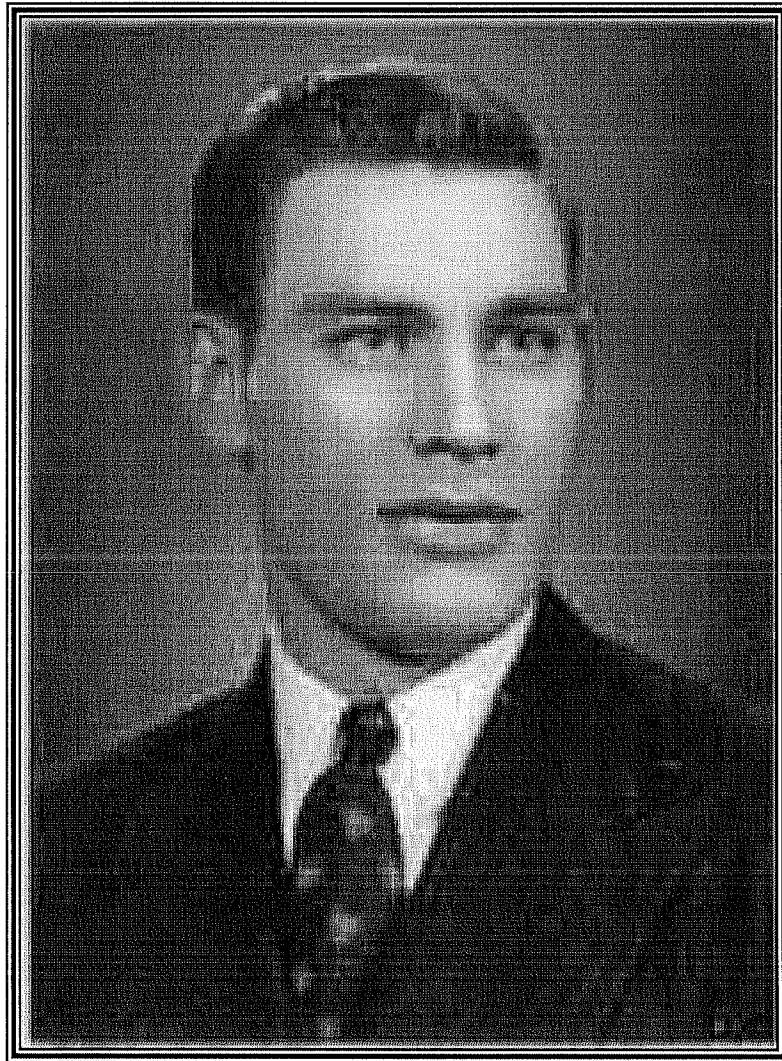


A Portrait of a Missionary

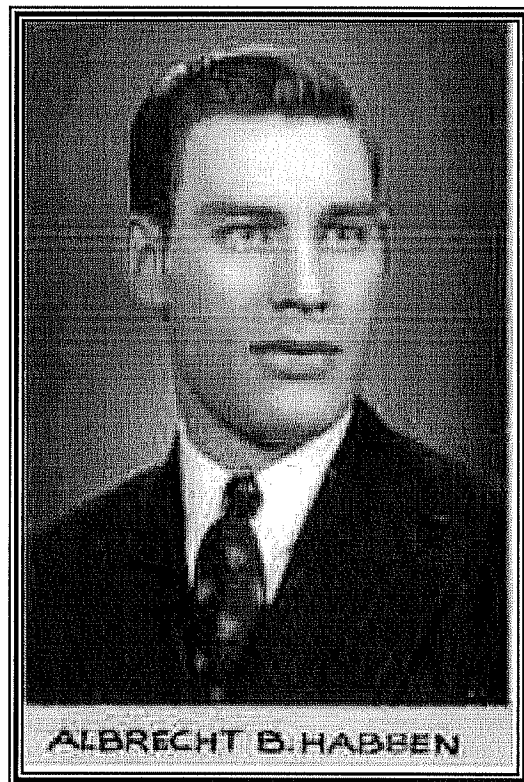
Albrecht Bernhard Habben



**Daniel Habben
Senior Church History
Professor Brenner
April 12, 1999**

Introduction

For two years as I walked to class, my eyes have been drawn to his graduation portrait hanging on the wall outside of room 32, just an echoing hallway down from the “Holy Ghost” room at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. It’s not an unusual portrait; it’s not particularly old or rare. It’s not a portrait of a respected professor, or even the smartest student in the class. It’s just another portrait surrounded by twenty or so others, proof that he belongs to the graduating class of 1943. Though it may not stand out as many other portraits do, my eyes have always been drawn to *that* one because it’s a portrait of a pioneer, a missionary, an evangelist, a mentor, and an “uncle” to many. It's the portrait of Albrecht Bernhard Habben.



Seminary Graduation 1943

Anyone faithfully reading the Northwestern Lutheran during the 50’s would have recognized the name A. B. Habben. “Habs”, as his friends knew him, was the Wisconsin Synod's first missionary to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Not only that, he was the first missionary in our synod's first independent overseas mission field. Although the Wisconsin Synod had been working in Nigeria since the 30's through the Synodical Conference, it had never attempted overseas mission work on its own. Northern Rhodesia was the prototype. A study of A. B. Habben's work in Africa is a study in our synod's first endeavor in "going at it alone". This paper is an attempt to find out what A. B. Habben was like as a pastor and missionary, and to learn about our early mission work in Northern Rhodesia.

Although many pastors and teachers today still speak of Pastor Habben's positive influence on their ministry and look to him as their mentor, this paper is not a portrait of an impeccable crystal vase. It's a portrait of a clay jar which, in spite of its weaknesses, God used to spread the gospel. Here is a portrait of a missionary named Albrecht Bernhard Habben.

Childhood and Education

Pastor Habben was born on January 2, 1917, in Clark, South Dakota. He grew up in the town of Raymond, ten miles west Clark. Raymond has never been a big town. With a population of less than two hundred it sits quietly off of Highway 212 waiting to be discovered by a lost traveler or someone in search of a quiet, inexpensive place to retire. Nights are so quiet there that the only noises interrupting the silence of the shimmering stars are the muted sounds of cattle chewing their cud and the occasional pickup truck chugging its way down Main Street. It's not exactly the place where you would expect to find a future world missionary.

Albrecht's father farmed and tended a herd of prized sheep. Although he spent his summers helping out on the farm, Albert, as his family called him, didn't want to become a farmer. He always had talked about moving away. In fact he used to say that some day he was going to live in Africa.¹ Eventually Albert would fulfill that dream, but not before he received an education in our synodical schools.

Albrecht spent his prep days at Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm, Minnesota, and upon graduation in 1936 he went to Watertown, Wisconsin. There he attended Northwestern College and graduated in 1940. Because he was blessed with the sturdy frame of a two hundred-pound farm boy, it was no surprise that Albrecht played football. His size was a welcome addition to Coach Leonard

¹ Habben, Kenneth, phone interview by author, Raymond, SD., 8 February 1999.

Umnus' first football team and cleared the way to many touchdowns for running backs Harold Sauer, and Ernst H. Wendland.²

While he was a great athlete, Albrecht didn't excel in academics. He had a lot of common sense, but was an average student. One day in Hebrew class, Professor Kowalke became upset with Albrecht because he was unable to analyze a certain Hebrew verb. In his frustration, Professor Kowalke told Albrecht that he should consider becoming a plumber instead of a pastor.³ Albrecht never seemed to live that incident down. In a characterization for the *Black and Red* one of his classmates wrote, "He (Albrecht)



NWC Graduation

has chosen the ministry as his work but he has been advised by some that he would also have abilities as a plumber."⁴

Although Albrecht never considered becoming a plumber, he did seriously consider joining the navy with his good friend Marcus Horn upon graduation.⁵ Marcus went on to become a navy fighter pilot, but Albrecht continued his pre-ministerial education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduating in 1943.

Sometime towards the end of his last year at the seminary, Albrecht met Alva Blank of Cedarburg, Wisconsin. Although "Alva" was her given name, Albrecht gave her the nickname "Suzie" because he said that she looked more like a "Suzie" than an "Alva."⁶ After a short courtship the two were married on June 19, 1943.

Suzie proved to be a faithful companion to Albrecht as she shared her husband's love for people and the ministry. She played the organ when it was needed and helped to plan and carry out the many

² Wendland, Ernst H. interview by author, email, Lusaka, Zambia, 19 March 1999.

³ Brick, Delmar, interview by author, email, Manitowoc, WI., 8 February 1999.

⁴ *The Black and Red*. Volume 44 Number 3. Northwestern College, Watertown, WI., 1940, p. 98.

⁵ Habben, Kenneth, phone interview by author, Raymond, SD., 8 February 1999.

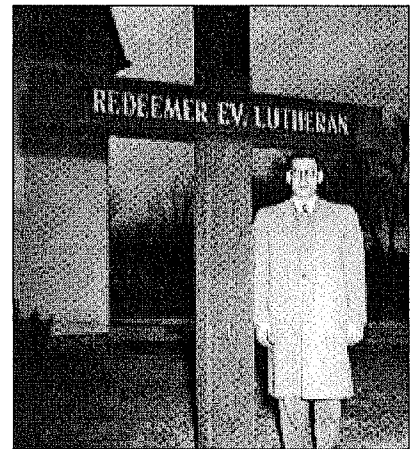
⁶ Sievert, Jim, interview by author, West Bend, WI., 6 March 1999.

youth camps they ran while in the States. Although the two never had any children of their own, they were quick to adopt the neighboring pastors' and teachers' children as their own.⁷

Early Ministry

When Albrecht graduated from the seminary in 1943, there were few calls to be had. Many graduates were assigned to teach in parochial schools, or serve as assistant pastors in larger congregations.⁸ Pastor Habben became an assistant to the pastor at Zebaoth Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. He served there for eight months before receiving a call to Redeemer Lutheran in Hastings, Nebraska.

The Lord blessed Pastor Habben's work in Hastings. In one year Redeemer went from a church of seventy-two souls⁹ to one hundred and twenty-three souls.¹⁰ By the time Pastor Habben left Hastings in 1954, the baptized membership had grown to two hundred and fifty.¹¹ Pastor Habben also guided Redeemer's move from an old chicken hatchery into a new sanctuary.



Pastor Habben in Hastings

African Mission Background

While Pastor Habben was busy serving in Hastings, there were certain men who thought that it was time for the Wisconsin Synod to expand its worldwide outreach efforts. Although the synod had been doing work in Nigeria in cooperation with the Synodical Conference, the only outreach that the Wisconsin Synod was conducting on its own was the work with the Apaches in Arizona.

⁷ Sievert, Jim, interview by author, West Bend, WI., 6 March 1999.

⁸ Krause, Robert, phone interview by author, Brookfield, WI., 8 February 1999.

⁹ 15th Biennial Proceedings Nebraska District, June 19th, Hastings, NE., 1946, p.21.

¹⁰ 16th Biennial Proceedings Nebraska District, June 16, 21, Claytonia, NE., 1948, p. 23.

¹¹ 19th Biennial Proceedings Nebraska District, June 15-18, Stanton, NE., 1954, p.11.

One of the proponents for expansion was Pastor Edgar Hoenecke who would later become the first chairman of the World Mission Board. There were prominent opponents to expansion, however. One of those opponents was the president of the Wisconsin Synod, John Brenner. President Brenner was reluctant to encourage expansion because he had just lived through an era of financial difficulty. Through the years of depression synod officials often had to make the tough decision of whether to pay the missionaries in Apacheland, or the professors of our synodical schools since they were unable to do both. It wasn't until 1945 that the synod climbed out of debt, and enjoyed a sizeable surplus. President Brenner feared that if the synod rushed into expansion it would quickly fall into debt again.¹² With historical insight one could say that this was the perfect time for our synod to expand since our country's economy would continue to get stronger and the mission funds would continue to pour in.

Finally, in 1947, funds were set aside for an exploration team to go to Africa and find an area where there was no church doing mission work. It wasn't until 1949, however, that the synod could find two men willing to do the exploration. The two men who went to Africa were Pastor Edgar Hoenecke and Pastor Arthur Wacker. Their exciting story of exploration is told in "The WELS 49er's" by E. H. Wendland.

Pastors Hoenecke and Wacker covered over four thousand miles in a "power wagon" (a pick-up truck fitted with a camper). There were many hardships and disappointments along the way, but it was a trip that God blessed. Listen to Pastor Hoenecke express how his frustrations were turned into hope.

'Father, we are at our wits end. We do not know where to go and how to proceed. But you said that you would lead, so now lead us.' Both Art and I had no false ideas of our sagacity. We saw only too clearly how stupid it was for our Synod's mission board to insist on a wild goose chase through Africa's wilds, and for us to be dumb enough to go. Then it happened, and it seems we were led by the LORD to find the right field – to judge from

¹² Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 169.

results – after bumbling through about 4000 miles of trails and deserts and forests with nothing to offer.¹³

The land that the two recommended for work was Northern Rhodesia. It had a nice climate, the government was British and friendly towards missions, the official language was English, and there were not as many church groups working in Northern Rhodesia as there were in other African countries.¹⁴ Hear how Pastor Hoenecke describes Northern Rhodesia in his own words,



Pastor Hoenecke and Pastor Wacker

There had been other promising fields in Southwest Africa and Angola, but none held the promise to be found at Northern Rhodesia... Even the tall grasses which waved in the cool breeze of the gently rolling highland, four thousand feet above sea level, and the cottony white clouds suspended from the clear-blue vault of heaven seemed to beckon us to end our long quest and to settle down here and witness for our Savior.¹⁵

Pastors Hoenecke and Wacker were not able to report their findings until the 1951 convention because they were in Africa during the 1949 convention. They entitled their report “The Hook of the Kaufe” after an area near the Kaufe River in Northern Rhodesia where the men wanted to start work. Although Hoenecke and Wacker recommended that the synod start work immediately, the African Exploratory Commission chaired by President Brenner remained skeptical and recommended that the synod not move into Africa. Professor Conrad Frey was the only member of the committee to dissent from this recommendation and gave a minority report which recommended that the synod send two

¹³ Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 171.

¹⁴ Wendland, E. H. *A History of the Christian Church in Central Africa* (Lusaka: Lutheran Seminary, 1974), p. 5.

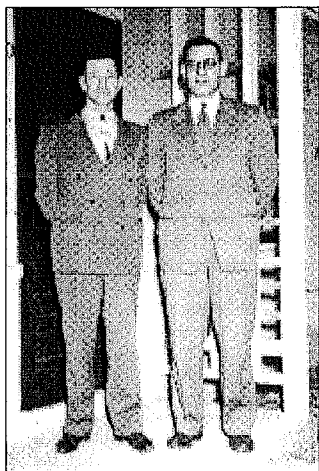
¹⁵ *Ibid.*

missionaries into Northern Rhodesia at once. It was this minority report that the convention favored as they voted to send our synod into Northern Rhodesia.¹⁶

Although the synod had decided to move into Northern Rhodesia at its 1951 convention, it wasn't until 1953, after nine calls had been issued, that Pastor Habben accepted the call and became the first missionary to Northern Rhodesia. An interesting side note to this story is that when Pastor Habben met with President Brenner to discuss his call to Africa, President Brenner said to Pastor Habben, "Welcome Pastor Habben. I will be happy to talk to you about anything except your call to Africa."¹⁷ It seems that President Brenner continued to oppose moving into world mission work even after calls were being issued.

The Trip and Early Exploration

Pastor Habben preached his farewell sermon to his congregation in Hastings on February 8,



1953. Even though no one had accepted the other call to Africa yet, the executive committee for Northern Rhodesia decided to send Pastor Habben at once. But he did not go to Africa alone. One of his members from Hastings who was a farm mechanic volunteered his services to help build houses and schools for the mission. The offer was accepted, and Paul

Mr. Ziegler and Pastor Habben

Ziegler became the first lay worker to become involved with the mission field in Africa. Soon after that, Otto Drevlow, a senior at Bethany Lutheran Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, accepted the second call to Africa and joined the team upon graduation.



Farewell in Nebraska

¹⁶ Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p.172.

¹⁷ Sievert, Jim, interview by author, West Bend, WI., 6 March 1999.

Pastor Habben's commissioning service was held at Zebaoth Lutheran Church in Milwaukee



The Zieglers and Habbens pose beside the "power wagon".

on April 12, 1953. Soon after the commissioning, members of the executive committee accompanied Pastor Habben and Mr. Ziegler as far as New York City where the two boarded the African Crescent on April 24, 1953, bound for Africa. The wives followed later that year in July. ¹⁸

After *thirty-six days* on the African Crescent,

the two landed at the port of Durban in South Africa. It took two weeks just to clear customs and it wasn't until five months later that they received most of their equipment! Nevertheless equipped with their "power wagon" Missionary Habben and Mr. Ziegler began their twelve hundred mile journey north to Northern Rhodesia. ¹⁹ **Ziegler and Habben set sail.**

Along the way the two made a stop at the Bleckmar Mission, a German Lutheran mission one hundred miles north of Durban. The Wisconsin Synod

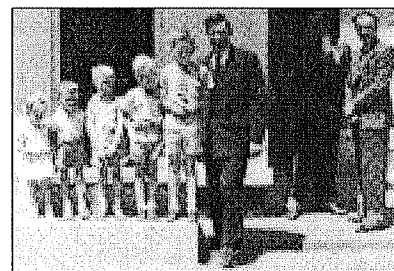


¹⁸ Hoyer, W. R. "News form our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 40, No. 7, April 5, 1953, p. 167, 168.

¹⁹ Hoyer, W. R. "News form our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 40, No. 4, February 22, 1953, p. 58, 59.

was in fellowship with this small mission and had just poured in ten thousand dollars to keep it going. The two men used the opportunity to observe mission work among the natives, hoping to learn whatever they could.²⁰

The two finally made it to Northern Rhodesia on June 15. Although the trip had taken two months, within three hours of their arrival in Lusaka eight European families with Lutheran backgrounds saw the truck with the words "Lutheran Missions" painted on the side and pleaded with Missionary Habben to hold services for them. The first WELS service on Northern Rhodesian soil was conducted on June 28, 1953, with those European families. **The First Sunday School**



Although the two had finally reached Northern Rhodesia, their travels were far from over. The land which Hoenecke and Wacker had recommended had been occupied by another church body while our synod was still looking for men willing to go to Africa. It was necessary, therefore, for the team to survey Northern Rhodesia again in search of a suitable mission field. This is what they were seeking. "We were to search out an area in which no other church body was at work, and where there would be a concentrated native population which would permit further expansions."²¹

In search for a suitable mission field, the team covered some thirty-five hundred miles in six months in Northern Rhodesia.



We traveled over roads, paths, and no roads. This meant crossing of pole bridges tied together with bark, fording streams infested with crocodiles, and traversing low valleys escorted by the drone of the tsetse fly, the dread carrier of the sleeping sickness. Yet in all things the Lord's guiding hand was evident. We were confident that in spite of obstacles and difficulties, He would somehow open for us the doors to the area in which we were to

²⁰ Hoyer, W. R. "News form our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 40, No. 15, July 26, 1953, p. 232.

²¹ Habben, Albrecht Bernhard, *Twenty-five Years of Blessings* (Riverside, CA.: Conference Paper), 1978, p. 1.

spread the good news of sin forgiven.²²

The team met many challenges along the way.

I ran over a native's dog; it took some fast talking to explain that no harm was meant. The truck dropped through a so-called bridge, fortunately for us we could eventually crawl out with our four wheel drive. Was forced to buy a weather beaten old rooster to get the native to move out of our way and let us pass. Also constrained to buy 20 eggs of peanut size.²³



Naturally, there were cultural barriers to overcome as well. Missionary Habben once told this story about the time he met Chief Magodi in the bush. The chief invited Missionary Habben to see a traditional dance while Mrs. Habben, who had since joined the endeavor, waited in the

truck. After a couple hours of waiting, listening to drums beating, and watching smoke rise in the distance Mrs. Habben feared the worst. After some time though, Missionary Habben returned unharmed accompanied by a "band of merry Africans".²⁴

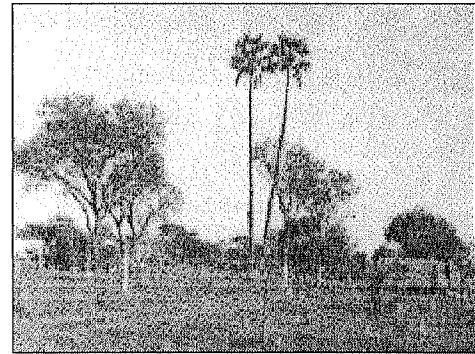
After the exploration was finished, Missionary Habben thought that doing work in the Lundazi district would be the best since it was the biggest field. God had other plans. Since the rainy season was about to begin, the team was discouraged from trying to set up camp in the bush until the rains had subsided. As they waited in Lusaka, Missionary Habben studied the population trends of Northern Rhodesia and found out that there was a move toward urbanization. The local government was even

²² Habben, Albrecht Bernhard, *Twenty-five Years of Blessings* (Riverside, CA.: Conference Paper), 1978, p. 1.

²³ Habben, A. B. "News from Our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 40, No. 21, October 18, 1953, p. 330.

²⁴ Ibid.

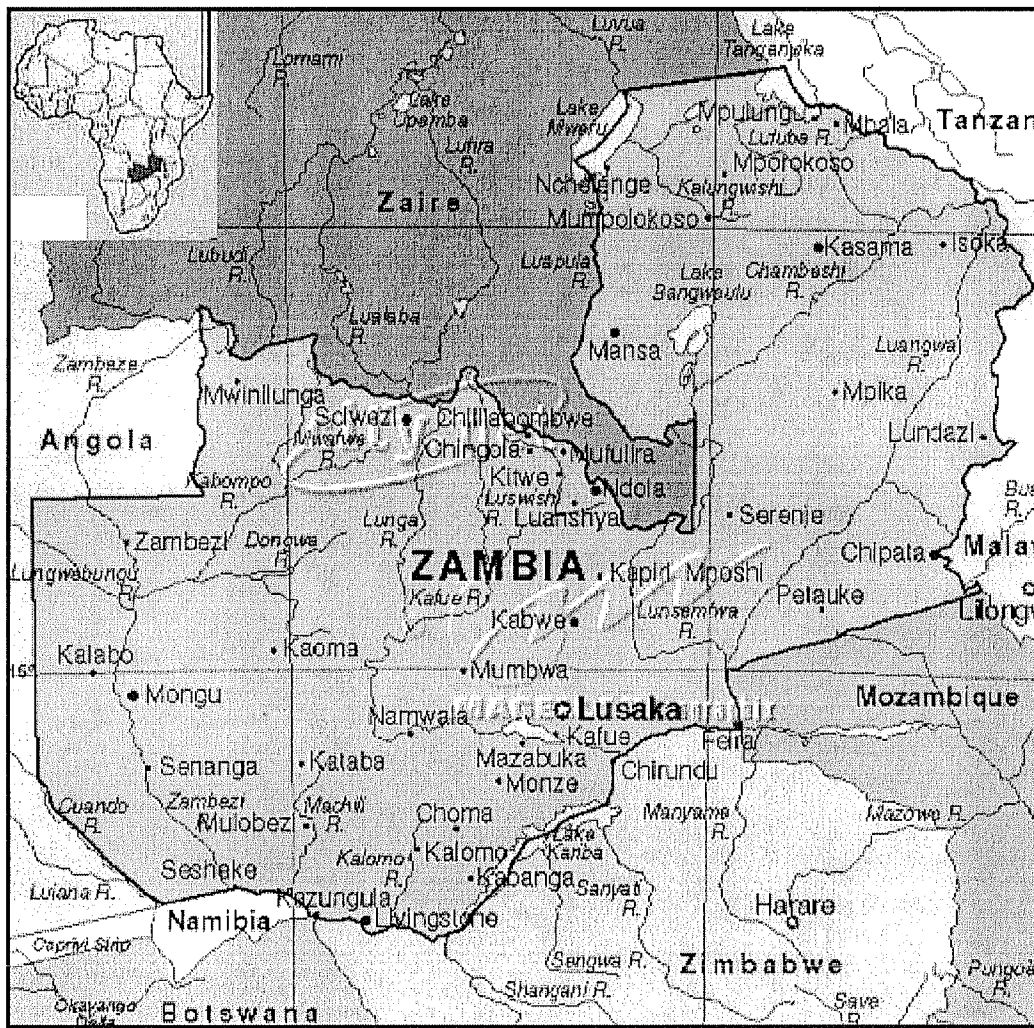
building a bedroom town outside of Lusaka called Matero to house those coming in for work. On top of all this, forty miles outside of Lusaka lived Chief Shakumbila and the Sala tribe. The chief had pledged to give the Lutheran Mission 160 acres of land if they would settle on the Sala tribal land.²⁵



Mission property on Sala Land

From this research a "three fold thrust" of mission work emerged: 1) Work in Lusaka with the Europeans, 2) work with the Africans in Matero, 3) work among the Sala people.²⁶

Map of Zambia (Northern Rhodesia)



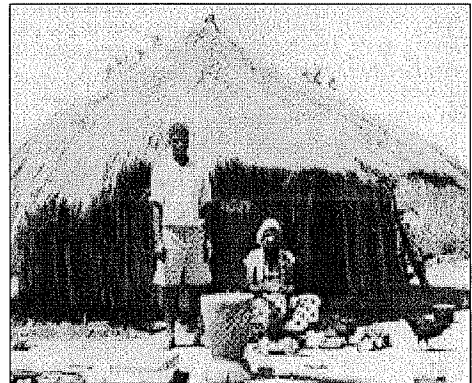
²⁵ Habben, A. B. "News from Our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 41, No. 3, February 7, 1954, p.39.

²⁶ Habben, Albrecht Bernhard, *Twenty-five Years of Blessings* (Riverside, CA.: Conference Paper), 1978, p. 3.

An African Beginning

With the exploration done it was time to get down to work. The first service among the Africans took place in Matero on December 6, 1953, some eight months after Missionary Habben and Mr. Ziegler arrived in Africa. There were fifty in attendance at that first service. Although it was the intent of Missionary Habben, and the executive committee's wish that the missionaries learn the language, Missionary Habben had to rely on a man by the name of Joseph Mwambula to be his interpreter at that first service. Joseph became a trusted friend and worker in the early mission work. He not only helped with language barriers but with cultural ones as well.²⁷

With the plan of attack in hand, it was time to get down to business. Missionary Habben reached out to the people by going from hut to hut distributing Sunday school material with colorful pictures depicting a simple Bible story. Missionary Habben described what it was like to canvass an African neighborhood, "To make calls and canvass among the Africans is quite an experience. After you have contacted one or two huts, you need not go any further. You will soon be surrounded by a couple hundred Africans and their dogs."²⁸



As Missionary Habben continued his work, he made the rounds out to the villages on the Sala tribal land. On one such visit Missionary Habben felt especially welcomed.

On arriving he (Habben) was greeted with a song from the lips of over 100 7 to 8 yr. old children: "We are the children of America. Help us, otherwise we will die." In a two-hour meeting 200 adults registered a most eloquent plea to begin preaching and to open a school. When the missionary had explained his plans and hopes for them and made to depart all insisted on touching his skin and shaking his hand. They lifted him to

²⁷ Hoyer, W.R. "News from Our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 41, No. 4, February 7, 1954, p. 55.

²⁸ Ibid.

their shoulders in football hero fashion and chanted a tune Habben will perhaps never forget. "Help us, Help us; our children shall be your children and your God shall be our God." It was an hour before he could get to his car.²⁹

The biggest obstacle to doing work at that time was the lack of manpower. Soon after Missionary Drevlow arrived, he had to return because of health problems, leaving Missionary Habben all alone to do the work.³⁰ This is what Missionary Habben's work-schedule was like as he juggled his time between three different places.

First service on Sala land, 1953.

Can you find Missionary Habben?



Consider his Sunday. He (Habben) leaves his trailer home at 7:30 for a 9:30 service at Lusaka. 17 miles are negotiated over bush-trails and 18 miles over poor gravel road. By 11:00 he is at Matero for services, and by 4:00 back at Lumano for bush services. Thursdays he is in Lusaka by 10:00 to transact urgent business. This done he makes mission calls at Matero until 2:00. From then until 3:30 he holds instructions at Munali Government school, where 15 boys attend his classes. From 4:00 to 7:00 he drives into the bush for instructions and from 7:00 to 9:00 he has a class at Matero. Saturdays you can find him at Katinti at 10:00, preaching. If you miss him there you can rush to Ciyaba, where he preaches at 12:00. Failing in that you can if you're a good driver catch him at Sabasange where he preaches at 3:00. These stations are 25 miles apart over bush trail and the dust and dry wind and next to impossible roads, to say nothing of open-air preaching in the dry wind all take their toll. We can understand why he has lost 25 lbs. in the process. And to think that some of our men

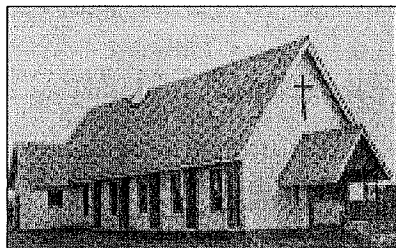
²⁹ Committee for Northern Rhodesia, *Report to the Gen. Mission Board on Northern Rhodesia....October 18, 1954*, pg. 3, 4.

³⁰ John, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 180.

in home missions rebel at preaching twice a Sunday in churches reached via concrete highways.³¹

Due to his busy work schedule Missionary Habben was unable to send lengthy reports back to the committee in the United States. This would lead to problems in the future as the executive committee felt compelled to gather information from other sources since they were not receiving it on a regular basis from Missionary Habben.

As the work progressed there was opposition from other church bodies in the area. The Methodists and Seventh Day Adventists had run schools in the area before our mission arrived and still had a following. From time to time the SDA followers would stir up opposition to the Lutheran Church



Matero Lutheran Church

accusing the Lutheran mission of discriminating against their followers. Lutheran worship grew so popular in Matero that the local Catholic church began to post guards at our church's entrances to keep out any of its Catholic members.³²

Despite the obstacles, God blessed the spread of his word. Listen to what Missionary Habben's interpreter, Joseph Mwambula, had to say about the work as it progressed.

It is little over 18 months ago that the first Lutheran Missionaries came to Rhodesia, and a year and three months since the first Service was held on Dec. 6, 1953. This month, April 10, seventeen children were baptized at Matero. These were what I call the first fruits (visible) of the Lutheran Missionary work among my people.

Judging from the speed at which things are done in these days one would think of the fifteen months period as a very long one. This is never so, it has been a slow process for people to know, in the first place, that



Joseph Mwambula

³¹ Committee for Northern Rhodesia, *Report to the Gen. Mission Board on Northern Rhodesia....October 18, 1954*, p. 2.

³² Kohl, H. R. "News from our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 42, No. 17, August 21, 1955, p. 264.

there were new Missionaries and slower still to realize they brought a message which though many generations old, would mean salvation to many of their countrymen and women.

This process, in my opinion, has been quick. Personally I see what I was about 18 months ago, and I compare that state with what I feel like now. The change of heart within me has been very rapid, and many other African people I am sure feel as I do.³³

Work in the Schools

As Missionary Habben continued the work he had started, he thought that another good way of reaching out was to take over management of the government schools in the area. This was something that many of the other denominations did, and it seemed to be a good way to reach the children in the community. The schools were more or less owned and supported by the government but managed by private groups.³⁴ While it sounded like a good way to reach out, there were some caveats. Since the teachers were hired by the government, they were answerable to the government and not to the mission managers. It was difficult, therefore, to discipline teachers since the government was in charge of hiring and firing. Many of the teachers were not members of our Lutheran churches, and a few of them caused problems by leading openly immoral lives while living beyond the reach of church discipline.

In looking to take over the management of schools, Missionary Habben and the executive committee were hoping to build the Lutheran church through the children that they reached.³⁵ As they would learn later, however, the culture dictated that change had to come from the top down, not from the bottom, up. In other words, in order to establish the church the missionaries would have to work through the adults.³⁶

³³ Mwambula, Joseph E. "News form our Mission Fields". *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 42, No. 17, August 21, 1955, p. 265.

³⁴ Committee for Northern Rhodesia, *Report to the Gen. Mission Board on Northern Rhodesia.... October 18, 1954*, p. 2.

³⁵ Committee for Northern Rhodesia, *Report to the Gen. Mission Board on Northern Rhodesia.... October 18, 1954*, p. 1.

³⁶ Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p.186.

The goal of the mission work was to build an indigenous church. In the beginning, it was hoped that this would be accomplished by bringing the natives onto the mission compound where they would work land available to them while receiving instruction in God's word. When a group had been instructed in God's word, they would be sent back to their villages to spread the gospel while a new group was to be brought on to the compound.³⁷ Here was the rationale for this approach.

The basic aim of this program outlined above is not to peddle the Gospel from native door to door through the efforts of the white missionaries, but rather, to make the native ministers, evangelists, teachers and lay people (in families) as thoroughly fitted as possible within a reasonably short time to do this piece work themselves under the instruction, guidance, supervision and control of white missionary leaders.

It should never be necessary, under this plan to support anyone from the Synodical mission funds, excepting only the missionaries, teachers, farmer-mechanics and white assistants actually sent out by the Synodical mission board.³⁸

Storms Clouds Gather

While things seemed to be going along relatively smoothly considering the lack of manpower, problems would soon develop between Missionary Habben and the committee, and between the other missionaries on the field. The chapter that talks about the Northern Rhodesian work in the book *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* which traces the history of the Wisconsin Synod's mission work starts like this.

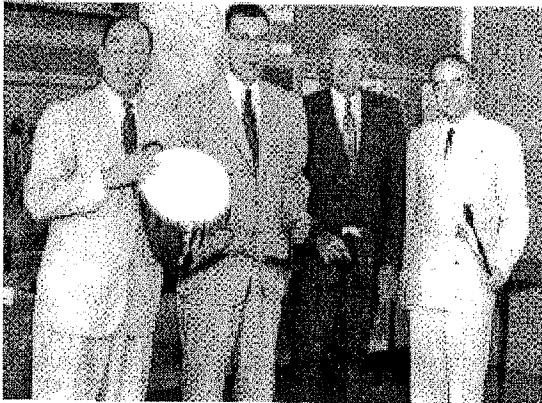
This account is first and foremost a history of the workings of God's grace...It tells of the meetings two cultures, of learning, growing, overcoming errors of judgment and technique, and the gaining of new insights. It is a story not lacking in friction and tensions such as must exist

³⁷ Wacker, et al. *Procedures in Establishing an African Mission as an Indigenous Church*. General Mission Board Meeting, October 15, 1951, p.3.

³⁸ Ibid.

among honest men, a story of the forging of new friendships across seas and across national and racial and cultural lines.³⁹

Missionary Habben and the Executive Committee
(From left to right) Wacker, Habben, Gehrke, Mennicke



The first time a problem on the field is mentioned appears in a report that Pastor Wacker made to the committee while Missionary Habben was on furlough. Pastor Wacker had come to Northern Rhodesia to fill in for Missionary Habben while he was gone. In his report Pastor Wacker expressed that

Missionary Habben's administration style, and his lack of communication with the committee and other members of the mission staff were creating difficulties on the field. While Pastor Wacker praised Missionary Habben for his energy and desire to get things done quickly by cutting through red tape, he felt that this virtue had its corresponding vice.⁴⁰ Pastor Wacker felt that Missionary Habben was unwilling to delegate responsibility, and his zeal for action led him to "act single handedly in serious matters."⁴¹

In order to remedy the problem Pastor Wacker proposed the following: 1) The insistence on complete reports from the field on finances, policy, and procedures. 2) The insistence on regular monthly meetings of mission personnel to discuss matters of policy and procedures. 3) Clear definition by the executive committee on the individual responsibilities of the men in the field.⁴²

Broken Trust

³⁹ Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993) p. 175.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Wacker, *Letter addressed to Mennicke and Hoenecke*. Lusaka: October 26, 1955, p.1.

⁴² Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993) p. 183.

With the committee's recommendations in mind the missionaries not only continued their "three pronged" mission approach for the next two years but stepped up their outreach efforts to the children by managing more schools. The late 50's, however, was a time of mounting tension as the natives agitated for independence. This political turmoil affected many churches since they were connected with the colonial government. Professor emeritus Wendland explains, "Churches were connected to Colonial Government and Christianity was called 'White man's religion.' Many churches reported loss in membership - even sermons were interpreted to have political meaning."⁴³ It seems that some of this tension affected our mission field. On April 14th, 1957, Missionary Habben wrote this note to the committee.

The troubles are brewing and becoming ever more intense...a group was ready to use their clubs on Wednesday. In the last two weeks we have been jeered, mocked, and cursed. We are sitting on a powder keg that could blow sky high at any time.⁴⁴

This threat of violence must have been great because Missionary Habben picked up a couple of guard dogs, and kept loaded guns in the house "ready for action."⁴⁵

Just what was the source of irritation? The Sala tribe had always been considered to be very nationalistic and had never been very welcoming to mission endeavors until our Lutheran mission arrived.⁴⁶ It seems that the Seventh Day Adventists who had previously managed schools in the area were stirring up trouble for our mission among the Sala people because they wanted back in.⁴⁷

The problems with the Seventh Day Adventists escalated when Missionary Habben had to discipline some teachers who were Seventh Day Adventists for the sin of adultery. On June 11th, 1957,

⁴³ Wendland, E.H. *A History of the Christian Church in Central Africa*, (Lusaka: Lutheran Seminary), 1974, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Habben, A. B. *Letter to the Northern Rhodesian Executive committee* April 14th, 1957, (Found in *Report on Trip to Northern Rhodesian Mission by Mennicke and Tacke*), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Mennicke A. L. and Arthur W. Tacke. *Report on Trip to Northern Rhodesian Mission*, October 30, 1957, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Habben, A. B. *Letter to President Frey* (Lusaka), December 5th, 1957, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Mennicke A.L. and Arthur W. Tacke. *Report on Trip to Northern Rhodesian Mission*, October 30, 1957, p. 6.

the District Commission (a government agency) was called out to hear complaints against Missionary Habben and his handling of the schools. Some of the accusations were that unless the people went to the Lutheran church they were not given access to the wells on the mission compound, or were not given rides into town. Furthermore, the Seventh Day Adventists claimed that their people were discriminated against when it came to maize and mail distribution. Although the district commissioner felt it necessary to publicly censure Missionary Habben for the accusations, in private he praised the mission for their good work with the tribe.⁴⁸

The June 11th meeting came and went, and Missionary Habben forgot about it since things had calmed down. Unfortunately Missionary Habben never told the executive committee about the meeting, and how it had been handled. The executive committee found out about the meeting from another missionary who had heard about it from one of the natives. With this third hand report the committee started an investigation into the matter without the knowledge of Missionary Habben.⁴⁹

When Missionary Habben found out that the committee was investigating this meeting, he was crushed and felt that principles of Matthew 18 had been violated and that his position as a called worker had been reduced to that of a "hireling".⁵⁰ Trust had been broken to the extent that Missionary Habben did not even feel as if he could appeal his case to his own executive committee. Instead, he sent a letter of protest to District President Frey who in turn forwarded the letter to the General Mission Board.

The lines of communication had been broken between Missionary Habben and the members of the executive committee. Instead of the two disputing parties speaking face to face on the matter they chose the indirect route which led to misunderstandings. The matter was eventually cleared, but not before serious damage had been done to the committee's relationship with Missionary Habben.

⁴⁸ Habben, A. B. *Letter to President Frey* (Lusaka), December 5th, 1957, p. 1.

⁴⁹ *Minutes from the Executive committee for Northern Rhodesia* (Milwaukee), January 16, 1958, p.5.

⁵⁰ Habben, A. B. *Letter to President Frey* (Lusaka), December 5th, 1957, p. 1

Despite the confrontation with the committee, outreach work continued. A 1957 report relates that there were eighteen preaching stations and one organized congregation with a weekly attendance of over a thousand. On top of this we were managing a number of government schools.⁵¹

Differences on the Field

Although one hurdle had been cleared, another one would soon present itself. As the work continued, it became evident that there was a difference in mission philosophy between Missionary Habben and the other missionaries. Missionary Habben believed that you must earn the love and respect of the African before you could expect to win him with the gospel.⁵² He often said that since the concept of God's love was foreign to the African it was necessary to go out of one's way to show them that love in action.⁵³ Missionary Habben practiced his mission philosophy by going out into the bush and meeting the people where they were. He also helped them in any way he could by giving them free rides into town and helping them obtain food in times of drought. Pastor Edgar Hoenecke maintains that getting along with the natives was Missionary Habben's strength and gift.⁵⁴

The other missionaries, however, viewed this approach as a handout program and thought that it was hindering the drive of becoming an indigenous church.⁵⁵ They were afraid that the people would become so dependent on these handouts that they would never seek to make themselves a self-supporting church.⁵⁶

The difference in approach came to a head when Missionaries Mueller and Essman cabled the executive committee in mid-November of 1958 asking that they come to Africa at once to observe

⁵¹ Wendland, E.H. *A History of the Christian Church in Central Africa*, (Lusaka: Lutheran Seminary), 1974, p. 8.

⁵² Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 184.

⁵³ Sievert, Jim, interview by author, West Bend, WI., 6 March 1999.

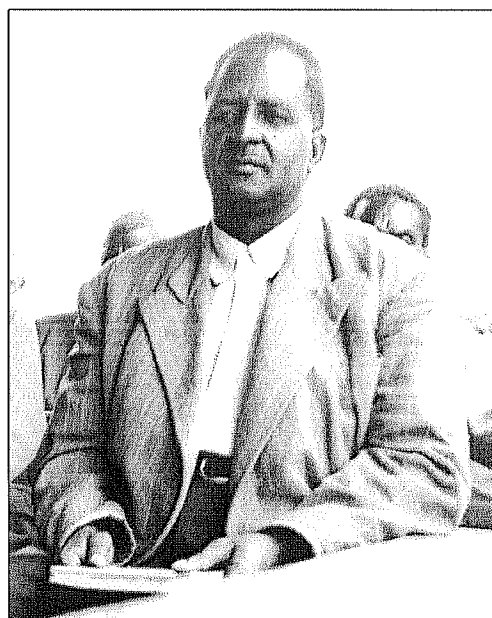
⁵⁴ Hoenecke, Edgar, phone interview by author, San Diego, CA., 8 April 1999.

⁵⁵ Essman, Harold, interview by author, Mequon, WI., 21 March 1999.

⁵⁶ Mueller, Richard, interview by author, Mequon, WI., 4 March 1999.

Missionary Habben's mission practices.⁵⁷ Tensions between the missionaries were evident even to the Africans. The natives thought that Missionaries Essman and Mueller were trying to cut off all support to them and force Missionary Habben off the field. Chief Shakumbila even wrote to the executive committee demanding that Missionary Habben be returned to the mission field after he left for furlough, saying that he didn't trust the other missionaries.⁵⁸

Finally, in February 1959, Pastor Mennicke and Pastor Wendland came to the field to meet with the missionaries and sort through the differences. They conducted fifty-one hours of meetings over ten days, yet were unable to resolve "how best to show love to the African."⁵⁹ Perhaps this excerpt from a report to the General Board on the meetings can summarize the committee's findings.



Chief Shakumbila

In the present area (Sala Land) we are at the mercy of the whims of one man (Chief Shakumbila). The missionaries too, are at the mercy of his whims. Must we now ask ourselves, to what extent has this fact caused the troubles? The difficulties are real. Our missionaries, no doubt, are men of good intentions, but have reached an impasse...Habben feels that concessions must be made. Others frown upon this. The distribution of maize, [and a] personal gift to the chief, were the source of difficulties. Had these matters been subjected to mutual consideration, many ensuing charges could have been avoided. Essman feels that Habben's course is a dangerous one. In the evaluations both personality and policy are involved. We have a sad situation that three lone representatives on a far distant mission field scarcely speak to one another, much less associate with one another...It is evident that unless the situation is changed, the crisis will continue.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Mennicke, A.L. *Letter to Edgar Hoenecke* November, 15, 1958, (Winonna, MN.), p. 1.

⁵⁸ Shakumbila. *Letter to the Executive committee for N. Rhodesia, Africa* October 4, 1958 (Mwembezhi Lutheran Mission), p.1.

⁵⁹ Johne, R. Harold, and Ernst H. Wendland, ed., *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), p. 186.

⁶⁰ *Report to the General Mission Board* (Chicago), March 13, 1959, p. 4.

The Resolution

What did the executive committee do to improve the situation? In a meeting on April 22, 1959, the executive committee recommended that Missionary Habben not be returned to Africa but take a call to another field.⁶¹ An October 1959 resolution from the executive committee explained the rationale behind the parting of ways like this. "In view of the fact that church history records under such situations brothers must go separate paths as did Paul and Barnabas, this committee feels itself forced by the circumstances to not return Pastor Habben to the field."⁶²

Missionary Habben was crushed at the news and contended that he should be allowed to return. After a subsequent meeting a week later the committee upheld the recommendation, and Missionary Habben agreed to abide by the committee's decision.⁶³

Unfortunately the problems for the mission field did not end there. Since the Habbens had planned on returning to Africa after their furlough, none of their belongings in Africa were ready to be shipped back home. The Habbens wanted to return so that they could retrieve their belongings. The committee was hesitant to grant this request because they were afraid that Missionary Habben's presence would cause further unrest on the field.

After some negotiation the Habbens were allowed to return to Africa to gather their belongings with the promise that they would go peacefully. However, when the natives heard that Missionary Habben had returned only to pack his belongings and return to the States, the children left their schools on the mission compound and demonstrated for three hours shouting, "We want Habben!"⁶⁴ Phone lines were cut, mission buildings were entered, and finally police were summoned to restore order. Though no

⁶¹ *Minutes from Executive committee for Northern Rhodesia Meeting* (Milwaukee), April 22, 1959, p. 2.

⁶² *Minutes from Executive committee for Northern Rhodesia Meeting* October 19, 1959, p 1.

⁶³ *Minutes from Executive committee for Northern Rhodesia Meeting* (Ann Arbor), April 29, 1959, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Hoenecke, Edgar. *Letter to Members of the General Mission Board*. November 28, 1959, p. 3.

no one had been hurt, and Missionary Habben had not been responsible for the demonstration since he was in Lusaka at that time, relations between the missionaries were strained even further. Soon after the demonstration the Habbens finished packing and left Africa never to return.⁶⁵

Assessment

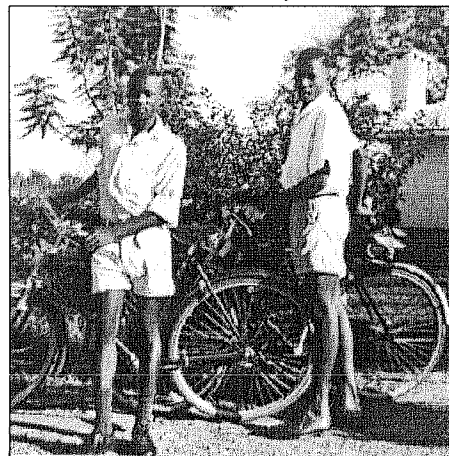
What can say we about our synod's beginnings in Northern Rhodesia? When we think about everything that transpired in Northern Rhodesia, we can say that it is only by God's grace that our mission survived and still thrives today.

What could have been done differently? Pastor T. Sauer, who served as the supervisor of the Northern Rhodesian field after Missionary Habben returned to the States, felt that communication between all parties could have been better. When Pastor Sauer worked in Africa, the missionaries held regular "think sessions" to make sure everyone was heard and knew what was going on. Pastor Sauer explains how these "think sessions" worked.

The rules were simple. Everyone had an equal voice. We were to feel free to express any idea, no matter how far out it might have seemed at the moment. After the meeting, no one was to be held to any statement he had made, and no one was to be quoted outside the meeting. It worked, and out of these think sessions the work took shape and policies fell into place that have served well in the years that have followed.⁶⁶

Sermon Boys

Although Missionary Habben could have communicated more clearly with his fellow workers, no one has disputed his ability to reach the people. After Missionary Habben's departure the missionaries began using "sermon boys" to preach in the villages instead of



⁶⁵ Hoenecke, Edgar. *Letter to Members of the General Mission Board*. November 28, 1959, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Suaer, Theodore A. interview by author, email, Manitowoc, WI., 9 March 1999.

going out themselves. Unfortunately most of these boys were teenagers who had not even been confirmed and the people began to complain about this practice saying that in "Habben's day" the *missionary* came out to do the preaching and to visit the people.⁶⁷

As we ponder what could have been done differently, perhaps we should consider what Professor emeritus Wendland had to say,

We have no doubt made a lot of mistakes along the way. When somebody asks me if I would have this or that differently, I answer by saying that I did the best I could in the circumstances that I was in. If there's anything I detest it's one generation of missionaries complaining about what their predecessors have done. They were not there at the time, and no doubt would have done the same thing.⁶⁸

So what are we to conclude? Whenever anyone speaks about Missionary Habben's work in Africa, they always speak about his zeal and energy, as well as his generosity and love for the Africans. While this cannot be denied, Professor emeritus Wendland contends that it was this generosity that was Missionary Habben's weakness. Instead of saying "No" to the demands of the people he continued to give in to their demands until he was no longer able to tell them "No" when he should have.⁶⁹

Despite his departure, Missionary Habben's influence is still felt in Africa today. The homes he built are still being used, and there are some natives that still remember Missionary Habben. In fact the missionaries still run into people today who have been named after Missionary Habben.⁷⁰

Stateside Again - Oregon and California

Although Pastor Habben considered a secular job offer after returning to the States, he turned it down and accepted a call to Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Tigard, Oregon. It would soon become

⁶⁷ Hoenecke, Edgar, *Letter to Mennicke, Naumann, Wendland* (Lusaka), May 11, 1960, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Wendland, Ernst H. interview by author, email, Lusaka, Zambia, 19 March 1999.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

evident to all that Pastor Habben's zeal for mission work had not diminished with his return to the States. The Statistical Report of the 23rd Biennial Convention of the Pacific Northwest District had this to say about Gethsemane. "We marvel and rejoice over the productivity of this field. After a year and a half of existence it lists forty-four communicants and on occasion has had over a hundred people in services."⁷¹

It was in Oregon and California that Habs and Suzie would make some of their best friends. The most enjoyable part of doing this paper was interviewing those pastors and teachers and hearing their stories about the Habbens.

Just what was it that drew so many to the Habbens? One thing that was mentioned quite often was Pastor Habben's ability to put things into perspective. Pastor Jon Mahnke said that when the congregation in Eugene, OR., was becoming discouraged because no one was accepting the call to become their pastor, Pastor Habben was the one who encouraged them.

After reminding them that the whole situation was in the Lord's hands Habs went on to say that the man whom the Lord had chosen as their next pastor wasn't available yet. Either he hadn't finished the work he was doing in his present Call or he hadn't finished his seminary training yet. But above all, they should keep in mind the Lord had already picked out the man, and when that person was ready, the Lord would bring him to them.⁷²

Another thing that many people remember about Pastor Habben is that he was a great evangelist. Pastor Habben always said that God had called pastors to be fishers of men and stressed that if you aren't fishing, don't expect to catch anything. Pastor Habben said that a pastor should be making twenty calls a week divided between members and non-members with the non-members receiving the bulk of the calls.⁷³ Pastor Habben also used to always say that when you are fishing, don't be surprised when God

⁷¹ *Proceedings of the 23rd Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District* (Faith Lutheran, Tacoma, Washington), June 26-28, 1962, p. 9.

⁷² Mahnke, Jon, interview by author, email, San Jose, CA., 15 February 1999.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

when God throws the fish in from the other side of the boat. In other words, don't be surprised when the prospect you've been working hard to bring in doesn't pan out, while the visitor who walks in off the street up joining your church. He commented that God uses those things to remind us that *He* is the one who does the converting and gathering of his elect.⁷⁴

The Habbens' love for children was also well known. This was evident in the youth camps that they organized. Pastor Habben not only recruited the camp staff, he also organized and prepared the Bible studies and activities. He insisted that these camps were necessary so that the young people in their church would see the pastors in a different light.⁷⁵ Apparently Pastor Habben practiced what he preached because a third of the children that came to camp were from his church.⁷⁶ Pastor Mahnke remembers how Pastor Habben would continuously mingle with the kids, talking to them and playing with them. "Kids loved him, respected him, and sought him out as a counselor, finding it easy to talk about their problems or anything else on their minds."⁷⁷ Suzie also shared her husband's love for children as she was in charge of getting the crafts together and also tucking in all the girls at night.⁷⁸

Another thing that the pastors remember about these camps was the Habbens' generosity. Whenever Pastor Habben would report on the camp finances, he would simply say that everything came out "fine." But Pastor Mahnke reports that when one considered what the children were charged for the week of camp, and what they received, it was virtually impossible for the campers' fees to cover everything. "Either we had another miracle like the feeding of the 5,000, or Habs picked up a lot of the tab. He would never admit it."⁷⁹

Although it is not certain that he picked up the tab for camp incidentals, Pastor Habben did pay for his nephew's education from high school through the seminary. Although Pastor Habben wanted his

⁷⁴ Mahnke, Jon, interview by author, email, San Jose, CA., 15 February 1999.

⁷⁵ Lange, Lyle, interview by author, email, New Ulm, MN., 18 February 1999.

⁷⁶ Schewe, Harold, interview by author, Watertown, WI., 19 February 1999.

⁷⁷ Mahnke, Jon, interview by author, email, San Jose, CA., 15 February 1999.

nephew to go into the ministry he never forced him. He just encouraged him in his studies and supported him financially.⁸⁰ That investment has been returning eternal dividends as Pastor Habben's nephew has served as a missionary in Japan for over thirty years, touching the lives of many Japanese through the study of the Word.

Pastor Mahnke also remembers that Pastor Habben was a good coordinator and facilitator, though not in a conventional way. Pastor Mahnke adds, "If there ever was a benevolent dictator, Habs was it. He didn't always have the time or desire to wait for the full democratic process to unfold...Habs used to like to say, 'Fish or cut bait.' In other words, make a decision or move to action. Habs did not have much time for indecision or idle inactivity."⁸¹ This coincides with what is known about Pastor Habben from his days in Africa. Though perhaps his zeal to get things done was now tempered with maturity.

Pastor Habben was a driving force behind the start of California Lutheran High School. As the chairmen of the California High School Association he made an impression on all of his co-workers. Once when Pastor Habben was ready to start a meeting, one of the board members said, "Quiet everybody, It's time for some 'Habbenocracy.'" Pastor Mahnke comments that the term "Habbenocracy" was coined in a loving and respectful way because Pastor Habben's decisions were not selfish or narrow-minded but made with the good of the whole in mind.⁸²

The Habbens' friends also recall that they were good at getting called workers and their families to relax and take time off.⁸³ Habs and Suzie themselves loved to go down to Baja California and play golf.⁸⁴ The Habbens would also often get together with the area pastors and teachers passing the time by

⁷⁸ Schewe, Harold, interview by author, Watertown, WI., 19 February 1999.

⁷⁹ Mahnke, Jon, interview by author, email, San Jose, CA., 15 February 1999.

⁸⁰ Habben, Kermit D. interview by author, Tokyo, Japan, 26 December 1998.

⁸¹ Mahnke, Jon, interview by author, email, San Jose, CA., 15 February 1999.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Bernhardt, William, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI., 14 February 1999.

⁸⁴ Humann, James, interview by author, email, Seattle, WA., 10 February 1999.

playing pinochle. Pastor Mahnke adds, "Our game of cards would never be complete without at least once Habs taking off his glasses because he would be laughing so hard he had to wipe the tears coming down his cheeks."⁸⁵

Jim Sievert who was principal at St. Paul's, Riverside, CA., the last church that Pastor Habben served, remembers that their get-togethers would last well into the early morning hours as they listened to story after story of the Habbens' time in Africa.⁸⁶

Perhaps the reason that people enjoyed being around Pastor Habben so much was his love for people. Pastor Habben loved it when his members went into the hospital because that was his chance to minister to those members one on one. The Sieverts remarked that when Habs had you one on one, you felt like you were the only person in the world that mattered to him.⁸⁷ It was his unique ability to make people feel loved that endeared him to so many.

Indonesia

After eleven years in Oregon, Pastor Habben received the call to be our synod's "friendly counselor" in Indonesia in 1971. At that time we had no missionaries in Indonesia, just contacts with an Indonesian pastor named Martinus Adam. It was Pastor Habben's job to guide Pastor Adam and instruct him in confessional Lutheran theology. Pastor Habben accepted the call and left for Indonesia soon after his commissioning in May, 1971.



The Habbens on their way to Indonesia

This move was a difficult one for the Habbens

⁸⁵ Mahnke, Jon, interview by author, email, San Jose, CA., 15 February 1999.

⁸⁶ Sievert, Jim, interview by author, West Bend, WI., 6 March 1999.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

since they had to sell or give away much of what they had accumulated over the years.⁸⁸ Unfortunately their stay in Indonesia was a short and unpleasant one. The few things that they did manage to bring over became ruined when it sat out on the docks during the hot and humid raining season. They were unable to find housing and for a year lived in a hotel. The anticipated work did not pan out either. Once Pastor Habben got over to Indonesia he found out that Pastor Adam was living with a woman who was not his wife and was unwilling to repent. Since we lost our contact with the native pastor, our synod lost its right to remain in Indonesia. Pastor and Mrs. Habben returned to the States in 1972.⁸⁹

Professor and Mrs. Schewe remember how much weight the two had lost while they were in Indonesia, and how this was the only time that they ever saw the two discouraged. It's understandable why the two were downhearted. Their mission opportunity had fallen through, and they had escaped political uprising in Indonesia, just barely making it to the airport in Jakarta.⁹⁰ Even though they had returned safely to the States they would have to start all over again. They had no home, and had given away, sold, or lost most of their other belongings.

California

Although disappointing, Indonesia was not the end of the line for Pastor Habben. He received and accepted the call to St. Paul's in Riverside, California, where he served from 1972 through 1980. He not only served as pastor, but, as already mentioned, was the chairman for the California Lutheran High School Association and served as a circuit pastor. The aggressive outreach that Pastor Habben had done in Oregon continued in California.

⁸⁸ Schewe, Harold, interview by author, Watertown, WI., 19 February 1999.

⁸⁹ "Mission Happenings in Southeast Asia." *The Northwestern Lutheran* Volume 59, No. 2, June 4, 1972, p. 188.

⁹⁰ Schewe, Harold, interview by author, Watertown, WI., 19 February 1999.

In 1979 Pastor Habben received a call to be missionary to Antigua. He probably would have gone had it not been for his health.⁹¹ The heart trouble he suffered in California finally caught up to him while he was vacationing on Vancouver Island with Suzie, and Suzie's sister and husband. The four were out for a drive just as the sun was setting over the Pacific. Right after Suzie remarked how beautiful it all was, the car slowed down and gently came to a stop on the side of the road. When Suzie looked over to see what had happened, she saw her husband slumped over the steering wheel. Albrecht Bernhard Habben died of a massive heart attack on September 17, 1980. About a half a year later Suzie followed her husband in death suffering a fatal stroke.⁹²

Conclusion

The portrait of A. B. Habben is an interesting and varied one. It's a story of God's plan of taking a farm boy from the quiet wind-swept plains of South Dakota, to put him to work in Milwaukee, Nebraska, Africa, Oregon, Indonesia, and California.

What have I learned from studying this portrait? I learned that his Savior's love for him drove Pastor Habben to love the people around him. I learned that a zeal for ministry and *doing* mission work is infectious, as many have learned from his example.

I have also learned from his weaknesses. I've learned the importance of keeping lines of communication open at all times, even when you don't see eye to eye with another called worker. This is especially important on the mission field where little problems blow up into huge problems. I learned that it's also important for mission boards to continue to make field visits so that they can see things from the viewpoint of their missionaries. It's also important for a mission board member to remember that just because he has made a two-week visit to the field doesn't mean that he is an expert on what is going on. His continued contact with the missionaries and the natives is important.

⁹¹ Sievert, Jim, interview by author, West Bend, WI., 6 March 1999.

⁹² Ibid.

Perhaps the portrait of A. B. Habben, a clay jar who knew that it was God's grace and power that held him together, can be best summarized by the words of one of Pastor Habben's favorite hymns,

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou are mighty;
Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises I will ever give to Thee⁹³

This is the portrait of A. B. Habben. It's a portrait of God's grace at work in and through his servant. Lord willing it's the portrait that others see in all of us who labor in his name.

⁹³ Williams, William, *Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah* The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia), 1941, #54.

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