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 36.

about that time, “The attitude and outlook was very positive and a high priority was given to the study of God’s Word. With the small nucleus close fellowship ties also developed.”¹⁹ The nucleus grew as civilian and military families and individuals transferred into North Carolina. On 27 June 1972, the nucleus informally organized as a congregation, elected officers and chose the name of “Gethsemane” for the congregation. Ziemer wrote about the group in June 1972,

From month to month these fellow-Christians live in the hope that someday soon they may be able to be served by a pastor more often than every four weeks. Exploratory status in their area would be a fulfillment of a dream and the answer to many prayers. For now, you will find them gathered every Sunday in the living room of a home, where, most often, a tape-recorder leads them in worship. When the pastor comes, Holy Communion is joyfully celebrated and the stereo cabinet becomes the altar.²⁰

In September 1972, Ziemer began to visit bi-monthly. Within two months, these increased efforts bore fruit. In November 1972, the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM) “approved the calling of a missionary for the state of North Carolina since several likely mission fields in North Carolina appeared open to our Synod.”²¹ The December 1972 *Colonial Conference Crier* reported that, “the state of North Carolina, including military bases and the civilian congregations at Raleigh and Havelock, was granted manpower to release Paul Ziemer for more extensive work in VA. Pastor Frederick Fallen was called for the position.”²² Fallen and two others returned the call, so the request for manpower was given to the Assignment Committee.²³ During the interim, Gethsemane came under the care of a new shepherd because of flight scheduling difficulties for Pastor Ziemer. Pastor John Guse of Columbia, SC took over the

¹⁹ Roger Kaus, E-Mail interview by author, 22 November 2004.

²⁰ Ziemer, *Introducing* 4.

²¹ Berg 314.

²² Karl Gurgel, “Good News of Great Joy Around the Conference,” *The Colonial Conference Crier* 6, no. 4 (December 1972), 1.

²³ Berg 314.

spiritual care of the mission from November 1972 to July 1973, flying up to Raleigh on a regular basis each month to serve the people there.²⁴

The group continued to develop in its size and commitment, so the GBHM granted Gethsemane “mission status” on 8 May 1973.²⁵ Norman Berg, the GBHM Chairman, wrote, “(Gethsemane) was also chosen out of a group of thirteen new missions established in that meeting to be designated the 1000th congregation to be affiliated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.”²⁶ The WELS had a foothold in North Carolina.²⁷



Worshipping at the Roger Kaus home – 1973



Installation service for Paul Schmiede – 15 July 1973²⁸

²⁴ John Guse, E-Mail interview by the author, 12 November 2004. Pastor Guse writes, “[A]fter Sun worship in Columbia (Irmo), SC I’d hope a plane to Raleigh; get picked up and transported to the home of Roger and Gladys Kaus....Services were held in their home. Most times, I was taken back to the airport for an evening flight back to Columbia, SC. My involment (sic) other than conducting swervices (sic) and providing some encouragement was mighty minimal.”

²⁵ GBHM, *General Board for Home Missions Report* (7-8 May 1973), Michigan DMB Collection, Page Unknown.

²⁶ Berg 314.

²⁷ It’s interesting to note that in the *Michigan DMB Report to the MI District Pastor-Teacher District Convention* in June 1973, the Gulf-Atlantic Mission District (GAMD) proposed by memorial to make North Carolina part of what is now the South Atlantic District of the WELS. This never came to pass since Raleigh—the only WELS church in North Carolina—was closer to the Virginia churches than the Florida churches. To this day, the only NC church in the forbear of the GAMD, the South Atlantic District is Living Savior in Asheville on the west end of the state.

²⁸ Photos courtesy of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, 7 October 1973, Cover Page.

On the heels of the mission status news came the report that Seminary graduate Paul Schmiede had been assigned to serve as Gethsemane's first resident pastor.²⁹ On 15 July 1973, Schmiede was ordained and installed by GBHM Executive Secretary, Norman Berg at the Raleigh Women's Club. Schmiede recounts about the service, "I remember the words of John the Baptist applied to me [by Pastor Paul Ziemer] and the nucleus, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30). I felt somewhat dwarfed by that huge picture of General Robert E. Lee over the altar."³⁰ At the time Gethsemane consisted of twenty-two souls.

The Lord's "garden" soon outgrew the Kaus family room, so starting in September 1973, Gethsemane began to meet in a conference room at the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge North. They made use of an old pump organ to lead the music for worship.³¹ Such rental arrangements were only meant to be temporary. Gethsemane needed a more permanent home, since average Sunday attendance had risen from twenty-two to thirty-five. So in November 1973, the congregation made a land request and received a Church Extension Fund (CEF) loan of \$55,000 for land and improvements.³² The search began for land in the Raleigh area.

By January 1974, the congregation narrowed down its search to several suitable sites for a building.³³ One in particular was a three-acre, triangular site on Newton Road in northeast Raleigh. Following the April recommendation of the District Mission Board, the Gethsemane congregation purchased the Newton Road site in July 1974. However, Gethsemane did not break

²⁹ Berg notes in his article, "Coincidentally, it was Paul Schmiede, the Colonial Conference summer vicar, who on July 11, 1971, conducted services at Raleigh and then did survey work there, who two years later on July 15, 1973 was installed as the first resident pastor of the group." (313-314)

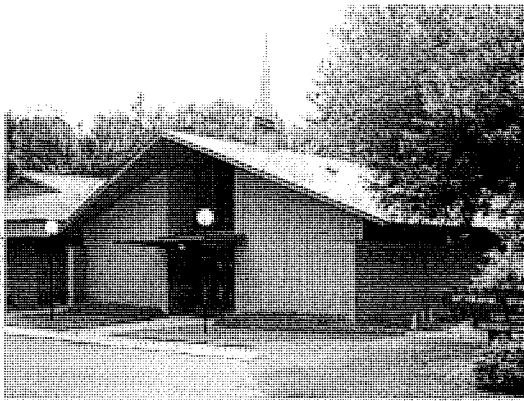
³⁰ Paul Schmiede, E-Mail interview by author, 21 October 2004.

³¹ Ibid.

³² GBHM Priority Committee, *GBHM Priority Committee Report* (5-6 November 1973), Michigan DMB Collection, 1 and GBHM Priority Committee, *Action on Requests to the G.B.H.M.* (5-6 November 1973), Michigan DMB Collection, 1.

³³ "News," *The Colonial Conference Crier* 8, no. 3 (October 1974): 1.

ground for their new chapel until 4 July 1976, because of a parsonage purchase and site-development problems. The October 1976 *Colonial Conference Crier* notes that the 2800 sq. ft., brick and frame building was to cost \$145,000.³⁴ Duane Anderson, the GBHM's Department Architect, designed Gethsemane's chapel.³⁵ New Year's Eve 1976 marked the first service held in the new chapel and 20 March 1977 was Dedication Day. WELS people from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia celebrated with Gethsemane that day. Since Gethsemane was the 1000th congregation of the WELS, *Northwestern Lutheran* featured it in its 12 June 1977 issue. Rev. Oscar J. Naumann, the president of the WELS, preached on Genesis 28:10-22, stressing that, "This is none other but the house of God."³⁶ This chapel continues to be their home.



Present-Day Exterior of Gethsemane



Present-Day Interior of Gethsemane

This is the church designed by Duane Anderson and built in 1977.³⁷

As Gethsemane entered the 1980s, she continued to grow through outreach programs like Vacation Bible School and Travel-Canvass-Witness teams. In January 1983, Gethsemane began

³⁴ "Building Boom," *The Colonial Conference Crier* 10, no. 3 (October 1976): 6. The 12 June 1976 *Northwestern Lutheran* noted that the cost of the 2800 square foot chapel ended up costing only \$130,000 with furnishings! (pg. 182)

³⁵ John Mittelstaedt, *The North Atlantic District: The Second Decade – 1973 through 1983*, Presented at the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the North Atlantic District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod at Winchester, Virginia, 15-16 June 2004, 3.

³⁶ Paul Schmiede, "WELS' 1000th Congregation Dedicates Church," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 64 (12 June 1977), 182.

³⁷ Photos courtesy of <http://www.gethsemanelutheran.us> -- 13 December 2004.

the process of weaning the congregation off of mission support. Due to a large class of vicars and a special monetary gift from a WELS member, Gethsemane received her only vicar in September 1983. Vicar David Lau was assigned to assist Pastor Schmiede with serving the WELS members in the military at Camp LeJeune, Cherry Point MCAS and Fort Bragg.³⁸ The Lord continued to bless Gethsemane and in January 1986, Gethsemane was only one step away from becoming a self-supporting congregation when she received interest subsidy from the WELS. She had grown from the twenty-seven members in 1973 to 138 members in 1986.

During this entire time, Gethsemane shared her pastor with various nuclei of WELS members across North Carolina. During the mid-1970s, Schmiede teamed up with Pastor John Guse to attempt exploratory work in Charlotte, where they conducted bi-monthly services and classes with a small nucleus of WELS members. This group after disbanding once eventually formed Grace in Charlotte. Between 1977 and 1979, Schmiede assisted Pastor Guse again with a small nucleus of WELS members in the Asheville-Hendersonville area in western North Carolina. This group formed Our Savior in Hendersonville. While flying each month to visit these groups, Pastor Schmiede continued to serve the military bases in Fayetteville, Jacksonville and Cherry Point.³⁹ On 7 September 1986, his efforts to the military led to the establishment of a daughter congregation – Beautiful Savior in Fayetteville – with a pastor of their own. This was the first of three congregations which Gethsemane daughtered in central North Carolina.⁴⁰

³⁸ David Lau, E-Mail interview by the author, 9 December 2004.

³⁹ Schmiede Interview. Scott Mews in his 27 October 2004 E-Mail Interview writes, “It was said in the early days of the congregation that Pastor Schmiede spent just about every Sunday afternoon on the road starting congregations and preaching stations in Fayetteville and Cherry Point.”

⁴⁰ *The History of God's Blessings Upon Gethsemane Ev. Lutheran Church – 25 Years of God's Unfailing Love*, (1998) 2.

In October 1988, Gethsemane's first pastor accepted a call to Our Savior in Pomona, CA. Without a shepherd for the first time since 1973, the pastors from Fayetteville and Charlotte served as shepherds in the vacancy. The Lord looked with favor on Gethsemane and the vacancy ended on 25 June 1989 as Seminary graduate Scott Mews was ordained and installed as Gethsemane's second pastor. At the time, Gethsemane had 122 souls with 82 communicants.

The ten years of Mews' Raleigh ministry would prove to be almost as busy as Schmiege's. During the first three years of his ministry, Mews helped to start a preaching station in Greensboro, eighty miles to the west of Raleigh. On 1 July 1992, Gethsemane became self-supporting after selling the parsonage. Eleven days later, Gethsemane's mission efforts in Greensboro bore fruit as a second daughter congregation was established – Christ the Redeemer in Greensboro. In spite of daughtering two congregations, Gethsemane continued to grow and the thought of perhaps starting a Lutheran Elementary School moved the congregation to begin plans for a new, 3500 sq. ft. Education/Fellowship building connected to the chapel. On 24 July 1994, they broke ground. It was dedicated nearly a year later on 9 July 1995.⁴¹

By 1997, the chapel and education/fellowship addition began to fill quickly. The congregation had grown to 241 souls with 165 communicants and there was talk of offering a second service. In January of that year, a committee was formed to make plans for an Early Childhood Center to open in fall 1998. At the same time, the possibility arose for the establishment of a third daughter congregation. About thirty of Gethsemane's members lived southwest of Raleigh in the rapidly growing Cary/Apex area. So Gethsemane went to the Assignment Committee for a Seminary graduate to serve as a "Mission Explorer" in the Cary

⁴¹ *History of Gethsemane*, 3.

area. The Lord led the Committee to assign Michael Geiger to the area, where he was ordained and installed on 10 August 1997.

The following year was a reason for celebration. Twenty-five years had passed since Gethsemane had become the 1000th WELS congregation. The Lord had blessed Gethsemane with grace over those twenty-five years. Gethsemane celebrated the anniversary on 17 May 1998 with great joy and humble thanks, being reminded again of all that the Lord had accomplished.⁴² With renewed zeal, Gethsemane planned to open Precious Lambs Early Learning Center for children ages five and younger. However, in August, Margaret Thomas, who had accepted the call to be the first Director of Precious Lambs, resigned to get married and moved back to her home in Nebraska. In August, Debbi Heiderich became the second Director. Precious Lambs opened on 4 January 1999 with five children enrolled. By the year 2000, there were twenty-seven children enrolled.

Shortly before Precious Lambs opened, Gethsemane's mission efforts in the Cary area bore fruit as Gethsemane's third daughter congregation – Tree of Life in Cary – held its first public worship service on 13 December 1998. It was shortly after this, in April 1999, that Pastor Mews accepted a call to Amazing Grace in Milwaukie, Oregon. Pastor Mews describes his Raleigh years, "Like seeing your children grow, it wasn't always obvious. Growth came in small steps. Over the years, however, God gave us an amazing amount of his blessings. Statistics show it. Buildings show it. Fruits of faith showed it."⁴³

Again, Gethsemane was without a shepherd, but the Lord provided as Pastor David Schleusener was installed as the third resident pastor on 7 November 1999. The beginnings of

⁴² Scott Mews, "Circuit News: Piedmont Circuit," *North Atlantic District News* 3 (June 1998), 8.

⁴³ Mews Interview.

Tree of Life, which took nearly thirty members from Gethsemane, and Precious Lambs Early Learning Center proved to be more financially challenging to Gethsemane than originally anticipated. The Lord did bless the work done at Precious Lambs as enrollment continued to increase. From 1998-2003, however, Gethsemane still saw a gradual decline in numbers for the first time since the mid-1980s, going from 230 members to 126. The loss of members to Tree of Life in 1999, job transfers out of the area, member delinquency and a doctrinal controversy that surfaced in 2002 contributed to this slide in membership. Regarding the doctrinal controversy and the vacancy that followed, Roger Kaus writes,

A doctrinal controversy regarding Church Fellowship surfaced during August, 2002. The Circuit pastor and District Officers were involved with the matter. Rev. David Schleusener resigned effective July 1, 2003 and joined the Missouri Synod. Approximately 20% of Gethsemane's members left the congregation.⁴⁴

Gethsemane was hurting after the resignation and was in desperate need of healing. I, personally, saw how great this need was when I attended an Elders' Meeting at Gethsemane during my first week as a vicar at Tree of Life. They had to pick up the pieces of trust and recover what was left of those who stayed at Gethsemane—who was still with them and who was not. Pastor George Enderle, who assisted Pastor Geiger as vacancy pastor from October 2003 to April 2004, describes the situation well, "It was the first time in my ministry that I served a congregation in which the previous pastor fell in false doctrine and left. The effect upon the people is devastating. It is similar to what a spouse feels when confronted with the reality that the

⁴⁴ Kaus Interview. In a 22 October 2004 e-mail, Pastor David Schleusener provided the following footnote about his ministry at Gethsemane: "Further insight into the ministry of Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church may be obtained directly from David Schleusener. David Schleusener served as pastor at Gethsemane from October 1999 through June 2002 (sic). He resigned from the ministry due to a controversy that arose over his daughters attending a non-WELS Lutheran grade school and his wife teaching at the same school. After resigning from the WELS ministerium, David took on a full-time Latin teaching position at Trinity Academy of Raleigh. At the time this paper was written, he was seeking colloquy within LCMS."

other spouse has been unfaithful. ‘We feel betrayed,’ sums it up.”⁴⁵ At the time, it seemed almost like the Lord had forsaken his faithful people, but the Lord used this trial to strengthen the remnant and healing came soon to the congregation. Roger Kaus writes, “The Lord provided Circuit Pastor Jonathan Kuske, Pastor Michael Geiger, Vicar Jeremiah Gumm, Pastor George Enderle and Elder Seth Neyhart to shepherd Gethsemane during a year long vacancy. They were very instrumental in helping with the healing and recovery process. A Service of Healing was led by Pastor Michael Geiger on July 6, 2003. Pastor George Enderle proposed a ‘Cord of Three Strands’ Stewardship program during the fall of 2003 which the Lord richly blessed.”⁴⁶

By the spring of 2004, healing had taken place and Gethsemane was in need of a new shepherd. Seminary graduate Rob Guenther was assigned to serve Gethsemane on 20 May 2004. On 11 July 2004 the members of Gethsemane rejoiced as Guenther was ordained and installed. Currently, Gethsemane is close to recovering from the two mission/education projects of 1998-1999 and the doctrinal controversy. They now have a full-time pastor and are seeking to make use of Precious Lambs as a tool for outreach. That mission zeal of days of old is beginning to come back as Gethsemane considers ways to reach out to the community. Roger Kaus writes,

Looking back we can see how God was in control by moving a mission nucleus to North Carolina, providing shepherds to guide us, providing the means to bring Gethsemane through various challenging times and preserving Gethsemane through a doctrinal controversy. It was a special privilege to see Gethsemane grow from a few families to a self supporting congregation and to be part of this effort as a tool or instrument in God’s hands.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ George Enderle, E-Mail interview by the author, 2 December 2004.

⁴⁶ Kaus Interview.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

As seen from Gethsemane's past, the Lord's hand used his people to establish a WELS congregation in the Raleigh area. About the same time that Gethsemane was dedicating their chapel in 1977, the Lord began to open another door across the state in western NC.

The Gospel Dawns Over the Blue Ridge Mountains – Our Savior, Hendersonville, NC

Nestled among the towering Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains in western North Carolina lies the city of Asheville. About ten miles to the south is the town of Hendersonville. As in Raleigh, but to a lesser extent, northern corporations transferred their employees down there. Also, in spite of its regular snowfall, the area became a popular place to retire. These two factors drew a handful of WELS people to move to the Asheville-Hendersonville area. When the Jonathan Tweit family moved down to this area in 1977, they found out that the closest WELS church was almost 150 miles away in Columbia, SC. In order to continue worshipping, they contacted the Synod for tapes to "lead" their services on Sunday mornings. Shortly, thereafter, they came into contact with another WELS family, Ed & Mary Groeschel, who had transferred down in September 1977 and had been attending both a local CLC church and the WELS church in Columbia. This contact led to the two families gathering each Sunday to worship by tape and to conduct Sunday School classes.⁴⁸ A couple more families with ELS or WELS backgrounds began to come to the services as well. By the end of the year, Pastor John Guse of Columbia, SC was visiting regularly to offer the Word and Sacraments.⁴⁹

The group determined that they were interested in forming a WELS congregation of their own. The January 1978 *Colonial Conference Crier* reports that, "Four families in Asheville and Hendersonville requested Wisconsin Synod services in the western part of North Carolina. Newspaper advertising is being done in Asheville and meetings are being held with mission

⁴⁸ Jonathan Tweit, Mailed interview by author, 20 November 2004.

⁴⁹ *Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Hendersonville, 1994, 3.

board representatives in the hopes that exploratory services could be started.”⁵⁰ With the help of the Synod, the members blitzed the area through the newspapers and canvassing with plans to invite the public to two informational meetings for 8 January 1978,⁵¹ one at Asheville and one near Hendersonville, about the creation of a new Lutheran church in the area. Unfortunately, there were problems for the Asheville meeting. Pastor Guse writes, “Our ad in the newspaper, placed over the phone, appeared as ‘Information Meeting – Wisconsin Lutheran Synagogue’ or something like that. The Holiday Inn in Asheville (sic) put on their sign ‘Welcome – Jon Tweit’ plus I think it snowed. Attendance in Asheville was virtually nil.”⁵² In fact, there were only two men who showed up. However, the Hendersonville had better results. Mary Groeschel writes, “The meeting in Hendersonville was attended by several couples who had retired to the area and were attending but not happy at the CLC church. They were definitely interested but reluctant to meet in someone’s home.”⁵³ This reluctance led the group to seek a rental facility for worship.

They soon found that facility in the YMCA in Hendersonville. For a congregation consisting primarily of retirees used to the established northern churches of the WELS, weekly clean-up, set-up and take down proved to be a testing experience at times. Sometimes the facility had no heat or they did not have music. In April 1978, a request was made for manpower, but was deferred by the GBHM.⁵⁴ Until the GBHM granted manpower in 1979, Pastor Scott Stone

⁵⁰ “‘Lengthening & Strengthening’ Growth in the Conference,” *Colonial Conference Crier* 11, 4 (January 1978): 4.

⁵¹ *Our Savior* 4.

⁵² Guse Interview.

⁵³ Ed & Mary Groeschel, E-Mail interview by author, 7 December 2004.

⁵⁴ GBHM Priority Committee, *GBHM Priority Committee Report* (24-25 April 1978), Michigan DMB Collection, 5.

from Knoxville, Tennessee,⁵⁵ Pastor Guse and occasionally Pastor Paul Schmiede from Raleigh came to Hendersonville by car or plane to offer monthly communion services.⁵⁶ In September 1978, the group in Hendersonville received the joyous news that they had received exploratory status and the first of at least four attempts were made to call a “District Missionary” to serve western NC.⁵⁷ On 13 February 1979, the GBHM granted Hendersonville’s request for manpower. A call was sent to Pastor Harvey Witte who returned the call.⁵⁸ Hendersonville’s request still resulted in the assignment of Seminary graduate Jon Guenther, who was ordained and installed as Hendersonville’s first resident pastor on 1 July 1979.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Pastor Stone tells an amusing story about the Lord’s protection during his travels to and from Hendersonville in his 4 December 2004 E-Mail, “One time my family went with me on the trip [to Hendersonville over the Smokies], including Sandi my wife, two young daughters, and baby boy. On our trip home we became snarled in a snowstorm passing through the Smokies westbound on I-40. There were dead stop in the midst of a mountain blizzard along with a long line of trucks heading for ‘Malfunction Junction’ at ‘K-Town.’ Those were the days when CB radios were popular, so one of the truckers with whom I was chatting on the radio used our plight to his advantage (since he was stuck in a long line of trucks along with the rest of us): he made a U-turn on the interstate and led the way for us to follow back down the eastern slope of the Smokies! I think this was the only time in my life when I drove many miles the wrong way on a freeway. He ran interference for us until we could find a Motel to sleepover that night. I can still hear his words over the CB: ‘Coming through with a pregnant mother and her babies!’ Of course, that way he got out of the traffic jam, too, Thereafter we always thought of him as our angel trucker.”

⁵⁶ *Living Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church* (2000), 1.

⁵⁷ Paul Schmiede, “The Gospel Advances!,” *Colonial Conference Crier* 12 (October 1978), 1. A “District Missionary” is defined as “a missionary who would be moved from place to place to start missions”. (Paul Schmiede – E-Mail Interview – 9 December 2004).

⁵⁸ Paul Schmiede, “Our Easter Amen,” *Colonial Conference Crier* 13 (April 1979), 1.

⁵⁹ *Our Savior* 5.



Pastor Jon Guenther (Left Rear) and the Hendersonville Nucleus at the YMCA – 1979.⁶⁰

The Hendersonville group had Guenther all to themselves for only three months, when in September the Mission Board called him to also serve a group in Charlotte, which was about three hours away at that time. He conducted services at both locations each Sunday, which meant that he was driving 300 miles a Sunday. As before Guenther arrived, Hendersonville had a “shared-time” pastor. This “shared-time” situation became common for much of Our Savior’s history. At about this same time, the YMCA began to present greater problems for the Hendersonville group. The YMCA wanted to expand their facilities and informed the group that they had to find another place to worship.⁶¹ So the search for a new home began.

On 15 January 1980, the group selected a name for their congregation. Most members recalled names of their previous churches, but Jonathan Tweit suggested “Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church.” This became the informal name of this new Hendersonville congregation.⁶² In February, the congregation requested mission status from the GBHM. However, their request was deferred “in light of limited financial resources and priority

⁶⁰ Photo courtesy of Pastor em. Frederic Kosanke – 16 October 2004.

⁶¹ *Our Savior* 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

consideration of all requests submitted.”⁶³ That same month, the older members of the congregation, led by Mr. & Mrs. Henry Kleine, pooled their money together and purchased a twenty-six-year-old building from a local Church of Christ for \$20,000 at 7% interest.⁶⁴ This church was in great need of cleaning and remodeling, yet the congregation rejoiced at the fact that it had finally found a more permanent home. This joy was expressed in the April 1980 *Colonial Conference Crier*, “The Lord has truly been faithful to us here. He has never left us; His presence is with us each and every day. It was out of thankfulness to our Savior that many of the members decided a church was needed in which to worship their Lord and Redeemer.”⁶⁵ Their purchase, however, caught the Mission Board off-guard. Some explaining on the part of Pastor Guenther was necessary, since Our Savior did not go through the normal process for purchasing land or a building, as well as the fact that they did not have mission status.⁶⁶ This caused some tension between Our Savior and the Mission Board, in that the Mission Board preferred that the group work closer to Asheville. This tension continued into the next two decades. Our Savior was averaging twenty-three people a Sunday at that time.

⁶³ GBHM Office, *Listing of Requests Deferred by the General Board for Home Missions 2/23/80* (26 February 1980), Michigan DMB Collection.

⁶⁴ *Our Savior* 6.

⁶⁵ “Building Purchased,” *Colonial Conference Crier* 14, no. 2 (April 1980), 6.

⁶⁶ Jon Guenther, E-Mail interview re: Our Savior by author, 23 October 2004.



Renovated Chapel of Our Savior—Hendersonville, NC⁶⁷

It was in 1980 that Our Savior finally became an official member of the Michigan District of the WELS (23 January 1980) and received the acceptance of its constitution by the state of North Carolina (12 March 1980). March 12, 1980 is considered the founding date of the congregation. During the ensuing months, the congregation renovated their new facility and pursued various opportunities to reach out to the surrounding community, such as making use of a Travel-Canvass-Witness (TCW) group of Lutheran Collegians that year.⁶⁸ The congregation grew and had twenty-five members by the end of 1980.⁶⁹ They also applied for membership in the South Atlantic District (SAD), since they were closer to South Carolina than to Raleigh.

In February 1981, SAD membership was made possible when Pastor Guenther accepted the Mission Board's call to serve full-time in Charlotte. This left Our Savior without a shepherd. On the basis of the years that followed, the removal of a full-time pastor probably hindered the outreach efforts of the little congregation in Hendersonville.⁷⁰ At about this same time, the GBHM issued the following resolution: "That Our Savior congregation be recognized as an organized congregation; request membership in the South Atlantic District; and be served by the

⁶⁷ Photo courtesy of Pastor em. Frederic Kosanke – 16 October 2004.

⁶⁸ Erich Waldek, "The Growth of the Mustard Seed," *Colonial Conference Crier* 14 (October 1980), 1.

⁶⁹ *Our Savior* 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

resident pastor of Greenville, SC.”⁷¹ In essence, the Mission Board was expressing its unhappiness with the permanency of the Hendersonville situation and began to gradually pull away its support. This led to frustration among many of the members towards the Mission Board. Our Savior applied for membership in the South Atlantic District and western North Carolina permanently came under the care of the South Atlantic District in a dual parish situation in June 1982.⁷²

The resident pastor who cared for Our Savior at this time was newly-assigned Pastor Robert Rhyne. Rhyne had roots in that area of the South, even with familial connections to Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, NC. He had actually helped serve Our Savior during his vacations from the Seminary, and now he served as a “shared-time” pastor from 1981 until 1986. Rhyne served the congregation by holding weekly Sunday afternoon services and carrying out all the necessary tasks of bringing spiritual care to the members of Our Savior, such as baptizing, confirming, burying and leading groups like the newly-formed Ladies’ Guild.

On 18 October 1981, Our Savior dedicated its renovated chapel, which continued to undergo other renovations during the next two decades. In 1982, they hosted further outreach groups such as a TCW group from Dr. Martin Luther College and a Summer Vicar from the Seminary – Brian Dose.⁷³ In the following years, Our Savior continued in its “shared-time” ministry format, but in 1984, they requested mission status and manpower again. Unfortunately, both of their requests were deferred.⁷⁴ Tension continued between Our Savior and the Mission Board. Following this deferment, Pastor Rhyne encouraged Our Savior to pursue the services of

⁷¹ *Our Savior* 10.

⁷² Guse Interview.

⁷³ Robert Rhyne, *Our Savior Annual Report 1982*, 3.

⁷⁴ GBHM Priority Committee, *GBHM Priority Committee Report* (30 April 1984), Michigan DMB Collection, 1-2.

a semi-retired, “Social Security Pastor.” The Mission Board’s approval ushered in the “Social Security Ministry” era at Our Savior.

In 1985, they called A.T. Kretzmann, who was forced to resign due to ill health shortly after his installation in April. Again the congregation came under Pastor Rhyne’s care. In October, an anonymous member paid off in full all that the church owed, making the congregation debt-free. In spite of the challenges that came from not having a full-time pastor and the small size of the group, the Lord continued to shower his grace on Our Savior.⁷⁵

He provided another “S.S. Pastor” in semi-retired Pastor Harold Schwertfeger on 12 January 1986. Pastor Schwertfeger served Our Savior for nearly three years, canvassing the area, conducting VBS and starting Bible studies at area rest homes. He and his wife returned to Minnesota in October 1988, because of health reasons and the need for heart surgery.⁷⁶ Our Savior came under Pastor Rhyne’s care for the final time until they called their final “S.S. Pastor” – Pastor Frederic Kosanke.

Under the care of these “Social Security Pastors,” the congregation in Hendersonville had grown to sixty-six souls by the time of Pastor Kosanke’s installation on 8 January 1989. During the next nine years of Pastor Kosanke’s service, preaching stations were started in nearby Franklin and Landrum, NC. Both, however, disbanded due to deaths, transfers and lack of financial support. There was a slowly growing unwillingness on the part of some of the members to do evangelism work in the community. It was also a challenge for the pastors to stay under the twenty-hour-a-week maximum rule of the Federal Government and the WELS Pension fund.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Our Savior* 11.

⁷⁶ *Living Savior* 1-2. Pastor Schwertfeger actually “un-retired” once more to serve as a visitation pastor at St. Paul in Minneapolis. He passed away 8 August 2000. (*Forward in Christ*, November 2000, 22.)

⁷⁷ *Our Savior* 12ff.

In spite of the challenges, the congregation celebrated its 15th anniversary on 12 March 1995. By 1998, the future still seemed uncertain. In a 1997 history of the South Atlantic District, it was written about Our Savior, “Mission Status? Another semi-retired pastor? Service with a neighbor congregation? The 61 communicant members, 69 souls, of January 1, 1998, do not know exactly what the future holds, but they do know who holds the future, and who has been with and blessed this group for all these years! To Him be the Glory!”⁷⁸

Our Savior still wanted a full-time pastor, but it was financially difficult for them to do it. They issued a number of calls to pastors for a full-time pastor, but to no avail. So the group approached the Mission Board for assistance and the Mission Board offered them a deal. If Our Savior would consider a move closer to Asheville, the Mission Board was willing to “supply a pastor to care for the existing group and work to gather people for a new start, toward Asheville.”⁷⁹ In 1999, both sides came to an agreement and in July 2000, Pastor John Qualmann was installed as the pastor of what would now become “Living Savior” in Arden/Asheville.

A New Day Dawns Over the Mountains – Living Savior – Arden/Asheville, NC

When Pastor Qualmann arrived, the Hendersonville congregation numbered ninety souls. His assignment was to continue to serve Our Savior until an exploratory mission could be started in Asheville. In September 2000, the first major canvassing effort for the new mission took place and over twenty members came out to help. This was an encouraging sign for a new pastor working to start a new mission and carry out a relocation at the same time.⁸⁰ During the few months that Pastor Qualmann served Our Savior, even though it was a challenge to find a new place to worship and place for a ministry center, optimism grew towards moving to a new

⁷⁸ John Guse, 1997 Our Savior history, received by fax, 12 November 2004.

⁷⁹ *Living Savior* 2.

⁸⁰ John Qualmann – E-Mail Interview – 10 November 2004.

location and starting fresh all over again, as they saw the Lord provide both facilities. When it came time to leave the old church building and close the old Our Savior congregation to begin anew as Living Savior, there was still some apprehension especially among the older members.

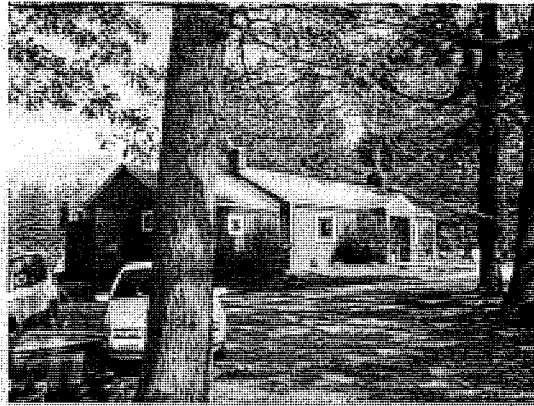
Pastor Qualmann writes,

For some it was difficult to leave that church building. 70 out of the 73 communicant members were WELS transfers or LC-MS transplants and what happened is that there was a secureness about their cozy congregation (almost like many had up north). While I believe they all wanted to do mission work in the community, it wasn't happening. The building and the mindset of the people was just not conducive to reaching out. – The building was small with little parking, the size of the church was comfortable. It needed a whole new direction and moving to a different location with a full-time pastor (Finally!) was the impetus that got it going.⁸¹

In March 2001, the new Living Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church held its Grand Opening service at the chapel of the Groce Funeral Home. Nearly 200 people attended the service. The next Sunday—Easter, 212 people attended, including three adult baptisms and two children. From the Grand Opening service, a spirit of outright optimism has filled the congregation. The people are inviting their friends and neighbors. In 2002, Living Savior received mission status, something which the members of Our Savior had desired for a long time. In January 2002 and January 2003, Living Savior hosted teams of college-age Kingdom Workers. In 2003, for the first time since 1982, they hosted another summer vicar – Timothy Berg and in August 2004, Living Savior received their first full-year vicar – Benjamin Tomczak.⁸²

⁸¹ Qualmann Interview.

⁸² Ibid.



Living Savior's Current Ministry Center⁸³

At the present time, Living Savior has more “new” people than “old timers”. They have 146 souls with about 120 communicants. They recently began an Acolyte program to get young men and women involved in their worship life and to strengthen their faith. They are also in the midst of purchasing their ministry center and the land around it for a future church and education facility. Vicar Benjamin Tomczyk writes, “What I have observed is that Living Savior is a congregation that is not willing to sit upon its hands and hide the Gospel which has been entrusted to it. The Lord is at work in Asheville, and it is a blessed privilege to be one of his instruments and called servants.”⁸⁴ Jonathan Tweit, the last remaining charter member of the Hendersonville/Asheville congregation, writes,

Initially our concern was to find some way to have a pastor that would serve us on a regular basis so we would not have to have our worship services on Sunday afternoons or evenings, based on surrounding pastors (sic) ability to serve us. Soon this attitude changed to one of focusing on reaching out to the unchurched. Over the years we often lost the proper focus and were more concerned about how we could keep the doors open due to the small size of the congregation. . . . Since hindsight is 20/20, when I reflect back over the years, the single greatest highlight is realizing that God is in control and it is only through His plan that we are where we are today.⁸⁵

⁸³ Photo Courtesy of Wendall Burton, a member at Living Savior – 11 November 2004.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Tomczyk, E-Mail interview by author, 13 November 2004.

⁸⁵ Tweit Interview.

The Lord showed his faithfulness and mercy to Our Savior through its times of challenge and trial. Now his grace is most evident as his blessings shower on the “young” congregation in western North Carolina. Our attention now focuses on a congregation named after that undeserved love of God – Grace.

God’s Grace at the “Gateway to the New South” – Grace, Charlotte, NC

During the WELS mission boom of the late 1960s to the late 1970s, one of the most common questions that faced the General Board for Home Missions was, “Where should we plant another mission?” As the eyes of the Mission Board looked out to the fertile fields of the Southeast, their gaze focused on the rapidly growing city of Charlotte in southern North Carolina. Charlotte was known as “the Gateway to the New South.” It had become the 50th largest city in the country and as industrial corporations set up shop in the area, they brought thousands of workers with them.⁸⁶ One of the first mentions of Charlotte on the radar of the GBHM is in the 1970 GBHM Six-Year Plan, which projected to start and fund a Charlotte mission by 1973. That same year the Michigan District Mission Board Report indicated that Charlotte was a “projected area for future W.E.L.S. missions.”⁸⁷

Plans to start a WELS mission in Charlotte were held off until the group in Raleigh had organized. In November and December 1974, the Charlotte group requested exploratory status, but their requests were deferred.⁸⁸ Shortly after Paul Schmiede arrived in Raleigh, he teamed up with John Guse in an attempt to begin exploratory work in Charlotte. The earliest services in

⁸⁶ Gary Baumler, “Mission Report,” *Colonial Conference Crier* 9, no. 2 (April 1975), 2.

⁸⁷ Michigan District Mission Board, *1970 Michigan District Mission Board Report*, 1970, Michigan DMB Collection, 3.

⁸⁸ Norman Berg, *Action on Request to the G.B.H.M. – 11/5/74*, (12 November 1974), Michigan DMB Collection, 3.

Charlotte took place in the home of Fred and Mary Kuekes.⁸⁹ On 29 April 1975, the group was granted exploratory status and continued in that status at least through May 1976.⁹⁰ For several years, Schmiede traveled down bi-monthly to Charlotte to serve a handful of families, who met regularly in a bank building. During that time, Jennifer Lakas, became the first child baptized in the WELS in Charlotte. Unfortunately by mid-1976, three of the core families had moved out of the area, so services were discontinued for two years.⁹¹

Around 1978, two WELS families—Monte & Sue Prange and Don & Lesly Wisch—moved into the area from the Midwest. Much like their WELS brothers and sisters in the early days in Raleigh and Asheville, these two families met each Sunday to listen to a taped worship service. Pastor Schmiede began to come down once again to serve them with the Lord's Supper once a month. Three months after Jon Guenther was assigned to Hendersonville (about 150 miles west of Charlotte at that time), the Mission Board called him to serve both Hendersonville and the group in Charlotte. Starting in September 1979, Guenther traveled to Charlotte monthly to serve three families that met in the Wisch home. Pastor Guenther recounts that there were twelve in attendance when he first visited the people in Charlotte.⁹²

By July 1980, the nucleus grew to five families as they continued to meet in the Wisch home. It was time again to request exploratory status, which was granted in September 1980. At about the same time, the group chose the name, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, for itself. The group soon outgrew the Wisch home and held its first public worship service on 2

⁸⁹ Guse Interview.

⁹⁰ GBHM Priority Committee, *Priority Committee Report: GBHM – April 29, 1975*, Michigan DMB Collection, 2.

⁹¹ "Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church: Charlotte, NC" *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 65.

⁹² Jon Guenther, E-Mail interview re: Grace by author, 23 October 2004.

November 1980 at the Harris YMCA in southern Charlotte. They set up and packed up their “church” each week at the YMCA until the group was able to purchase property in 1984. When they first started meeting at the YMCA, Pastor Guenther served both Hendersonville and Charlotte every Sunday, making the 300 mi. round trip each week.⁹³

The following year, 1981, proved to be a year of firsts for Grace. In February, Pastor Guenther accepted the call to serve Grace as her full-time pastor. On 8 March, the congregation worshipped on Sunday morning for the first time. On 22 March, Bible class and Sunday School started and Grace produced their first confirmand, Kimberly Wisch. By October, Grace had a membership of thirty-five souls and twenty-three communicants.⁹⁴

In February 1982, the GBHM granted Grace mission status. That same month they elected their first church council and received land search authorization in November of that year. After two years of searching, they purchased a 3.87 acre piece of property on Providence Road from the local Baptist association in southern Charlotte for about \$60,000.⁹⁵ By June 1984, they had chapel planning authority for a Worship/Education/Fellowship (WEF) unit.⁹⁶ In September 1985, they broke ground for this 30’ by 60’ rectangular WEF unit, which was dedicated in May 1986. Ninety people attended the Dedication service. Grace was growing because of God’s grace.

⁹³ “Grace” 65.

⁹⁴ “New Mission in Charlotte, NC”, *The Colonial Conference Crier* 15, no. 3 (October 1981), 2.

⁹⁵ “Grace” 65.

⁹⁶ “District Mission Board Report,” *Proceedings of the First Biennial Convention – North Atlantic District*, (11-13 June, 1984), 6.

In June 1984, northeast Charlotte had become a possible new field for starting a new mission.⁹⁷ Ever since then, northeast Charlotte has been listed as a potential mission field that beckons for outreach. In a city of over a million people, Grace has had no problem staying very busy just on the south end of Charlotte. Establishing a WELS mission congregation in a city that had over 500 Christian congregations had its challenges. Pastor Guenther wrote,

The challenge was to introduce a small mission congregation of the WELS in a large community. We didn't offer the big ticket items many people wanted. We felt that if we could start a school, we'd be able to attract people. Charlotte is very money conscious. Private schools are better than public. The challenge to also reach 'unhappy' Lutherans with the gospel – the role of women was an issue in Charlotte (sic) churches. Another challenge was the changing of people. People would come and go as their jobs brought them to the area and away from the area.⁹⁸

In spite of the challenges, efforts were made to get something started in Hickory and Greensboro in partnership with Good Shepherd in China Grove, NC. The congregation itself grew spiritually and numerically. Pastor Guenther writes, "The initial group was from the Midwest (sic) but we recognized together the need to have a Lutheran presence and service but to also adapt ourselves to the south....The people wanted to reach out and many days were spent canvassing, money spent on ads and billboards."⁹⁹

In 1988, the congregation purchased a parsonage and witnessed its first adult baptism. In 1990, the District Mission Board noticed the "large numbers of first time visitors to this congregation."¹⁰⁰ In May 1991, the Lord led Pastor Guenther to accept a call to Marshfield, Wisconsin. Pastor Greg Ewald from Columbia, SC served as vacancy pastor until Seminary

⁹⁷ 1984 DMB Report 7.

⁹⁸ Guenther Interview re: Grace.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ "District Mission Board Report to the North Atlantic District," *Proceedings of the North Atlantic District Convention*, (12-13 June 1990), 24.

graduate Mark Gartner was ordained and installed in August 1991. Under Pastor Gartner, the excitement and busyness continued as outreach activities stepped up and the congregation continued to grow. People were coming from as far away as one and a half hours one-way to hear the Word. In 1995, Grace celebrated her 15th anniversary with great joy, since a number of the original members were still there. By that time, Grace had 127 souls. That same year, on 27 June 1995, Grace left operating subsidy and became interest subsidized. In 1997-98, plans began to form for a larger facility, because the WEF unit had become too small for the growing congregation. About this same time, because of increased traffic on Providence Road, the city widened the two-lane highway to four lanes, which gave Grace greater exposure, but the congregation lost a significant portion of land.¹⁰¹

In March 1998, Pastor Gartner accepted a call to St. Luke's in Watertown, Wisconsin. He left a growing congregation of nearly 130 souls in the midst of a building program. Pastor Gartner notes that there was some concern that "the building expansion would fall apart once I left. God however called Pastor Fellers to Charlotte who not only kept it going but completed it."¹⁰² Pastor Paul Ziemer of High Point, NC served in the vacancy until Pastor Tadd Fellers arrived from Jacksonville, NC in April 1998 to become Grace's third resident pastor.¹⁰³

When Tadd arrived in 1998, the building plans continued as Grace considered how "this little church could find its niche in such a heavily churching community and how it could use this niches as a means of sharing the gospel."¹⁰⁴ In 2000, Grace decided that "pursuing an early

¹⁰¹ Mark Gartner, E-Mail interview by author, 19 October 2004 and "Grace" 66.

¹⁰² Gartner Interview.

¹⁰³ "Grace" – 66.

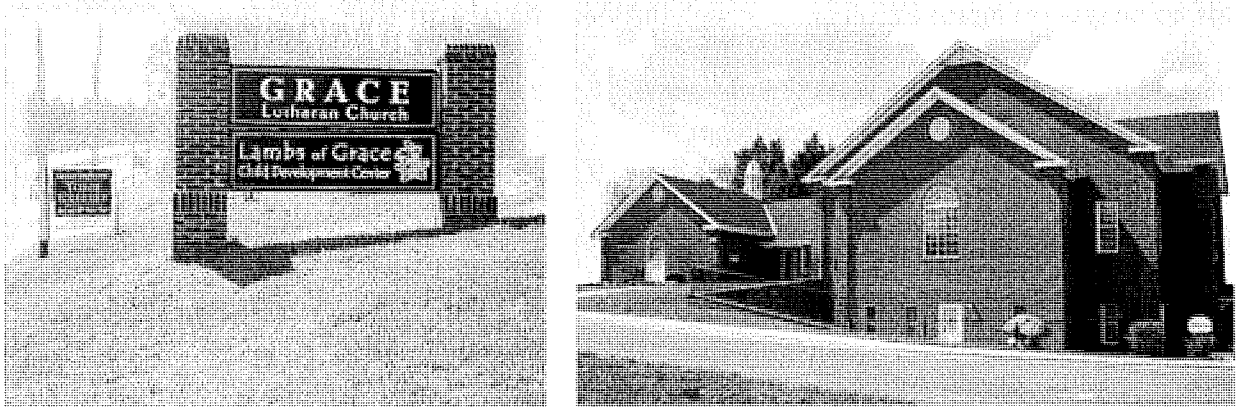
¹⁰⁴ Tadd Fellers, E-Mail sent to author, 6 October 2004.

childhood education program as its niche.”¹⁰⁵ On Christmas Eve, 2000, Grace held a groundbreaking ceremony. Grace had planned to dedicate the new early childhood facility in Fall 2001, however, because of excavation problems, building setbacks, and permit delays, Dedication Day took place on 20 January 2002.

Lambs of Grace, as the early childhood program came to be known, called Mrs. Patti Fellers in February 2000. Several calls were issued to no avail for an assistant director/PreK teacher. This led to the request and granting of an emergency teacher, Miss Rebekah Berg, who served as assistant director and PreK teacher in 2001-02. In May 2002, Miss Kayte Gut was assigned to serve in that capacity. When Lambs of Grace opened in January 2002, twenty-seven children were enrolled from six-weeks-old to four-year-olds. In December 2004, sixty-four children are enrolled in the same age groups. The faculty currently numbers fifteen, four of whom are MLC-graduated called workers. As for the purpose of this program, Pastor Fellers notes that it is meant to be “an outreach effort.”¹⁰⁶ Many of the parents have visited, but none have joined. Sixty-four children, however, hear the Word on a daily basis—all but two are non-WELS. Three non-WELS faculty members have taken BIC and joined. Since the beginning, Lambs of God has sought for high quality, Christ-centered education. At the time of this writing, Lambs of God had a Five-Star Rating from the state of North Carolina, which is the highest rating a childcare can get in the state.

¹⁰⁵ Fellers E-Mail – 6 October 2004.

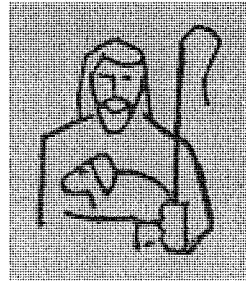
¹⁰⁶ Tadd Fellers, E-Mail sent to author, 7 December 2004.



Current Facilities of Grace Lutheran Church – Charlotte, NC.
Lambs of Grace is located in the wing on the left side of the main building.¹⁰⁷

The Lord has truly showered his grace on Grace over the years. Attendance has risen slightly. Lambs of God offers new opportunities to share the Word. As Charlotte grows, the importance of sharing that Word becomes all the more important. Faithfulness to the truth of that Word led to the founding of another WELS congregation about forty miles to the northeast.

The Good Shepherd Seeks His Straying Sheep – Good Shepherd, China Grove, NC



How far would you go for the sake of the truth, particularly God’s truth as found in his Word? For Pastor Fred Archer, it meant leaving the church body that he had grown up in because it had forsaken the true Gospel of Christ for a liberal, social gospel. In 1971, for “reasons of conscience”, Pastor Archer left the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the church body in which he had grown up. Since his ordination in 1964 by the North Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, Archer had been serving as pastor in several LCA congregations in

¹⁰⁷ Photos Courtesy of <http://www.grace-charlotte.org> -- 13 December 2004.

his home state of North Carolina. Although this decision was difficult, the Lord still richly blessed that decision in the years that followed.

At the time that he severed his ties with the LCA, Pastor Archer was serving at Grace in Hendersonville. Few in the congregation joined Pastor Archer in leaving the LCA, so he became affiliated with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) and established Living Word in Hendersonville. He served Living Word from 1971 to 1979.¹⁰⁸ Incidentally, Living Word was the CLC church that several WELS families attended in the years leading up to the organization of the WELS congregation – Our Savior – in Hendersonville in 1979.¹⁰⁹

In 1979, Pastor Archer accepted a call to Holy Trinity Independent Evangelical Lutheran church in West Columbia, SC, whereupon in 1980, he resigned and moved back to Hendersonville. After he moved back, Pastor Archer decided to act on an idea he had been considering since leaving the LCA in 1971. He had always wanted to go back to his native Rowan County, north of Charlotte, “to give the people there a choice between liberal and conservative Lutheranism.”¹¹⁰ In order to do this, he made use of local newspaper and radio announcements to get the word out to the people of Rowan County for an informational meeting for “Concerned Lutherans and Other Christians” to be held at the Salisbury Holiday Inn on 14 June 1981. Twenty-eight people showed up to hear Pastor Archer’s plan for the organization of a conservative Lutheran church in the Salisbury/China Grove area. Worship was to begin the following Sunday. Fourteen people attended the first service held at the Holiday Inn.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Fred Archer, *History of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, China Grove, North Carolina – 1981-2001* (China Grove, 2001), 8.

¹⁰⁹ Eventually by the late 1990s, the last of the members of Living Word joined Our Savior in Hendersonville. (Frederic Kosanke, E-Mail interview by author, 16 October 2004).

¹¹⁰ Archer, *History* 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

On 28 June, the group moved worship and Sunday School to Linn-Honeycutt funeral chapel in China Grove. Only nine people attended, but this chapel served as the worship home of the China Grove congregation until 1984. In the months that followed the first worship services, the group officially organized into a congregation of eleven members (23 August 1981) and took the name of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church. They also officially called Pastor Archer, who had been driving weekly from Hendersonville, to be their pastor. By 31 October, the group had grown from eleven to eighteen and by the end of the year, the Lord increased the congregation to thirty souls.¹¹² During these early days of Good Shepherd, the congregation was affiliated with the CLC until the fall of 1982, when the congregation became independent for a brief time because of confessional reasons. By that time the congregation had grown to forty.¹¹³

It is remarkable to see how this congregation grew so quickly during those early days, because Good Shepherd has, from the beginning, intentionally avoided any large-scale, systematic outreach efforts. The 2001 history of the congregation explains why this was the case,

When the pastor first made his presence known in Rowan County, some of his former colleagues in the LCA stated that he was just coming here in order to steal their members. From that point forward it was agreed that we would not go house to house in our mission efforts, lest it be wrongly interpreted by other churches. However, we also agreed that, as the Lord led people to worship with us at Good Shepherd, we would reserve the right, as well as the duty, to follow up by visiting them in their homes

Over the years there has been no canvassing of neighborhoods and little knocking on doors. Largely by word of mouth, some advertising, and other ways known only to the Lord, people have come. The congregation has followed up on their visits, and members have come into the church.¹¹⁴

¹¹² "Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, China Grove, North Carolina," *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 79.

¹¹³ Archer, *History 2*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

In 1982, the congregation purchased a 1.69 acre lot in China Grove with the hope of building a church building of their own someday. The next year, Good Shepherd became affiliated with the WELS. Roger Huffman in his essay, *North Atlantic District History: 1983 to 1993*, notes the unique ways that the Lord gathered his flocks together to form the North Atlantic District. Among these “flocks” was Good Shepherd. Huffman writes,

Just as the North Atlantic District was forming [in 1983], Pastor Fred Archer came over to check us out. Committed to Confessional Lutheranism, Pastor Archer had left the Lutheran Church in America and eventually returned home to Rowan County North Carolina. A congregation was gathered by the Word of Truth. Both Good Shepherd Lutheran and Pastor Archer joined the WELS in 1983. As our district was formed, we welcomed a grass roots North Carolinian congregation into our fellowship.¹¹⁵

Good Shepherd continued to grow by leaps and bounds and by the end of 1983, she had sixty-nine members. The General Board for Home Missions quickly moved China Grove through the regular mission process in 1983—granting manpower (which they had already) in February and mission status in September.¹¹⁶

By April 1984, Good Shepherd had a CEF loan for building a 2300, square foot, WEF unit.¹¹⁷ On 15 July, they held a groundbreaking service and by 23 December, they were holding worship services in their new chapel. The chapel was officially dedicated to God’s glory on 14 April 1985.¹¹⁸ The Lord had truly blessed this small congregation devoted to the truth of God’s Word, however, challenging times lay ahead in the next decade.

¹¹⁵ Roger Huffman, “North Atlantic District History: 1983 to 1993”, Presented at the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the North Atlantic District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod at Winchester, Virginia, 15-16 June 2004, 6.

¹¹⁶ GBHM Priority Committee, *GBHM Priority Committee Report*, (25-26 February 1983), Michigan DMB Collection, 2 and “District Mission Board Report,” *Proceedings of the First Biennial Convention – North Atlantic District*, (11-13 June, 1984), 6.

¹¹⁷ GBHM, *CEF Allocation Chart*, 30 April 1984, Michigan DMB Collection.

¹¹⁸ Archer, *History 2*.

Although Good Shepherd had not done systematic outreach in the China Grove area, they still made mission efforts farther away in places like Salisbury, Hickory, Greensboro, Franklin, NC and Roanoke, VA to the north and Concord to the south.¹¹⁹ In mid-1992, Good Shepherd reached an all-time high for membership with seventy-eight, but that same year, the WELS started a mission in congregation in Greensboro, to which a number of families, with most of the children transferred. Around the same time, several other families moved away and others left because of dissension in the congregation. All these factors contributed to a dramatic decrease in membership. Church attendance fell to the mid to high twenties.¹²⁰

Three years later, in 1995, the Board for Home Missions (BHM) began to withdraw subsidy from the congregation, forcing Pastor Archer to take a substantial pay cut. In 1997, since it appeared that the congregation was shrinking rapidly and that the situation may not change, the Mission Board gave Good Shepherd two years to “get their house in order”. The plan was that in 1999 the congregation would lose their operating subsidy and would be compelled to pay their bills on their own. The BHM gave them these two years to increase membership and get their finances in order. An attitude of gloom set in on the little congregation. How would they ever survive? Even more people left to avoid “witnessing the funeral.”¹²¹

What was the congregation going to do? The Good Shepherd rescued his flock. In early 1998, an anonymous donor, who turned out to be Lewis and Margaret Alsobrooks—charter members of Good Shepherd—came forward and volunteered to pay off the entire mortgage of

¹¹⁹ Fred Archer, E-Mail interview by author, 12 October 2004.

¹²⁰ Archer, *History* 5, 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

almost \$100,000 by the end of the year. On 18 April 1999, Good Shepherd held a special note-burning service on the front lawn of the church. Good Shepherd was now self-supporting.¹²²

Since that time, Good Shepherd has slowly started to grow again and continues to remain faithful to the truth of God's Word. Their sole goal is to proclaim the truth about Christ Crucified and to remain ever faithful to that truth. There is no doubt that Good Shepherd remains a confessional Lutheran congregation. Pastor Archer writes about the renewed attitude of Good Shepherd in the 2001 history of the congregation, "By the grace of God, we have had a spiritual rebirth, and we are once again looking forward to the future rather than agonizing about the past. As in the beginning, this congregation gives credit to Almighty God and His wondrous grace for making us what and who we are."¹²³ When it comes to the history of Good Shepherd, in the end, all that can really be said is, "To God be the glory!"

At the time when China Grove joined the WELS in 1983, North Carolina had three other organized congregations (Raleigh, Hendersonville and Charlotte). However, in the next decade and a half, the WELS in North Carolina would double in size. Two military outposts, who had received pastoral care as far back as 1970, and two daughters, one in the Triad and one in the Triangle, would find organized WELS congregations in their midst by the end of the Twentieth Century. We find the first congregation in this new growth movement and the last new NC congregation of the 1980s in the southeastern North Carolina city of Fayetteville.

Serving Those Who Serve Our Nation, Part I – Beautiful Savior, Fayetteville, NC

Although Beautiful Savior was not incorporated until 1987, the history of Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church really goes as far back as 1967, when Pastor Luther Voss

¹²² Archer, *History* 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

began to make his monthly, 900-mile tours of the military bases of North Carolina. As noted in Part I, Pastor Paul Ziemer took over this task from 1970 to 1973, when Paul Schmiede was installed as the pastor of Gethsemane in Raleigh and also became the new military contact pastor for over 125 WELS military members all over eastern North Carolina.¹²⁴ In 1975, Pastor Schmiede began to come down to Fayetteville on a monthly basis to serve the people with Word and Sacrament. Services were held at the Discom Chapel at Fort Bragg and averaged about ten people a service. Schmiede offered counseling and visitation to the servicemen and their families stationed at Fort Bragg or Pope Air Force Base.¹²⁵ Although some concern was occasionally expressed by members at Gethsemane over sharing their pastor with the military, the members from Gethsemane in large part assisted him with monthly mailings and support where needed.¹²⁶ The Lord was blessing this ministry to the military. In a lengthy article on the ministry to the military in eastern North Carolina, Schmiede expressed the need for extra manpower to serve these servicemen and their families,

Up to this time, the trademark of our ministry to the military has been consistency and dependability. It is hoped that despite the budget squeeze in our synod our God will find a way to provide more manpower to eastern North Carolina, answering the prayers of many by making possible an even more consistent and dependable ministry to the military in North Carolina.¹²⁷

Although the October 1980 *Colonial Conference Crier* reported that Fayetteville planned to request exploratory status in April 1981, it appears that their request was deferred, since no

¹²⁴ Schmiede notes in his 21 October 2004 E-mail interview that he had actually assisted Ziemer with serving these military bases as a Summer Vicar after his middler year.

¹²⁵ Paul Schmiede, "In North Carolina," *The Colonial Conference Crier* 15, (April 1981), 2-3.

¹²⁶ Schmiede Interview.

¹²⁷ Schmiede, "In North Carolina" 3.

mention is made of it in any of the 1981 issues.¹²⁸ Schmiede continued to serve the group in Fayetteville, but things really began to move forward in 1983, when Gethsemane's Vicar David Lau assisted Schmiede in increasing the ministry to Fayetteville. Services increased to twice a month and attendance grew to nearly twenty per service. The June 1984 *Colonial Crier* notes that mailed invitations to worship had increased to nearly sixty per month.¹²⁹ The actual formation of a Fayetteville congregation was becoming possible. A request for manpower was made and deferred again in April 1984.¹³⁰ However, the BHM granted exploratory status on Fayetteville's third attempted request in early 1985.¹³¹

On 30 June 1985, Seminary graduate Mark Schoeneck, who formerly flew on B-52s in the Air Force, was ordained and installed as the first resident pastor by Pastor Paul Schmiede.¹³² Schoeneck's new task was to minister to the more than 100 WELS families scattered across southeastern North Carolina not only at Fayetteville, but also Camp LeJeune in Jacksonville and Cherry Point MCAS, which were both on the coast.

In Fayetteville, Pastor Schoeneck was expected to try out a new outreach approach that the Board for Home Missions had devised. It had the original name of "New Mode" evangelism.¹³³ This technique failed to work for most of the missions that tried it in the North

¹²⁸ Waldek 2.

¹²⁹ Ziemer, *Fifteen* 5.

¹³⁰ GBHM Priority Committee, *GBHM Priority Committee Report*, (30 April 1984), Michigan DMB Collection, 2.

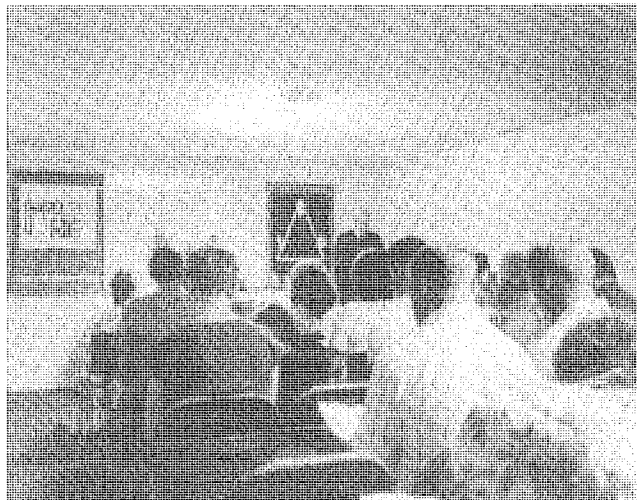
¹³¹ "Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, North Carolina," *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 89.

¹³² Walter Beckmann, "District President's Report," *North Atlantic District Proceedings* (9-11 June 1986), 18-19.

¹³³ "Exploratory Work at Fayetteville, NC," *The Colonial Crier* 9 (Winter 1985), 4. Pastor Roger Huffman in his *North Atlantic District History: 1983 to 1993* explains this "New Mode" technique: "The concept was: a) find a field with ungathered souls ripe for harvest (with or without a core group of committed lay people), b) send a

Atlantic District, because the mission was started without a core group. Since there already was a small group in Fayetteville, the technique seems to have worked to a certain extent there, but the burden of outreach fell on the shoulders of the pastor. Pastor Schoeneck comments, “[There was] some interest in local outreach. I wound up doing almost 98% of the outreach work. Yet we couldn’t have a congregation without the WELS core group.”¹³⁴ During this time, the WELS members met for worship twice a month in the rented parsonage.

After trying out the “New Mode” technique for fourteen months and visiting 2500 homes in western Fayetteville, the combined group of WELS members and New Mode prospects held their first public worship service at the Dartmouth Outpatient Center on 7 September 1986. Seventy-five people attended this “Grand Opening” service.¹³⁵ Worship continued at the Dartmouth Center for the next two years.



First Public Worship at the Dartmouth Center in Fayetteville – 7 September 1986¹³⁶

missionary in who devotes himself to outreach efforts and Bible Study, c) delay holding worship services until a sizeable flock was gathered. The thinking was that this would free the missionary from the time intensive task of worship preparation, so he could use the time for evangelism. Also, it was thought that worship should wait until a sizable group could be gathered for worship, lest visitors or prospects be turned off by the small group struggling through a worship service.” (Huffman 6-7)

¹³⁴ Mark Schoeneck, Mailed interview by author, 8 November 2004.

¹³⁵ Mark Schoeneck, “‘Going Public’ in Fayetteville,” *The Colonial Crier* 10, (Winter 1987), 3.

¹³⁶ Photo courtesy of *The Colonial Crier* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1987), 3.

During this time, Schoeneck continued to minister to WELS military and civilian families all over southeastern North Carolina with bi-monthly services in Jacksonville and regular visits to New Bern and Wilmington.¹³⁷ The next two years—1987 to 1988—proved to be an exciting time for the young Fayetteville congregation. In January 1987, the BHM granted Fayetteville mission status. On 29 March 1987, the congregation celebrated its charter and on 15 November, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church was officially incorporated in the state of North Carolina.¹³⁸

Now that Beautiful Savior was a reality, the congregation sought to find a permanent home. During early 1988, the congregation purchased a three-acre piece of land on the west side of Fayetteville and dedicated it on 20 November 1988. By January 1989, the congregation was granted planning authority for a WEF unit, but the congregation was not able to break ground for the WEF unit and a new parsonage until 9 September 1990. During the interim, Beautiful Savior left the Dartmouth Center and began to hold services in the local YMCA. On 15 November, the Schoenecks moved into the new parsonage and 23 December saw the first worship services in the new WEF unit. Dedication Day was 13 January 1991. This facility continues to be the home of Beautiful Savior.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Schoeneck Interview.

¹³⁸ “Beautiful Savior” 89. The District Mission Board Report at the June 1988 NAD Convention describes the situation in Fayetteville at this time, “The congregation’s membership is drawn both from Fayetteville and Jacksonville (2 hours away). Pastor Mark Schoeneck serves this wide-spread congregation by providing a regular mission ministry in Fayetteville and also conducting services 2-3 times per month in Jacksonville and providing pastoral leadership for the lay-led services and Christian education program conducted twice per month. If one voter’s meeting is held in church in Fayetteville after church, then the next meeting will be held in Jacksonville (where the president of the congregation lives). The congregation hopes to close on a church site soon.” (“District Mission Board to the Convention of the North Atlantic District”, *North Atlantic District Proceedings 1988 – 25 Years of Grace 1963-1988*, (14-15 June 1988), 35).

¹³⁹ “Beautiful Savior” 89.

During Beautiful Savior's early years, one thing became very apparent about this largely military congregation. This congregation was transient as members and prospects in the military moved in and out of the Fayetteville area. Pastor Schoeneck writes,

I had a prospect list of from 200-500 names. I had more prospects than I could work with. I took many of them through BIC. But I could not get most of them to come to church. And those that did normally didn't stay very long....[Beautiful Savior] grew, but growth was very small. We usually gained as many as we lost because of transfers in the military. We had a lot of visitors from all over, drop ins, etc. But we didn't grow rapidly.¹⁴⁰

This transience hindered the long-range planning for Beautiful Savior as well as any kind of continuity, as the male leaders of the congregation would be transferred out or would spend long tours overseas for months at a time.¹⁴¹ In spite of the transient nature of Beautiful Savior, long-time member Elisabeth Junker notes, "Pastor Mark Schoeneck and the congregation reached out to us in love and took us in as one of their own."¹⁴² From the very beginning, Beautiful Savior has been very welcoming as new people get transferred into the area and attend worship, since nearly all of the members have transferred in from all over the world themselves.

Pastor Schoeneck continued to serve until 1994 when he accepted a call to Ocean Drive Lutheran Church in Pompano Beach, Florida. Pastor Scott Mews from Raleigh served the short vacancy, as Seminary graduate David Pries was assigned to serve as Beautiful Savior's second resident pastor. Pries was ordained and installed on 24 July 1994. Pastor Pries notes, "Beautiful Savior was a congregation of change. When I started there, we had 70 souls. We gained up to 35

¹⁴⁰ Schoeneck Interview.

¹⁴¹ Mark Schoeneck, "North Carolina," *Colonial Crier*, (April 1989), 2.

¹⁴² Elisabeth L. Junker, E-Mail interview by author, 15 November 2004.

souls each year, yet lost 15-20 each year. The congregation was about 90% US Army and a little Air Force. Every year people came and left to serve the US in other places.”¹⁴³

Under Pries, the Lord continued to bless the congregation with increased growth. Pastor Pries notes, “We doubled out (sic) size in four years and set some record attendance records. For a small church we always had about 2 – 4 keyboard players who could play organ to lead worship. It was an exciting place to do mission work because about 400 families were moving into that community each month.”¹⁴⁴ He also notes that the congregation became more of a “people run church”, as the congregation really became a big family.¹⁴⁵ At this time, Beautiful Savior was able to begin to do some long range planning, which included the hope to end receiving operating subsidy and become self-supporting.¹⁴⁶ At the present, that is still their goal. Among the many tasks during Pries’ ministry, early attempts were made to serve WELS people in Myrtle Beach, SC. Six months after he stopped conducting services there, a pastor arrived.¹⁴⁷

By 1998, the congregation was only interest-subsidized and numbered 129 souls with seventy-five communicants. The Lord was holding his hand of blessing over this congregation. That same year, however, Beautiful Savior lost her second shepherd as Pastor Pries accepted a call to Grace Lutheran Church in Dakota, MN. Retired pastors Walter Henning and Ervine Vomhoff served the vacancy until 2 May 1999, when Pastor David Schmidt was installed as the third resident pastor. At the time that he was installed, only one charter member was left.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ David Pries, E-Mail interview by author, 7 October 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ “Beautiful Savior” 90.

¹⁴⁷ Pries Interview.

¹⁴⁸ “Beautiful Savior” 90.

Under Pastor Schmidt's care, the congregation continued to grow and started a Preschool. Plans for a building project with a thirty-year projection were drawn up. Beautiful Savior was reaching out to the community and finding a number of native Fayetteville prospects. By the year 2000, the congregation numbered 125 souls.

Then 11 September 2001 happened and the "War on Terror" began. As Pastor Schmidt described it, "...the bottom fell out." Since that time, because of Beautiful Savior's largely military membership, attendance dropped from eighty-five a Sunday to thirty. This has forced the congregation to return to operating subsidy status. Many have passed in and out of the area as they had temporary assignments at Fort Bragg or Pope Air Force Base on their way to Afghanistan and Iraq or elsewhere around the world. On the positive side, as these servicemen and women pass through Beautiful Savior, the congregation has sought to make them "missionaries through out the world."¹⁴⁹

At this time, Beautiful Savior has recommitted itself to serve our armed forces. Pastor Schmidt is now recognized by the Synod as more than just a Military Contact Pastor, but also a Civilian Chaplain.¹⁵⁰ There is a greater effort to reach out to the bases in Fayetteville for outreach, in spite of the many losses that the congregation has endured.¹⁵¹ The congregation continues to offer Christ-centered counseling to servicemen and women and their families as they face the strains and difficulties of military life. The Lord has truly blessed this congregation by bringing the Word to a very large number of believers who have passed through Beautiful

¹⁴⁹ David Schmidt, E-Mail interview by author, 15 November 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Tim Wempner, E-Mail interview by author, 8 December 2004.

Savior's doors over the years. Only in heaven will we know what impact Beautiful Savior has had on the lives of God's people.

Where Does the Lord Want Us to Go? – Christ the Redeemer, Greensboro/High Point, NC

About 100 miles northwest of Fayetteville lies a three-city area known as the “Triad.” It consists of the cities of Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem. As in Charlotte and Raleigh, corporations set up shop across the “New South” and in the process, transferred many of their workers down to North Carolina. The Triad was no different. Already in 1982, the GBHM recognized Winston-Salem and the surrounding areas as potential areas for starting a new mission.¹⁵² In report after report in the years that followed, the GBHM and the North Atlantic District Mission Board mentioned their desire to start something there.¹⁵³

In 1987, the Lord began to open a door to the possibility of a mission in the area when the Dan Schulz family moved to High Point. The closest WELS church was an hour away in China Grove. After a couple years of driving seventy minutes one way, Pastor Scott Mews of Raleigh and at first, Pastor Fred Archer of China Grove, began to hold bi-monthly services with the group at a building used by another church in Jamestown, a suburb of High Point. In late 1991, Pastor Mews and the nucleus of four families approached the North Atlantic DMB about the possibility of getting exploratory status. When the DMB investigated the rapidly growing area and saw how promising it was, they made the request to the Board for Home Missions in early 1992. The Triad nucleus received exploratory status and manpower. Seminary graduate Mark Rosenberg was assigned to the Triad group and was installed in July 1992.¹⁵⁴ Shortly thereafter,

¹⁵² GBHM, *General Board for Home Missions Report* (April 1982), Michigan DMB Collection, 2.

¹⁵³ “District Mission Board Report”, *North Atlantic District Proceedings*, (9-11 1986), 25 and “District Mission Board to the Convention of the North Atlantic District”, *North Atlantic District Proceedings 1988 – 25 Years of Grace 1963-1988*, (14-15 June 1988), 40

¹⁵⁴ Mark Rosenberg, E-Mail interview by author, 7 December 2004.

the congregation of fifteen, now known as Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church, began to meet regularly at the Jamestown Public Library for worship and Bible Study. The group focused its outreach efforts on a growing housing development known as Adam's Farm. Through a variety of methods (bulk mailing, phone surveys, door to door canvassing, newspaper and radio advertising), the little group uncovered a number of prospects, but few, if any, committed. By 1994, the group had grown to thirty members, mostly because of transfers.¹⁵⁵

Getting established in the Triad was very challenging for Christ the Redeemer. The potential for great mission work was there, but many roadblocks got in the way. For example, the 2000 history of Christ the Redeemer describes the church situation in the area, "Large, plush worship facilities dotted the landscape. Conservative Protestantism was easy to find by the newcomer. This was Billy Graham's backyard."¹⁵⁶ The temporary facilities of the congregation hindered visibility and exposure in the area. Another challenge was that the location of Christ the Redeemer was three miles away from the Adam's Farm development and the traffic patterns flowed towards Greensboro and not towards Jamestown/High Point. Besides that, none of the members lived in the Adam's Farm area.

In spite of this, the Lord blessed the congregation spiritually, if not as much numerically. They grew together as a family in Christ and continued to reach out to the community, telling strangers about their Savior and their church. In 1993, they were able to conduct an evening Vacation Bible School.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Rosenberg interview.

¹⁵⁶ "Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church, Greensboro, North Carolina," *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 103.

¹⁵⁷ Rosenberg Interview.

In 1994, the exploratory status of Christ the Redeemer came up for review by the Mission Board and the group proposed to move to a new area for outreach, since Adam's Farm was not bearing fruit as originally hoped. The Mission Board granted them a third year of exploratory status, but the group ran into difficulties finding an acceptable place for worship in the local high school until 1995. Outreach attempts were made in the area, but few prospects were uncovered. Christ the Redeemer's time as an exploratory was running out. Unfortunately, their time did run out when in August 1995, after much wrestling with the decision, the District Mission Board notified the group that their exploratory status was ending. Pastor Rosenberg was told that if he did not accept a call to another congregation by 1 January 1996, he could remain serving the Triad area until the end of 2005. In spite of this news, the group continued worshipping every Sunday until the end of the year. In December 1995, Pastor Rosenberg accepted a call to Scottville, MI and the High Point group came under the care of Pastor Scott Mews.¹⁵⁸

The WELS, however, did not completely give up on the Triad. The potential of this rapidly growing area was just too great. The seven remaining families of the High Point preaching station still remained committed and encouraged that a mission would soon start up again. By Easter Sunday 1996, that dream had become a reality.

Three months after closing down, the nucleus, that had now shrunk to three families, convinced the Mission Board to restart the mission in Greensboro, because the area was still ripe for the harvest. In March 1996, Pastor Paul Ziemer accepted the call to the Greensboro exploratory and was installed in April. Easter Sunday served as the occasion for the first worship service of the second version of Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church. When Ziemer arrived,

¹⁵⁸ Rosenberg Interview.

the group although fragmented remained determined. It didn't take long for them to realize that the Lord had just opened his hand of blessing over them in giving them a second chance.¹⁵⁹

The small group threw themselves into renewed outreach by preparing brochures, sending mailings and inviting by word of mouth and publicly. Soon the group outgrew the high school library space and had to move into the cafeteria. Suddenly, new faces began to appear. With each new visitor, the joy and excitement of the congregation grew. Soon the congregation itself began to grow. By the fall of 1997, the nucleus had grown to over seventy souls and fifty communicants. They quickly received mission status from the Board for Home Missions.¹⁶⁰

Christ the Redeemer was in the midst of a land search, but a unique opportunity arose to the west that no one expected. As the congregation grew, the people began to look beyond their immediate area to do outreach work. Winston-Salem presented itself as a potential mission field. Winston-Salem was thirty miles west of Greensboro, and from early on, the people at Greensboro had determined that the two cities were too far from each to be served well by one congregation. They determined that eventually a second congregation in Winston-Salem needed to be established to practically and properly minister to those in Winston-Salem. However, this second congregation came much quicker than anticipated.¹⁶¹ Pastor Don Tollefson writes in his essay, *North Atlantic District History – 1993-2004*,

An LC-MS congregation worshiping in a newly constructed building was dissatisfied with the direction their young congregation was taking. they were interested in learning more about the WELS and the part it might play in the future. While these people were not ready to simply be received into membership

¹⁵⁹ Paul Ziemer, E-Mail interview re: Christ the Redeemer by author, 7 October 2004.

¹⁶⁰ "Christ the Redeemer" 103.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 104.

into the WELS as a group, they did offer their building for sale to the WELS for the price of paying off their mortgage.¹⁶²

With this new development, it became obvious that work needed to be done in Winston-Salem. The members from Greensboro regularly made the trek over to Winston-Salem to assist in the outreach work. Soon a new congregation named Star of Bethlehem opened in the former LC-MS building.¹⁶³ Pastor Ziemer writes about this time in Christ the Redeemer's history,

To this group's great credit, the people were willing to set aside the dream of a WELS congregation in Greensboro when they came to realize that their support and leadership was needed to allow a healthy mission in Winston-Salem get started. The plan was to return to Greensboro and reactivate Christ the Redeemer after three years. By the time the target date arrived the Triad (Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem) were leading the nation in job layoffs. No restart of Christ the Redeemer could be authorized....

Seldom have I seen a spirit of selflessness compared to the members of Christ the Redeemer. The mission board would have been willing to call a second pastor to the Triad to attempt to develop the Winston-Salem field as a separate unit. Christ the Redeemer people would have loved for this to happen. They had few members in the Winston-Salem field, a good half-hour away. They had hopes to have their first building up within 12 months.

But in their hearts they knew that, humanly speaking, the need for them in Winston-Salem was critical. Only three people did not agree with this. The rest joyfully and faithfully drove the miles to help start a mission to serve a different city—and continue to do so today.¹⁶⁴

By November 1998, the remaining members of Christ the Redeemer formally joined Star of Bethlehem, where they still attend today, but they still hold out hope for a new Greensboro congregation someday in the future.

¹⁶² Donald Tollefson, *North Atlantic District History – 1993-2004*, Presented at the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the North Atlantic District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod at Winchester, Virginia, 15-16 June 2004, 3.

¹⁶³ "Christ the Redeemer" 104.

¹⁶⁴ Ziemer Interview.



Present facility of Star of Bethlehem, Winston-Salem, NC
Purchased in 1998¹⁶⁵

A Star Rises Over the Triad – Star of Bethlehem, Winston-Salem, NC

Star of Bethlehem was born in the midst of controversy. The leaders of Abiding Faith Lutheran Church, an LC-MS congregation in Winston-Salem, had become dissatisfied with their church body out of concern about the direction their congregation was heading. This concern led the group to approach Pastor Walter Beckmann, the WELS North Atlantic District President, to find out about the differences between the two synods and what part WELS might play in the future. Pastor Paul Ziemer recounts that this eventually led to presentations by himself and a neighboring ELCA pastor. He writes, “Surprisingly, the group drew away from the ELCA connection and asked our synod to purchase their church building. No one joined the WELS before the purchase went through and the first service was held, but many from that group had indicated in home visits that they were interested, and expected to join.”¹⁶⁶

The group held their first worship service on Pentecost Sunday 1998. Over 100 people attended the service. Shortly thereafter, the Synod responded promptly to this opportunity by purchasing the building for \$650,000, even before there was any formal membership. They also provided funding for a Vicar in Mission Settings – Vicar Scott Muske – to assist with the new

¹⁶⁵ Photo courtesy of <http://www.wswelstar.org> -- 15 December 2004.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Ziemer, E-Mail interview re: Star of Bethlehem by author, 7 October 2004.

field starting in September 1998. It was a challenging time for those who remained from Abiding Faith. Pastor Ziemer writes, “Most of the members of the former LC-MS congregation were disappointed, embittered, and fighting one another as much as they were fighting against their former synod. Money dominated their discussions and unpaid debts dominated their thoughts. Most saw the church as a social organization.”¹⁶⁷ Plans were made to provide an additional pastor to the area, but by November the nucleus in Greensboro decided that their experience was needed to help nurture and guide this new Winston-Salem group. The plans were put aside and the Greensboro members became mentors to those former LC-MS members who joined Star of Bethlehem.¹⁶⁸

The former LC-MS members who joined Star of Bethlehem had a unique background. They were largely elderly and African-American, but what was unique was their connection to pastors who had graduated from Immanuel Lutheran College in Greensboro. In Part I, we had discussed how the Synodical Conference had opened Immanuel to produce black pastors for the black populations of the South. This group of former LC-MS members had benefited from that work done through Immanuel Lutheran College. Pastor Ziemer writes,

It turned out that the solid and spiritual core of the Missouri group were all elderly, and mostly African American. The LC-MS maintained a pastor-training college in Greensboro for many years during the days of segregation. It closed about the time that our synod’s (sic) split. Quite evidently the professors at this school were very faithful to the Word of god. As a result, the African American people who were served by the pastors flowing from this school benefited tremendously. They were still “Old Missouri” and thus very much in agreement with the WELS. This was the group that led the rest of the Missouri members to turn away from joining in with the ELCA and align with the WELS. This group became very active in the new WELS congregation and were our leading evangelism workers.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Ziemer Interview re: Star of Bethlehem.

¹⁶⁸ “Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina”, *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 105.

In the fall of 1999, this combined group of veteran WELS members from Greensboro, the new WELS members from the LC-MS and a number of new families from the area officially received mission status. By the end of the year they had nearly 120 souls with ninety communicants. From early on, Star of Bethlehem took advantage of another opportunity. Next door to the church was Southfork Extended Care Facility. Pastor Ziemer began weekly worship services with the residents there.¹⁷⁰

By 2002, the attitude of the congregation had improved significantly from Star of Bethlehem's first year. They had worked through most of the issues by that time, but growth had stopped. The congregation had actually regressed some, because a handful of businesses had transferred out of the area taking a handful of active member families with them. It was also about that time that Pastor Ziemer accepted a call to Richmond, Virginia. Seminary graduate Fred Guldberg was assigned to Star of Bethlehem in May 2002.¹⁷¹

When Guldberg arrived, the attitude of the congregation had become rather pessimistic, but within two short years, that attitude has changed for the better as the Lord leads new members into Star of Bethlehem's fold. During the first two years of his ministry, new growth was slow with only three families joining the church, but since July 2004 five families have joined Star of Bethlehem.¹⁷²

There have been other joys and challenges since Pastor Guldberg started at Star of Bethlehem. The congregation started a "Power Hour" program, through which the congregation ministers to mothers with young children. This may eventually lead to a preschool/day care in

¹⁶⁹ Ziemer Interview re: Star of Bethlehem.

¹⁷⁰ "Star of Bethlehem" 106.

¹⁷¹ Fred Guldberg, E-Mail interview by author, 1 November 2004.

¹⁷² Ibid.

the coming years. The adoption of a constitution proved to be a challenge for the congregation, particularly because of ambiguities regarding the roles of men and women in positions of leadership. Apparently, there were still some issues regarding this biblical teaching because Abiding Faith had had a woman as the president of the congregation. The issues were dealt with and a revised constitution was adopted.¹⁷³ Another challenge has been the fact that Star of Bethlehem is located in the heart of the “Bible Belt.” Pastor Guldberg writes the unique challenge of working among such a heavily Evangelical population,

I am in the Bible Belt. There is no concept of biblical fellowship. There is a skewed picture of the means of grace. This is spiritually taxing on my members, who struggle to resist the temptations to join in. . . . The biggest issue with new members isn't stewardship. . . . it's baptism. Drunkenness isn't seen as a vice as much as public consumption of alcohol. In some ways this is refreshing. My eldest son's best friend is a Pentecostal. There are so many places where we can let our light shine.¹⁷⁴

The Lord continues to bless the efforts of Star of Bethlehem and their future looks very promising in this rapidly growing area of North Carolina. Shortly after work began in the Triad, different work began on the other end of the state along the Atlantic coast. Attempts had been made to do exploratory work in eastern North Carolina years before, but it was always short-lived. This time a full-time pastor was assigned to the area for the first time and these renewed mission efforts resulted in the first WELS congregation along the North Carolina coast.

Serving Those Who Serve Our Nation, Part II – Ascension, Jacksonville, NC

The history of Jacksonville is tied up with WELS work done throughout eastern North Carolina. Much like Beautiful Savior, Ascension can trace its history back to the traveling military missionary, Luther Voss. Voss frequently visited the Marines stationed at both Camp LeJeune in Jacksonville and up the coast at the Cherry Point MCAS near Havelock. When Paul

¹⁷³ Guldberg Interview.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Ziemer took over in 1970, the numbers of WELS servicemen and their families in eastern North Carolina were increasing. At one point in time, the Mission Board had its focus not on Jacksonville, where WELS members were still few and far between, but on Cherry Point/Havelock. As mentioned at the beginning of Part II, in 1971, the mission nucleus at Cherry Point/Havelock seemed the most promising of all the WELS groups in North Carolina to organize a congregation.¹⁷⁵ A nucleus had formed when the Gardner and Burdoin families left the local LC-MS church in Havelock. Their request for services caught the Michigan District Mission Board's attention, however, that attention soon changed to Raleigh. When Paul Schmiede was called to Gethsemane in May 1973, a major portion of his call was to conduct services in these outlying areas of North Carolina with the intention of eventually starting congregations.¹⁷⁶ By November 1973, the group in Cherry Point had seven families with eighteen communicants and exploratory status, but their requests for mission status and manpower were deferred.¹⁷⁷ This was the highpoint of work in Cherry Point.

Pastor Schmiede continued to conduct monthly or bi-monthly services for the next ten years. In 1981, the group at Cherry Point was averaging about thirteen people per service with three families and some individuals making the hour-long drive from Camp LeJeune.¹⁷⁸ Shortly thereafter, Pastor Schmiede began monthly services at Camp LeJeune. By June 1984, services were continuing at Cherry Point, but their group was decreasing as the group at Camp LeJeune

¹⁷⁵ Ziemer, "Introducing", 4.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Schmiede, E-Mail interview by author, 19 November 2004.

¹⁷⁷ GBHM Priority Committee, *Action on Requests to the G.B.H.M.*, (5-6 November 1973), Michigan DMB Collection, 2.

¹⁷⁸ Schmiede, "In North Carolina" 2.

increased. Eleven families were meeting monthly at a community center across from Camp LeJeune's main gate.¹⁷⁹ Vicar David Lau assisted Pastor Schmiede with serving these groups.

Pastor Mark Schoeneck took over ministering to the military after he was assigned to Fayetteville in 1985. Through the early 1990s, Pastor Schoeneck continued visiting the WELS people at Cherry Point, Camp LeJeune and ministered to a group in Wilmington.¹⁸⁰ Although Fayetteville was over a hundred miles away, it was the closest WELS congregation.

In 1993, the North Atlantic District Mission Board sought to establish a WELS presence on the Carolina coast, while serving Camp LeJeune, which had become the largest permanent United States Marine Corps base.¹⁸¹ With this in mind, Seminary graduate Tadd Fellers was assigned out of the Seminary to the "Exploratory Field of Churches, Eastern North Carolina."¹⁸²

The "Field of Churches" concept was based on an idea along the lines of the old circuit riders. The Baptists had used it with success in the South and the Mission Board wanted to try it out. Pastor Fellers was to go around and visit each town where WELS people were located on a monthly basis with his base in Jacksonville. His "Field of Churches" was scattered all over eastern North Carolina in towns like New Bern, Kinston, Havelock, Wilmington and Greenville. Between his visits, strong lay leaders were to conduct services.¹⁸³

During the time that Pastor Fellers visited this "Field of Churches", the nucleus in Jacksonville began meeting every Sunday at the Marine Base Chapel at Camp LeJeune starting

¹⁷⁹ Ziemer, "Fifteen" 5.

¹⁸⁰ Schoeneck Interview.

¹⁸¹ "Ascension, Jacksonville, North Carolina", *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 111.

¹⁸² *The Northwestern Lutheran* (July 1993).

¹⁸³ Tadd Fellers, Telephone interview by author, 29 November 2004.

in August 1993.¹⁸⁴ Meeting at the base deterred the group from creating an identity in the community and serving the community at-large, so they sought out a new facility for worship and Bible study. Shortly after choosing the name “Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church” for their group, the nucleus began renting the small auditorium of a child-care facility called Coastal Kiddie College. From the beginning, Ascension had a great relationship with Coastal Kiddie College. The child-care company allowed Ascension to set up their worship space in the little-used auditorium and leave it set up. The company also allowed Ascension to put a permanent sign out by the street. Having this semi-permanent facility allowed Ascension to start up a Sunday School in April 1994.¹⁸⁵

By the summer of 1995, it became apparent that the “Field of Churches” idea was not going to work as originally intended. It was evident that serving such a large area was too much for one person to concentrate his efforts. Even though the people Fellers visited appreciated his visits, none of those scattered across eastern North Carolina were willing to do things on their own and get churches started. So the decision was made for Pastor Fellers to focus his efforts on the Jacksonville area and the military bases of Camp LeJeune, Cherry Point and New River.¹⁸⁶

Because of the concentrated efforts in the Jacksonville area, in August 1996, Ascension requested mission status, which was immediately granted. During that time, a new company bought out Coastal Kiddie College and asked that Ascension move to a different facility. This led Ascension to move to the conference room of the Quality Inn & Suites in Jacksonville in September 1996.¹⁸⁷ The congregation consisted mostly of younger people who were serving in

¹⁸⁴ Tadd Fellers, E-Mail history, received 6 October 2004.

¹⁸⁵ Fellers Telephone interview and E-Mail history.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

the military. For example, when the ladies of Ascension held their first ladies' group meeting, it consisted mostly of women in their 20s, but there were a couple of middle-aged women who actually fit in very well and served as mentors to the younger ladies. Since Ascension consisted largely of military servicemen and their families, they also had to deal with the same transience that Beautiful Savior in Fayetteville did as Marines transferred in and out of the area.¹⁸⁸ In spite of this, the Lord continued to bless the congregation with growth.

In April 1998, Pastor Fellers accepted a call across the state to Grace in Charlotte. A month later, Stephen Schmidt was assigned by the Conference of Presidents to fill the vacancy and was installed on 12 July 1998. Ascension continued to meet at the Comfort Inn until January 1999, when the congregation rented its first full-time facility – a small cinder block building on Old Bridge Street in downtown Jacksonville. Ascension currently rents a facility on Gum Branch Road in Jacksonville that is twice the size of the old Coastal Kiddie College auditorium.¹⁸⁹

Currently, Ascension has embraced the transient nature of the area, by making it a goal to train young men and women to be missionaries and servants of the church wherever the Lord may send them. Young men, who probably would not be expected to serve in such capacities up north, are called upon to serve as leaders in this mission congregation. The core group of members, who have made the Jacksonville area their homes, is growing. The congregation continues to ebb and flow as the military goes. Events like 9/11 or military action in places like Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq continues to have a major impact on Ascension. Pastor Schmidt writes, "Through it all God has kept all our people safe with only a few close calls in battle."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Fellers Telephone interview and E-Mail history.

¹⁸⁹ "Ascension" 111.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Schmidt, E-Mail interview by author, 17 October 2004.

They have also begun work in the Wilmington area and continue to minister to members in the New Bern area. Being the only WELS congregation along the North Carolina coast gives Ascension the freedom to direct its mission efforts wherever it wants. Of course, local outreach efforts continue to reach out to those at Camp LeJeune and the other military bases. Pastor Schmidt writes, “Jacksonville is different than many North Carolina cities; everyone is from someplace else. It’s not as hard for Yankee to fit in as it is in other Southern cities. We’re trying, though, not to create a little island of German Lutheranism here on the coast but rather to serve the people here, whoever they may be, with the Gospel of their Savior. It’s fascinating, invigorating work.”¹⁹¹

The final congregation in this history of WELS work in North Carolina takes us back to where WELS first took root back in 1970 – the Raleigh area. From that first “plant” at Gethsemane, several other “shoots” have sprouted across the state and now are firmly planted on their own. This final congregation started as a young sapling transplanted from the first “plant” at Gethsemane.

A New Tree Grows in the Triangle – Tree of Life, Cary, NC

“An adventure from the beginning.” “A whirlwind...if you get too close you’ll get sucked in, but you won’t want to be left on the outside.” These phrases have been used to describe the ministry at Tree of Life – all in a positive sense.¹⁹² Really they indicate positively how the Lord has blessed the efforts to extend his kingdom in this area of central North Carolina.

¹⁹¹ Schmidt Interview.

¹⁹² Tollefson, *NAD History 5*.

As far back as 1986, the North Atlantic District Mission Board was looking at the Cary area as a potential new field for starting a mission.¹⁹³ Considering that between 1990 and 2000 Cary grew by over 77,000 households, it was a prime target for a future mission. Nearly every subsequent Mission Board Report listed Cary as a site for a new mission.¹⁹⁴ It was not the Mission Board, however, that gave the impetus for Tree of Life. Instead, it came from the congregation that had helped to start several other congregations in North Carolina – Gethsemane in North Raleigh.

The idea began between late 1996 and early 1997. Gethsemane's attendance was nearing all-time highs and the current facility was getting tight. Pastor Scott Mews and the leadership of Gethsemane considered options as to what to do – offer a second service? build? start a new mission in Cary where thirty or so of the members lived anyway? The decision was made to form a plan to call a pastor and ask for volunteer families who lived close to Cary to serve as a nucleus for a mission. On 3 March 1997, Gethsemane submitted a request for manpower and exploratory status to begin work in Cary. Their request was granted later in the month and Seminary graduate Michael Geiger was assigned to serve the exploratory in Cary, NC. A month after his ordination (10 August 1997), canvassing began in the Cary area. The first Bible study of the nucleus took place on 17 September in the home of Patti Johnson with eleven in attendance. In October, the group chose the name of "Tree of Life Evangelical Lutheran Church" as their official name.¹⁹⁵ Tree of Life was already on the grow.

¹⁹³ "DMB Report, 1986, 25.

¹⁹⁴ DMB Reports from 1988, 1992 and 1996 list Cary among their potential sites under consideration.

¹⁹⁵ Roger Larsen, E-Mail interview by author, 15 November 2004 and *5 Years of Grace – Tree of Life Lutheran Church – Cary, North Carolina: 1998-2003*, Cary, NC, 2003, 1-2.

During this entire time, the group continued to attend Gethsemane on Sundays for worship, but plans were being made to secure a worship home of their own. The first of many Travel-Canvass-Witness teams came down to Cary in March 1998 to prepare for an Easter Sunrise Service.¹⁹⁶ This was Tree of Life's first major outreach effort into the community. Forty-two people attended this outdoor Sunrise Service. The nucleus continued to grow little by little and in September 1998, Tree of Life secured a conference room at the Homewood Suites Hilton in Cary for worship and Bible study. Homewood Suites remained the worship home of Tree of Life until September 2003. The congregation was allowed to store their worship materials on-site, which proved to be a blessing, since the group had no facility yet. The Lord continued to bless Tree of Life's outreach efforts as the time neared for the first public worship service.¹⁹⁷

On 13 December 1998, Tree of Life held its first public worship service. The congregation was hoping for 100 for that first service. They got eighty-three with eighteen prospect families attending – still an “acceptable” number! In the year that followed, Tree of Life experienced several new firsts: first families received into membership, first adult confirmation and baptism, first child baptism, first Vacation Bible School, and its first Sunday School. The congregation continued to thrive and grow together as a family.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Tree of Life has hosted at least one TCW team per year every year since 1998. Over the years, these teams have contacted well over 10,000 homes and have uncovered hundreds of prospects through door-to-door canvassing, phone surveying, delivering newcomer packets and mailings. It was a true joy to have the chance to manage one of these teams during my vicar year at Tree of Life in February 2004.

¹⁹⁷ “Tree of Life, Cary, North Carolina”, *North Atlantic District History of Congregations* (Long Valley, NJ: Northeastern Publishing House, 2000), 110.

¹⁹⁸ *5 Years*, 5-9.

In May 2000, the District Mission Board granted Tree of Life mission status and land search authority.¹⁹⁹ That same year, Tree of Life introduced a unique children's ministry called Kinder or Kids' Church, where younger children are taught "how to do church" during the latter half of the worship service. That summer, Tree of Life also hosted a summer vicar – Eric Pelzl – to assist with Vacation Bible School and summer outreach.²⁰⁰

In May 2001, Tree of Life was officially incorporated. That same month, Tree of Life became involved for the first time in the vicar program as Jay Bickelhaupt was assigned to be a Vicar in Mission Setting under the supervision of Pastor Geiger. In the early months of Bickelhaupt's vicarship, the offices of Tree of Life moved from the spare bedrooms of the Geigers' parsonage to a new rented Ministry Center in office space above a dentist's office on Old Raleigh Road in nearby Apex. Outreach continued and grew more focused with the assistance of "Vicar Jay". The Lord continued to bless Tree of Life with growth.²⁰¹

On 18 August 2002, Tree of Life installed a new vicar – Scott Wolfram. During Wolfram's vicarship, Tree of Life increased its efforts in searching for a rental facility, because the situation at the Homewood Suites was becoming more challenging with each passing month. When one potential facility fell through because the paperwork was not handed in on time, the members became discouraged, but the Lord had other plans.²⁰² About the same time, Tree of Life began a new outreach program to get more members involved, which was called G.R.O.W. (God

¹⁹⁹ "Report of the District Mission Board to the North Atlantic District Convention," *Proceedings of the North Atlantic District* (6-7 June 2000), 43.

²⁰⁰ *5 Years* 12-13.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 14-19.

²⁰² *5 Years* 19-23.

Rewards Our Work)²⁰³ The story is told that on the first night of G.R.O.W. groups, Pastor Geiger and Marty Ranft visited a prospect's home. In the course of the conversation with the lady of the house, they found out that she was a real estate agent, who knew about a vacant office space on MacKenan Drive in Cary that could possibly be sublet by Tree of Life. By the end of "Vicar Scott's" vicarship, Tree of Life had secured a lease on 6100 square feet of that vacant office space. In the midst of the remodeling of this space for worship and education purposes, this writer was installed as the third vicar of Tree of Life on 17 August 2003.

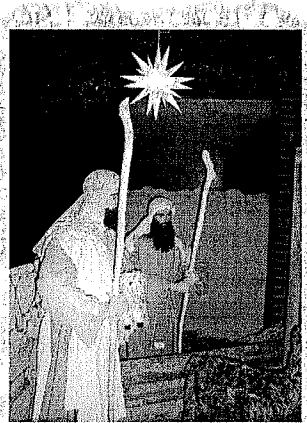
The following year proved to be an exciting time in Tree of Life's history. In September 2003, the congregation moved out of Homewood Suites and the Ministry Center and into the Mackenan Drive facility. I had the privilege of presiding over the final service at Homewood Suites. The joy of the charter members over pushing the wheeled carts that contained the worship materials down the hall one last time was very evident. Getting out of the now-cramped Ministry Center allowed for more freedom for Tree of Life's ministry. On 21 September 2003, the first worship service was held at MacKenan Drive and on 2 November, Tree of Life held its Grand Opening in the new facility.²⁰⁴ On 5 December 2003, as part of Tree of Life's fifth anniversary celebration, the congregation opened "Virtual Bethlehem" to the public. "Virtual Bethlehem" has become Tree of Life's signature outreach event as the congregation seeks to get its name out to the community at Christmas time and to share the Good News of the Christmas story in a unique way.²⁰⁵ It was planned before Tree of Life even had a facility yet. The congregation hoped to get 250 people for this special event. The Lord blessed them with over 600! Pastor Michael Geiger

²⁰³ The G.R.O.W. Group outreach program "offers an opportunity for all members to be involved with evangelism one hour a month at a time that works into their personal schedules. The various evangelism activities allow everyone to use their skills and talents within their own comfort zone." (*5 Years* 23)

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰⁵ For more details, go to <http://www.virtualbethlehem.org>.

writes, “Virtual Bethlehem stands out in my mind as evidence of God’s grace. We plan with no facility in which to hold it, God provides a perfect spot. We plan with \$0 in the budget, he provides \$7500. We plan to have each member involved, we have over 90% involved. We plan for 250 people, he brings 630. The Lord is in control and makes great things happen.”²⁰⁶



Scene from the Nativity Booth at Virtual Bethlehem 2003²⁰⁷

During July 2004, Tree of Life tried out a made-from-scratch Vacation Bible School that was like no ordinary VBS. 3-D Exploration Camp or 3-DEC, as it came to be called, allowed the members of the congregation to teach children basic life skills and hobbies, while sharing Christ at the same time. While attendance was low, the potential for the program is quite good. On 15 August 2004, Benjamin Zahn was installed as the fourth vicar to serve under Pastor Geiger’s supervision. The Lord continues to bless their outreach efforts. Throughout the years, the congregation has been involved in all kinds of outreach programs – having booths at craft fairs, various community events, hosting Travel-Canvass-Witness teams, G.R.O.W. groups, and Virtual Bethlehem. The congregation has grown from ten to 129 souls over the past five years, but the work continues. Pastor Geiger writes, “I believe our congregation is poised with a solid core group to do some great things for the Lord in this community, however we lack a bit of clarity of vision to determine what that is. We are working to reclarify the mission of our

²⁰⁶ Geiger Interview.

²⁰⁷ Photo courtesy of <http://www.virtualbethlehem.org>.

congregation in each of the members' minds so that together we can increase the kingdom of God, not just shuffle the WELS or Lutheran deck."²⁰⁸ At this time, the congregation is still searching for land for a permanent home. There is also an increased effort to get more members involved in the ministry of the congregation, rather than laying the burden of the work on a certain few. As the congregation grows larger and nears the time when it can become independent of synod subsidy, it is also experiencing some growing pains. In spite of that, the Lord continues to bless the congregation with a spirit of love and welcoming as each new face enters Tree of Life. The Lord continues to bless the congregation with a strong desire for reaching out to others and expanding his kingdom.

Pastor Geiger describes the ministry and history of Tree of Life in this way, "A joyfilled, blessed challenge. Along the way the Lord has been gracious to see us move from a Bible study of 10 to a congregation of 129. We certainly rejoice in that. Along the way he has challenged us to continue to see and seize opportunities for his gospel ministry. All along his hand of blessing has carried us and given us many reasons to rejoice while looking forward to the next challenge he has for us."²⁰⁹ Having experienced this "joyfilled, blessed challenge" firsthand and having had the privilege of being part of Tree of Life's history, it is amazing to see how the Lord opens his hand of blessing and showers his grace on his people. He does it in such remarkable ways, as he has in every one of the WELS congregations he planted in North Carolina. Tree of Life is just another example of what can be accomplished when a congregation trusts in the Lord's gracious promises.

²⁰⁸ Geiger Interview.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.



Present "Chancel" Area at Tree of Life, Cary, NC²¹⁰

III. Looking Back and Looking Ahead

The history of the WELS work in North Carolina can be summed up in two words – God’s grace. It was God’s grace that sent Luther Voss back in the 1960s to visit our servicemen in North Carolina. It was God’s grace that brought little clusters of WELS members together in places like Raleigh and Hendersonville and Charlotte and Greensboro. It was God’s grace that moved some to stand up for God’s truth and others to travel thousands of miles to share it with just a few. It was God’s grace that allowed congregations to be sown across the state of North Carolina like seed and it was that same grace that made those congregations grow. Above all, it is God’s grace through Jesus Christ that makes all the effort, all the time, all the joy and all the sorrow that went into these eight North Carolina congregations priceless, because all this is done for one purpose – to seek and to save the lost with the message of Christ’s forgiveness.

Now as the WELS’ presence in North Carolina nears thirty-five years of God’s grace, what is in store for the WELS in North Carolina? Perhaps in the coming years we will see new WELS congregations pop up in places like Greensboro or Wilmington or Durham or North Charlotte. Perhaps we will see increased Christian education through early childhood centers, preschools or Lutheran Elementary Schools in places like Winston-Salem or Raleigh or Cary or

²¹⁰ Photo courtesy of Jeremiah and Lisa Gumm – Taken on Easter Sunday, 11 April 2004.

Fayetteville. Perhaps greater efforts will be made to minister to college students on the university campuses of Asheville and the Triangle and the Triad or to the military in places like Goldsboro, Fayetteville and the Carolina coast. Perhaps for some a permanent home will finally be a reality as in Cary or Jacksonville or Asheville. Perhaps a larger facility will be necessary.²¹¹

God-willing, in the coming years, we will still hear the sweet message of the Gospel proclaimed in all its truth and purity from the pulpits of our congregations in North Carolina and on the highways and byways across the state.. As with all these plans, we trust in the promise of our gracious Lord through his servant Paul, "*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*"²¹²

As we look back at the many years of God's grace across North Carolina and as we look ahead to what blessings the Lord has in store for his faithful people located there, we can only give thanks and pray the prayer of Solomon, when he dedicated the temple:

*May the Lord our God be with us
As he was with our fathers;
May he never leave us nor forsake us.*²¹³

Soli Deo Gloria!

²¹¹ For future updates on these congregations, please refer to the list below of active websites run by five of the North Carolina WELS congregations. Keep on the lookout for others to pop up in the future!

- 1.) Living Savior – Asheville, NC – <http://www.livingsaviorlutheranchurch.com>
- 2.) Tree of Life – Cary, NC – <http://www.treeoflifenc.org>
- 3.) Grace – Charlotte, NC – <http://www.grace-charlotte.org>
- 4.) Gethsemane – Raleigh, NC – <http://www.gethsemanelutheran.us>
- 5.) Star of Bethlehem – Winston-Salem, NC – www.wswelstar.org

²¹² Romans 8:28.

²¹³ 1 Kings 8:57.

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