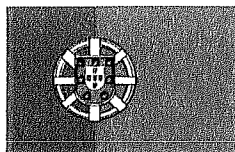
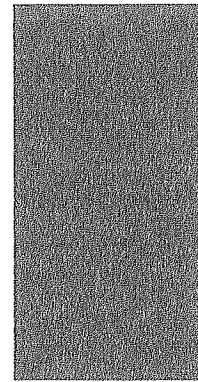
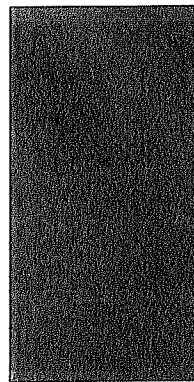
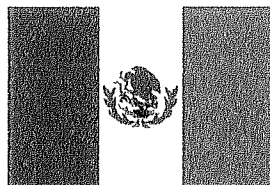
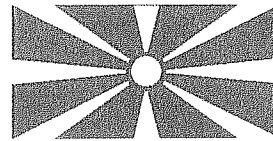
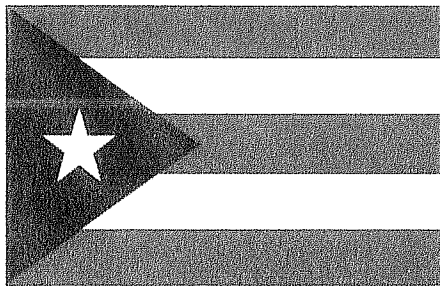


Pastor Harold A. Essmann
A Twentieth Century Herald



Michael Hartman
 Church History 376
 Professor John Brenner
 April 16, 1999

Preface

The name Essmann has been synonymous with world missions ever since I can remember. Even as a small child in Puerto Rico I can recall having to dress up and behave whenever the “important pastors” were coming for a visit. Thus, when it was suggested to me by a number of pastors that I ought to do my Church History paper on the life and ministry of Pastor Harold A. Essmann I jumped at the chance.

Since the entire life of Pastor Essmann is a rather broad subject I decided to narrow the focus to Essmann’s role in the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod’s world missions. The paper sets forth a historical time line of Pastor Essmann’s life. The video deals more with his philosophies.

The first part of my research involved interviewing a number of people who have played major roles in the life and ministry of Pastor Essmann. During this period I had the distinct privilege to visit Essmann’s home and speak to his family. These interviews also led me to check out further sources in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library, the Publications for Latin America headquarters in El Paso, Texas and St. John Lutheran Church in Waterloo, Wisconsin.

After completing the preliminary research I formed a number of questions which I emailed to Pastor Essmann. During the next couple weeks I received a number of letters from him in which he described his life and ministry. The last of these letters was received on March 23, 1999. These letters were the basis that I used to write this paper.

The video interview with Pastor Essmann was taped on March 23, 1999 in the basement of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library. Pastor Essmann was on campus for a meeting with the Multi-Language Publications Programs.

I hope that this paper and the enclosed video will serve to help preserve a record of the incredible years of ministry with which God has blessed Pastor Essmann.

Michael Hartman, April 1999.

THE EARLY YEARS

CHILDHOOD

Harold Alvin Essmann was born on September 20, 1930 in the small Southeastern Minnesota town of St. Charles, about ten miles from where he grew up in Lewiston. His parents, Alvin Paul Essmann and Sadie Johanna (nee' Rusert), were members of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lewiston, Minnesota.¹ It was there that they brought their new son to be baptized by Rev. Rudoph P. Korn on October 19, 1930.² According to a written account provided by Pastor Essmann, "An interesting association in my life was the relationship with Rev. Rudolph P. Korn... During his long pastorate at St. John, he married my parents, baptized me, confirmed me, married and ordained me; and then I turned around and married him after his first wife died and he remarried."³

Essmann spent most of his childhood in Lewiston. He writes, "Having been born early in the depression, life during those times was quite different from what it is today." His father was able to hold down jobs as a custodian and a mechanic. His mother stayed at home and helped raise Essmann and his three younger siblings: Wayne, Phyllis, and Lloyd.⁴ Nevertheless those were hard times to make ends meet. Alvin Essmann brought home \$65 a month. "Sometimes the money did not stretch for the entire month and we would have to buy groceries on credit. The bill was paid at the beginning of the next month only to have the situation repeated... Things are quite different today from what they were in those childhood depression days. We were poor but didn't know it."

¹ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. 23 March 1999.

² Bulletin insert from Pastor Essmann's retirement service on July 15, 1990. (On the bulletin insert Pastor Thomas Wilsman jotted down a couple of dates concerning Pastor Essmann's life.) See Appendix 1.

³ Essmann, Harold, Written Interview. op.cit.

⁴ Ibid.

While attending grade school at St. John Lutheran School, Essmann picked up a hobby which he has continued throughout his life. It served to peak his interest in history and geography, a capability which would greatly benefit him when he became involved with the Committee for Mission Expansion.

My hobby is that of collecting stamps. I was introduced to this hobby when I was about 12 years old. I mowed lawns during the summer; sometimes 12 a week. One day while mowing lawn I cut through a Planter's Peanut bag. I picked it up and on the backside of the bag I noticed that you could get a packet of foreign postage stamps by sending in the peanut bag wrapper and 10 cents. I did that and my lifelong hobby of collecting stamps was launched. Today I have a large collection of some 25,000 individual worldwide stamps as well as a specialized collection, perhaps one of the best in the United States, of stamps from the small country of Andorra that fills over a half-dozen albums. Then too, I have a large collection of United States stamps that fills several shelves. Stamp collecting has enriched my love and knowledge of history and geography.⁵

Essmann graduated from Lewiston Public High School in 1948 and enrolled at Winona State University in order to pursue a law degree.⁶ However he "did not graduate since [he] was asked, during a time when there was tremendous shortage of teachers, to teach fifth grade at St. Martin's Ev. Lutheran School in Winona, Minnesota."⁷

ENTERING THE MINISTRY

One often wonders how someone becomes interested in the ministry and mission work. Pastor Essmann writes:

Dr. William Schweppe...had influence on my life, although he did not know it. When he returned from serving his first tour of duty as missionary to Nigeria, Africa in 1939, he spoke at St. Martin's Lutheran Church in Winona, Minnesota. My parents attended the lecture. I can remember where we sat in the balcony of the church because it was so full (the church probably seats a thousand people). I can remember where Dr. Schweppe stood beside the pulpit and I can also remember some of his remarks – especially how in bringing offerings during worship services the Nigerians would bring palm nuts and even chickens. That my parents were interested enough to attend this presentation indicates their

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Essmann, Harold. Personal Conversation. 14 March 1999.

⁷ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. [op.cit.](#)

devotion to the work of the Lord that also led me to an appreciation of world mission work.

Later in my life when Pastor Edgar Hoenecke returned from the exploration in Africa in 1949, my parents and I were present at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Winona, Minnesota to see the movie presentation of the Hoenecke-Wacker mission visitation to Africa. The movie was shown to a packed crowd in the basement of St. Matthew's church. These presentations made a decided impression on me and likely helped to lead me to a ministry that was centered around world missions all my adult life.

A background of exposure to world missions through Dr. Wm. Schweppe and Pastor Edgar Hoenecke in their presentations; as well as a desire to bring the message of the Gospel to people who have not heard it before; were influences that initiated and continue to bolster [my] desire to serve in the area of world missions.⁸

Since the WELS did not have a program for students who decided to study for the ministry later in life, Pastor Essmann enrolled at the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod's Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois in September 1950. He vicared under Pastor A. L. Mennicke at St. Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Church in Winona, Minnesota.⁹ It was during his vicar year that he met Ruth Rose Lawrenz, the young lady he would marry and with whom he would share most of his life.¹⁰

AFRICA

Pastor E. H. Wendland writes in A History of the Christian Church in Central Africa, "The mission work which was done before the year 1961 was pioneer work. It was difficult work. It was a time of learning and of testing."¹¹ Pastor Theodore Sauer agrees, "The days [Pastor Essmann] was in Zambia were difficult days... We were real novices as far as world missions are concerned."¹² It was to these conditions that Pastor

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Essmann, Ruth. Personal Interview. 14 March 1999.

¹¹ E. H. Wendland, A History of the Christian Church in Central Africa (Lusaka, Zambia: Lutheran Seminary, 1978) p. 7

¹² Sauer, Theodore. Personal Interview. 6 March 1999.

Essmann was assigned upon graduation from Springfield on June 1, 1956. On June 9th Harold Essmann and Ruth Lawrenz were married. "I [Ruth] had very mixed emotions. I was enthused about it; still I was hesitant. But I knew we'd be together so that was the main thing."¹³ By August they were aboard the freighter, "African Crescent," bound for their new home. "Leaving port in New York we sailed for 22 days before reaching Capetown, South Africa. There we boarded a train to travel to Lusaka. We were on board the train for four days and three nights before reaching our destination."¹⁴

The first seven months were spent serving in the area around the Northern Rhodesian capital of Lusaka.

"I served in [the] Lusaka area because the previous missionary, John Kohl, had to leave the field for health reasons. I served a congregation in the African township of Matero as well as a preaching station in Chibolia, another African housing area near Lusaka. I also served the few whites who made up the English congregation in Lusaka as well as a leper colony called Lilande that was found just outside of Lusaka. Worship services were held each weekend at each place [with] Bible classes during the week."¹⁵

Soon the Essmann family moved to the Sala Reserve at Mwembeshi about 50 miles out in the bush country. During their time in Africa the Essmanns were blessed with the birth of two children. Rhoda Ruth was born on March 6, 1957. Soon afterwards David Harold was born on March 21, 1958.¹⁶ Ruth Essmann spoke about their new family. "It was hard trying to raise your children out in the bush. We could only go into town once a week for groceries. Once a week we got our mail. We had our own telephone [but] a lot of times it would be out." In order to stay in contact with their family back home they started a paper called "The Drumbeat." "[We] sent one copy to my cousin in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and he'd make copies and mail it to [friends and

¹³ Essmann, Ruth, *op.cit.*

¹⁴ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. *op.cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

family]. There we told about our trip and children being born, and different things that would happen. About the weather, the shopping...”¹⁷

Besides raising a new family there was much to be done in the area of mission work.

“[While at the Sala Reserve,] I served 6 preaching places with three worship services on Saturday – Sala, Mokombo village, and King Edward mine. On Sunday I served Shybiunji and Katinti (which grew into a large congregation) as well as a small village north of Katinti. Again, during the week we conducted Bible classes at most of these places. In addition, I served as manager of the schools. These schools, grades 1 through 4, were found at Shamwete, Sala, Lumano, Katinti, and Shabasongi. Another school, grades 5 and 6, was found on the mission station. Teacher’s meetings were held every Saturday. After I left Africa, the school system was handed back to the government since it was very difficult to continue the operation of these schools since the teachers were not all in sympathy with the Lutheran Church and its teachings.”¹⁸

Their daughter Rhoda remembers hearing stories about the church services in Africa, “[There were] people walking in and out of the worship services... It wasn’t a formal setting. You’d have mothers nursing their babies during the service and you’d have animals come in... Women were on one side, men [were] on the other.”¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, the early years of mission work in Africa were times “of learning and of testing.”²⁰ “There was a rather strong difference of opinion as to [the] way to go.”²¹ Conflict arose concerning the concept of the indigenous church²² and the traditional method of “setting up a sizable mission compound in village and rural areas complete with missionaries’ residences, staff residences, and possibly a school and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Essmann, Ruth. op.cit.

¹⁸ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

¹⁹ Belter (nee’ Essmann), Rhoda. Personal Interview. 14 March 1999.

²⁰ Wendland, E. H. op.cit. p.7

²¹ Sauer, Theodore. Personal Interview. op.cit.

²² Valleskey, David. Personal Interview. 11 March 1999. According to President David Valleskey the indigenous church concept can be defined with four “selfs”: self-governing, self-financing, self-disciplining, and self-propagating. For more on Pastor Essmann’s views concerning the indigenous church concept please see the attached video.

medical dispensary.”²³ Missionary A. B. Habben’s “mission philosophy was doubtless cast in the traditional mold.”²⁴ The other missionaries had a strong indigenous church policy.²⁵ Pastor Essmann was included among these missionaries and remains strongly in favor of the indigenous church method to this day.²⁶ The dispute continued unresolved when Pastor Essmann accepted a call to serve as pastor of St. Michael’s Ev. Lutheran Church in Fountain City, Wisconsin and left Africa in August of 1959.²⁷

The years in Africa had their ups and downs. Perhaps this account by Pastor Essmann sums them up the best.

While serving as missionary in Africa I can remember one day when we were traveling through the bush going to one of my preaching places. While traveling along in our Land Rover my interpreter and I could hear some drumming...caused by a funeral. Coming around a bend in the path, we saw the grave surrounded by long poles stuck into the ground and having enamel plates and bowls on the grave for the diseased to use in the afterlife. Cattle horns also protruded from the earth indicating that the man buried owned considerable amounts of cattle. Nearby was a village of half a dozen mud huts with thatched roofs. The inhabitants of the village were half naked with painted bodies. Drums were beating and the people had long branches from trees that they were sweeping back and forth on the ground. The Africans were chanting loudly hoping by their machinations they could scare away the evil spirits that had brought death to their village. Such experiences impressed upon me the necessity to bring the message of the gospel to people who had never heard it before.²⁸

FOUNTAIN CITY

Fountain City is a small Wisconsin town located on the Mississippi River across from Winona, Minnesota. It was here that Pastor Korn installed Pastor Essmann on

²³ Theodore A. Sauer, project director, To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub., 1992.) p.183.

²⁴ Ibid p.183.

²⁵ Ibid p.188.

²⁶ For more on Pastor Essmann’s views of the indigenous church method see the attached video.

²⁷ Theodore A. Sauer, project director, To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People. op.cit. p. 188,189.

²⁸ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

January 3, 1960 to serve at St. Michael Ev. Lutheran Church.²⁹ At the time of the installation the congregation numbered about 500 souls and 375 communicants.³⁰

It took a while to become readjusted to life in the United States. Ruth Essmann spoke of the incredible differences between Midwestern America and the African Bush country. "There were so many clothes [at all the stores in the United States]. In Africa we hardly ever bought clothes, our family would send them to us... At the grocery store [in the U.S.] you could buy anything you want. In Africa if you asked for a roast the man would turn around, slice off a piece of meat, and call it 'a roast.'"³¹ Their daughter Rhoda remembers, "In winter time [in Wisconsin] there was snow on the ground and [David and I] just wanted to go outside to play. To us that was white sand. So why couldn't you go outside? No, you had to have on these big coats and boots and things like that...It was just weird."³² Nevertheless the family adjusted and was soon blessed with a new child. Michele Renee was born in Winona, Minnesota on March 18, 1960.³³

Soon Pastor Essmann dove into his new task as pastor.

Founded in 1860, [St. Michael's] celebrated its centennial the first year I was pastor. We had a vigorous Sunday school and Vacation Bible school with from 100 to 110 in attendance for each. During the time I served St. Michael's a new parsonage was dedicated in 1960. Also, I served as the administrator of St. Michael's Lutheran Home, a home for the aging founded in 1947 and governed by an association of members [from] St. Michael's. In 1965 an addition was built at the home. Recently the home was turned over to the Lutheran Home Association at Belle Plaine, Minnesota. The property was given free of charge to the association although it was worth about one million dollars. A very active youth organization with 75% of the high school students participating continued through my ministry in Fountain City. We also had...four years of Bible classes for high school students with about 75% in attendance... It was truly a joy to serve the St. Michael's congregation in Fountain City.³⁴

²⁹ Proceedings for the 22nd Western Wisconsin District Convention held June 13-16, 1960 at Northwestern College, Watertown, WI. Found in the Library at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI. p. 6.

³⁰ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

³¹ Essmann, Ruth. op.cit.

³² Ibid.

³³ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

During his tenure Pastor Essmann twice served as vacancy pastor at Trinity congregation in Goodview, Minnesota and at the tri-parish of Cochrane, Buffalo City, and Cream, Wisconsin.³⁵

I remember on one occasion when I had only minutes to drive from Fountain City after worship services there... [to] the church in Cochrane to conduct worship that I ran out of gas. The congregation in Cochrane usually began worship singing the first hymn...before I arrived. While conducting the service at Fountain City I remembered I forgot to purchase gas for the car on Saturday. I attempted to reach Cochrane after the service, but failed. I grabbed my gown and Bible after my car stopped, ran into the middle of the road, and stopped the next car coming from the opposite direction. [I] asked them for a ride and arrived in time to conduct the service at Christ Lutheran Church in Cochrane.³⁶

THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSION SOCIETY

While serving at St. Michael's, Pastor Essmann was instrumental in organizing the National Lutheran's Women's Missionary Society.

In the attempt to interest more ladies in our mission program at home and abroad, mission groups were organized in the Winona Circuit, the Southwest Conference of the Western Wisconsin District (centered around Tomah) and the Wisconsin River Conference (centered around Wisconsin Rapids). I invited members of each of these groups to help form a national organization. Meetings were held, a constitution drawn up and a convention called the last Saturday in June of 1964. Over one hundred ladies met at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Winona, Minnesota. This new organization elected Mrs. Herbert Speckin as president. I was elected the first pastoral advisor. Since that date this organization has grown into a synod-wide organization with over 900 congregations as members and a national rally held each year in June that has had up to 1,400 persons in attendance. The Lord has blessed the work of these dedicated ladies and the projects that they have sponsored over the years. During my term as Pastoral Advisor, I was the editor of "Topics" a booklet of mission accounts that formed the basis of LWMS meetings in the individual congregations.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. For more on Essmann's role in the LWMS see the attached video.

In 1965 Pastor Essmann was appointed to be the chairman of the first Executive Committee for Latin America. Shortly afterwards he accepted the call to serve as pastor at St. John Ev. Lutheran Church in Waterloo, WI.

WATERLOO

After taking down the Christmas tree early, the family loaded up their belongings in a cattle truck supplied by the Waterloo congregation and headed for their new home. It was not an easy move. It was the end of December and the Essmann's youngest child, Michele, fell sick on the way there.³⁸

Upon arrival, Pastor Carl H. Mischke installed Pastor Essmann as the new pastor at St. John on January 2, 1966.³⁹

At the time I arrived it had a baptized membership of 1,165 souls and 830 communicants. It grew to nearly 1,300 souls and 1,000 communicants before a decline in membership set in. This congregation had a thriving Christian day school with seven teachers and as many as 218 students one year. I served alone as pastor for the first five years of my ministry in Waterloo. Then I had vicars for 15 years after that and the last 5 years of my ministry at St. John congregation I had an associate pastor – Pastor Thomas Wilsman. Faithful principals and teachers as well as congregation members made ministry in Waterloo a pleasure. During my tenure...two teacherages were purchased, and a large addition was made to the school consisting of office space, four classrooms and two dressing rooms for athletic events. This project was carried out in 1976. The next building project, the construction of a new church, was carried out beginning in June 1983, and culminated in the dedication of the new church in June of 1984.⁴⁰

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA

It was during his time at St. John's that Pastor Essmann became heavily involved in world missions. When he was elected to be the chairman of the first Executive

³⁸ Belter (nee' Essmann), Rhoda. *op.cit.*

³⁹ Proceedings from the 25th Biennial Convention of the Western Wisconsin District. June 13-15, 1966 at Northwestern College in Watertown, WI. Found at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI. p. 16.

Committee for Latin America the two other men on the committee were Pastor H. C. Nitz and Mr. Claude Hesse. A few years later the committee changed to consist of Pastor Richard Lauersdorf, Mr. Robert Grebe and Pastor Essmann.⁴¹ Lauersdorf described the committee: Pastor Essmann was in charge of administration, Grebe brought the businessman's logic and he was the counselor.⁴² These three men would serve together for 20 years.

When the executive committee was first formed there were two mission fields and three missionaries. One missionary, Pastor Venus Winter served San Pablo Lutheran Congregation in Tucson, Arizona. Pastors Rupert Eggert and Roger Sprain were our two missionaries in Puerto Rico. Over the 24 years these fields expanded to include Mexico in 1969, Colombia in 1973 and Brazil in 1986. Besides expanding to these new fields there are two other actions of the committee that are worth noting. 1) The establishment of a vicar program in Puerto Rico whereby a vicar was immersed in Spanish training in Mexico and then served for nine months as a Spanish speaking vicar in Puerto Rico. 2) The establishment of a publications program that has grown over the years supplying Spanish printed materials for use in Latin America.⁴³

According to the Administrator for World Missions, Pastor Daniel Koelpin, Pastor Essmann has been "one of the leaders in the board in terms of progressive ideas and branching out to new countries. He watches what other church bodies are doing. He's very committed to us doctrinally, but in terms of reaching out, he has been willing to examine other methods and strategies."⁴⁴

Pastor Essmann wrote about his experiences on the Executive Committee for Latin America.

As chairman I was responsible for representing our synod to the missionaries in Latin America and representing those missionaries to the synod. It was a two-way street. It was a joy to work with the missionaries. There was never a one I didn't like and they were all faithful in their duties and respectful in their

⁴⁰ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Lauersdorf, Richard. Personal Interview. 10 March 1999.

⁴³ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit. For more on Pastor Essmann's involvement on the Executive Committee for Latin America see the attached video.

⁴⁴ Koelpin, Daniel. Personal Interview. 8 March 1999.

attitudes. Also, as chairman, I was responsible for the budgets for the various fields. This was a tremendous amount of work. Added to that task was the need at times to trim our budgets because of a lack of funds. We could be asked to cut back 5% and then after we had done that were asked once again to do the same. These were not happy times. But there were also good times.

...We were prevented from entering the country of Colombia because of [a] lack of funds; after presenting a three-year budget in the amount of \$144,000 (remember this was in 1971 and the dollar went farther than it does today). Mr. Marvin Schwan offered to cover the cost for the first three years in order to get the mission underway. This was one of his first major gifts to the synod. The first three missionaries were then commissioned during the synod convention in 1973. These first three missionaries were Pastors Roger Sprain and Ernest Zimdars as well as Teacher Francis Warner.

Another incident that reminds us of the providence of God occurred when we were in need of funds to cover the cost of some radio broadcasts in Latin America. The cost for the broadcasts was coming due. I went to Milwaukee and sat down with the then synod treasurer, Norris Koopmann. We looked through all the Latin American accounts to see if we could find funds to cover the cost of the contract. There were not enough to be found. That evening I was to speak for a circuit LWMS meeting. Before the meeting started the treasurer of the group gave me a check for radio missions in Latin America. It more than covered the amount needed to fund the radio contract. Again and again I have experienced how the Lord answers our prayers, even before we ask.

Another duty of our committee was to make field visits to the various mission fields. The executive committee made arrangements to visit each field once every three years. The visits were usually made during two weeks early in November. One year we would go to Puerto Rico, another to Mexico and then the third visit would find us in Colombia and Brazil. These meetings often went on until late at night.

For a period of time in 1969 and 1970 I personally made visits to Mexico every month. That was after the Mexican field came under our direction and before we had a Friendly Counselor to oversee the work of the field. I would fly out of Chicago early on Tuesday morning arriving in Mexico City in the afternoon. That would give me time to meet with Pastor David Orea Luna, the head of the Mexican church, on Tuesday evening. All day Wednesday we would go about the work of the church in Mexico and then on Thursday I would fly back again to Chicago. This went on for a number of months until Pastor Rupert Eggert accepted the call to be Friendly Counselor for Mexico. The Lord's protecting hand watched over me on these mission visitations. One time, I recall, I was going to cross a street in Mexico City. I was about to step off the curb when a truck passed in front of me going at a very high speed. Had I taken one more step, I would have been hit and killed. I can still feel the movement of wind from the truck passing before my face.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

Pastor Essmann continued to serve on the Executive Committee for Latin America until 1989 when he was elected by the Board for World Missions to serve on the new Committee for Mission Expansion. On July 15, 1990 Pastor Essmann retired from the parish ministry. The attachment to the bulletin handout at his retirement service reflects the multitude of ways in which God had greatly blessed the ministry of Pastor Essmann.⁴⁶ Even though he was no longer serving as a pastor of a congregation, the Lord still had much work for him to do.

“RETIREMENT”

COMMITTEE FOR MISSION EXPANSION

For nine months after his retirement Pastor Essmann served as one of the vacancy pastors at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin.

As mentioned above, in 1989 Pastor Essmann was elected to serve on the new Committee for Mission Expansion (C.M.E.). Pastor Koelpin spoke about the purpose of this committee and Pastor Essmann’s role in it.

In the old days it used to be that [people would] appeal to the synod convention in an emotional way. ‘Here’s this Lutheran over here in Spain [I’m using Spain just as an example] who believes exactly the same as we do.’ So we rush in to Spain and it turns out that maybe this guy got a copy of *This We Believe* and was just out after American dollars. But the emotionalism of the synod just committed to...Spain (I’m just using this as an example) as a mission field and it wasn’t a mission field because the real long term potential for establishing a vibrant Lutheran entity in a Catholic Church country like Spain would be very limited. So that’s how we did things in the past. Today it’s a lot less emotional and much more study. We’ll send an exploratory team and we’ll look at a country like Thailand and we’ll look at India for two years. Before we commit major man power for 15/20 years and millions of the synod’s dollars we want to [ask] ‘Do we really have long term mission potential in this field?’ And so these explorations are done. Then the reports come in and the countries are weighed against one another in an objective way and then they’re prioritized and Harold

⁴⁶ See Appendix I.

with his explorations has been part of that process. I think that's what made it possible for us to go into 5 fields in one year.⁴⁷

Throughout Pastor Essmann's ten years on this committee the synod has been able to open new mission areas in Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Thailand, India, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota. During this time Pastor Essmann also served as the liaison person for the Japan, Europe, Asia Administrative Committee. As a result he has made, together with other individuals, 12 different field evaluations to 11 different countries, all since 1991.⁴⁸ "The countries are – Russia, visited twice; Bulgaria, visited twice; Romania; Macedonia; Albania; Portugal; Australia; India; United Arab Emirates; and Scandinavia including both Sweden and Finland."⁴⁹ Four of those countries now have mission fields. Romania, Macedonia, Portugal, and Australia received a negative report. The fate of the United Arab Emirates remains undecided.⁵⁰

The process of making an exploration is very detailed. Pastor Ronald Freier, who accompanied Pastor Essmann on visits to Russia, Bulgaria, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates, said:

If we're going to visit a certain country I like to go with [Pastor Essmann] because he will have thoroughly explored the geography and the cultural makeup up of that country...even the economic [situation], so that when we go there he can point out [places and say] this is who's president and so forth. It makes a visitation or exploration of a country very easy to do because of that particular capability of his.⁵¹

Besides studying up on local history, culture etc. a group of twenty questions is used to help determine if the area is ripe for missions activity at that time. "A simplified version

⁴⁷ Koelpin, Daniel. op.cit. Pastor Koelpin listed the Five mission fields as India, the Dominican Republic, Thailand, Russia, and Bulgaria.

⁴⁸ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

of these questions is used for a preliminary visit to a country. A more expanded group of the 20 questions, which I devised for use by the Committee for Mission Expansion, is then used to finally determine entry into a country or mission area."⁵²

Pastor Essmann describes his visits to Russia. According to his wife, Pastor Essmann was so determined to make the visits that he left as scheduled even though, before one of his visits, he needed to go to emergency room the very morning they were to leave as a result of a fall in the shower.⁵³

Perhaps the highlight of my service on the Board for World Missions was the exploration of Russia following the fall of the Iron Curtain. The first exploration in January of 1991 was brief. But it called for a more extensive exploration in 1992. Weeks of preparation, gathering materials about Russia and planning itineraries, preceded the actual exploration. Our headquarters was in Plzen, Czech Republic. Those on the exploration team were Pastor Kirby Spevacek, Mr. Gary Miller, my wife and myself. My wife played an important part in the exploration because she was the one who took care of all our laundry and also prepared food for us. Because of the shortage of good food in Russia at this time, each of us took one suitcase and half of it was filled with food – cheese, crackers, Spam, coffee, etc. that my wife would prepare as a lunch so we would have at least one good meal each day. We spent an entire week reviewing all the material we had gathered together before our first venture into Russia. The first journey took us to Moscow; Riga, Latvia; St. Petersburg and Novgorod. The journey to Moscow was by air. Then we went by train to Riga, Latvia and again by train from Riga to St. Petersburg. The train trip was an adventure. The four of us were crowded into a small compartment. The toilet facilities left very much to be desired. Water sloshed around on the floor and the washing facility was a bucket of water in one corner of the small restroom.

Our second journey into Russia took us to Moscow, Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad), Rostov on the Don, Tagenrod, Yecatrineburg (Formerly Sverdlovst), and Novosibirsk and Academgorodok. In Rostov on the Don the hotel was so cold that the people behind the reception desk wore heavy coats and boots. For four days all we could get to eat in the restaurant was chicken cutlets... In Volgograd we stayed in a hotel next to the department store in whose basement Field Marshal Von Paulus, the commander of the German forces in the battle of Stalingrad, had his headquarters. The ruins of an old flourmill is the only building left standing from that devastating battle fought there so many years ago. Traveling to Siberia we spent time in Novosibirsk and Academgorodok. These latter two cities are the ones we suggested as the place to begin mission work in Russia. Our team had traveled over 10,000 miles in Russia by plane,

⁵¹ Freier, Ronald. Personal Interview. 4 March 1999.

⁵² Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit. For an example of the twenty questions see Appendix 2.

⁵³ Essmann, Ruth. op.cit.

train, bus and car. We had interviewed government and church officials. We had met with radio and television people as well as publishers. This journey was truly the highlight of my service in world missions. All the previous years of experience found their purpose in evaluating this mission field and recommending it as one our WELS should enter.⁵⁴

During these trips Pastor Essmann was known to lighten the mood with his subtle sense of humor. Perhaps one anecdote which best brings out this sense of humor was told by Pastor Freier. When they were in Russia for the first time Gorbachev was still the Premier. "If you look at Harold Essmann he looks a bit like Gorby. [We] did a video of our visitation. When we did it, we took some lipstick and we painted the birthmark on [Pastor Essmann's] forehead... He looked just like Gorby and I interviewed him for this video. Everything I asked, Pastor Essmann answered 'Nyet! Nyet! Nyet!'"⁵⁵

Following the visit to Russia a third exploratory trip was made from Plzen to Romania and Bulgaria. In Bulgaria they learned that there was no Lutheran presence. After making a more thorough visit in 1992 with Pastors Spevacek and Don Fastenau a mission was opened in January of 1993. Pastor Essmann was then asked by the Japan, Europe, Asia Administrative Committee to assist with their missions in Russia and Bulgaria.⁵⁶

Primarily I provided guidance for the publication of tracts, booklets and books in Russian and Bulgarian. [My wife and I] spent nearly a year in Bulgaria over a period of three years. We would go to Bulgaria in the spring and again in the fall of each year. We would stay [anywhere] from one to four months each time. When the mission staff in Bulgaria was enlarged and I felt they could carry on the literature program themselves, I asked to be relieved of that work. The day after I sent the fax requesting that I be relieved, I received a message from the Board for World Mission's Administrator, Pastor Duane Tomhave, asking me to serve as the Project Coordinator of a world-wide literature program, which I accepted and continue to carry responsibility for today.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit. See map in Appendix 3.

⁵⁵ Freier, Ronald. op.cit.

⁵⁶ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Pastor Dennis Belter, Pastor Essmann's son-in-law, had the chance to visit Bulgaria and describes the work which went on. "A couple of Bulgarian people would translate [what they had written in] Bulgarian into English and Essmann would make sure it was fine by comparing it to the English version."⁵⁸

MULTI-LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM

Pastor Koelpin said Pastor Essmann's involvement as the Project Coordinator for the Multi-Language Publications Program is "probably the most lasting contribution" he has made.⁵⁹

This program really had its origin back in 1995 when a Slavic Conference was held at Nesebar, Bulgaria, from September 24 to 29. I presented a brief outline for a worldwide publications program to World Board Administrator Duane Tomhave and later to the members of the conference. Duane asked me to flesh out the idea and he then presented it to the Board for World Missions. When I decided not to return to Bulgaria in April of 1996, the Board for World Missions asked me to be the Project Coordinator for the Multi-Language Publications Program. I began my work on this project on July 1, 1996. A committee was appointed to oversee this work. That first committee, which at this writing is still functioning, is Mr. Mark Brunner, chairman; Professor John Hartwig and Pastor Paul Hartman. Great strides have been made during the opening activities of this work. A World Mission Collection of books, tracts, booklets, videos, etc. has been gathered together in the library of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. More than 1,500 items are in this collection. Items in the collection, which covers over 55 languages, can be received on loan by anyone in the world because the items...are on a website. Also, a catalog was produced [which] lists over 350 items in 22 languages...are available, on sale, from our distribution center in El Paso, Texas. These items are translations or publications of WELS or ELS materials.

Personally, I have been the author of a three level English as Second Language Materials. The three books are entitled "The Life of Christ according to the Gospel of Mark." First published in Bulgaria, especially the first level volume is being used in other mission fields and in cross-cultural situations in congregations in the United States. Another publication that I wrote is "What the Bible and Lutherans Teach." It has been or is being translated into at least 5 languages. But the most popular publication I wrote is "The Promise." This 16-page booklet outlines God's plan of salvation from creation to eternity in heaven.

⁵⁸ Belter, Dennis. Personal Interview. 14 March 1999.

⁵⁹ Koelpin, Daniel. op.cit.

It has been published in 22 different languages. Over 190,000 copies of the booklet have been printed. Several new versions are being planned.

The Lord has blessed this program. In the future we look forward to the translation and publication of many different books that will preserve and proclaim the confessional doctrines of Scripture to coming generations in many lands. The People's Bible is being translated and published in Russian, Bulgarian, Japanese, Indonesian, and Spanish. Other works – "Revelation" and "We Believe – Therefore We Speak" are being made available in Finnish. The catechism and other works are being translated and... published along with Sunday school materials and tracts in many languages. This program will be of assistance to missionaries, lay persons and worker training programs around the world and in our multi-cultural situations in the United States.⁶⁰

On March 31, 1998, Pastor Essmann attended the first meeting of the Publications Coordinating Commission as the representative of the Board for World Missions. This commission has representatives from the Board for World Missions, the Board for Home Missions, Ministerial Education, Parish Services, and Northwestern Publishing House. Their purpose is to promote and prioritize publications in the WELS.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

There are three observations from Pastor Essmann's ministry which really stand out in my mind. The first is his great desire to "bring the message of the Gospel to people who have not heard it before."⁶² This zeal is very evident in his work ethic and approaches to spreading the Gospel.

Secondly, motivated by God's love for him, Pastor Essmann puts his passion into practice. I believe Pastor Koelpin said it best. "[Pastor Essmann] is very committed to us doctrinally, but in terms of reaching out he has been willing to examine other methods

⁶⁰ Essmann, Harold. Written Interview. op.cit.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

and strategies.”⁶³ Pastor Essmann has been an innovator in our church when it comes to developing alternate strategies of bringing the Gospel to others.

Finally, Pastor Essmann’s great gift for administration can be clearly seen. Not only is this blessing put to use through out his life, but Essmann’s ministry demonstrates the importance of good organization and leadership. It is his creativity, zeal, and organizational skills which have made the greatest impact on this writer.

The Lord has certainly blessed both the ministry and life of Pastor Essmann. Today he is the proud parent of three children who remain faithful to their Savior and the grandparent of seven. Despite his “retirement” Essmann continues to faithfully serve his Lord. He currently resides with his wife in a duplex on Spencer Village Court in Appleton, WI.

⁶³ Koelpin, Daniel. op.cit.

APPENDIX 1

The Bulletin insert from Pastor Essmann's retirement service on July 15, 1990. Pastor Thomas Wilsman added the dates jotted on the side.

THE MINISTRY OF PASTOR ESSMANN - 1956 - 1990

Served - Taught St. Martin Lutheran School - 1950
Missionary to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Africa from
1956 - 1959 (3 years).
Pastor of St. Michael Ev. Lutheran Church, Fountain City
Wisconsin from 1960 - 1965 (6 years).
Pastor of St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Waterloo, Wis-
consin from 1966 - 1990 (25 years).

Served the church at large - (WELS) -
As Secretary of the Mississippi Valley Conference.
As founder and first national pastoral advisor (4 Years)
of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society of WELS.
As Chairman of the Executive Committee for Latin Ameri-
can Missions of the WELS and member of the Board for
World Missions from 1965 to 1989 (24 years).
As Secretary of the Committee for Mission Expansion and
member of the Board for World Missions of the WELS
from 1989 to the present.

During his ministry, Pastor Essmann -
Baptized 642 children, including 468 at St. John
Baptized 21 adults, including 7 at St. John
Confirmed 606 children, including 531 at St. John
Confirmed 140 adults, including 113 at St. John
Married 273 couples, including 253 at St. John
Funerals 327 persons, including 280 at St. John
Preached 3,543 sermons, including 2,364 at St. John

Programs inaugurated during ministry at St. John -
In Worship - Use of page 5 & 15 in The Lutheran Hymnal
Use of page 3 in the Sampler
Use of the NIV throughout the worship service
Began Easter Sunrise & Good Fri. afternoon ser.
Mid-week services on Monday and Saturday
Worship at the Columbus Care Center
Taped services for shut-ins

In Education - Began vacation Bible school
Began pre-school religion classes
Began kindergarten at St. John School
Joined Lakeside Lutheran High Federation
Began Sunday and Teachers' Bible Classes
Summer school for children
Jesus Cares program for our members.

In Organizations - Parent-Teacher Organization founded
Lutheran Boys' & Girls' Club organized

In Buildings - In 1968 purchased two teacherages
In 1976 constructed new school addition
In 1984 completed new church

Born 9/20/1930
Baptized 10/19/1930
Confirmed 4/2/1944
Married 6/9/1956

APPENDIX 2

An example of the twenty questions used by the Committee for Mission Expansion.
Taken from Essmann's report on the CME's October 1995 visit to Albania.

I. Prospects for Mission

1. To what extent are the people in this field now exposed to the gospel?
2. Are the people receptive to the gospel?
3. Are the target areas large population centers?
4. How quickly might a church in this country become a self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating and self-disciplining church?
5. Have the people targeted recently experienced a major change in their lives and lifestyle?
6. Can the various strata and classes of society be reached?
7. Are there sizeable people groups within the country?
(This refers to language, economic, social groups, possibly also groups determined by educational level or social status.)
8. Is there a bridge to enter the country such as a sponsor or a special need to be met?
9. Will we be helping an existing church become stronger confessionally?
10. Can the work be expanded from this field to other fields?
11. Are we doing work under similar conditions in other areas of the country or the world?

II. Government

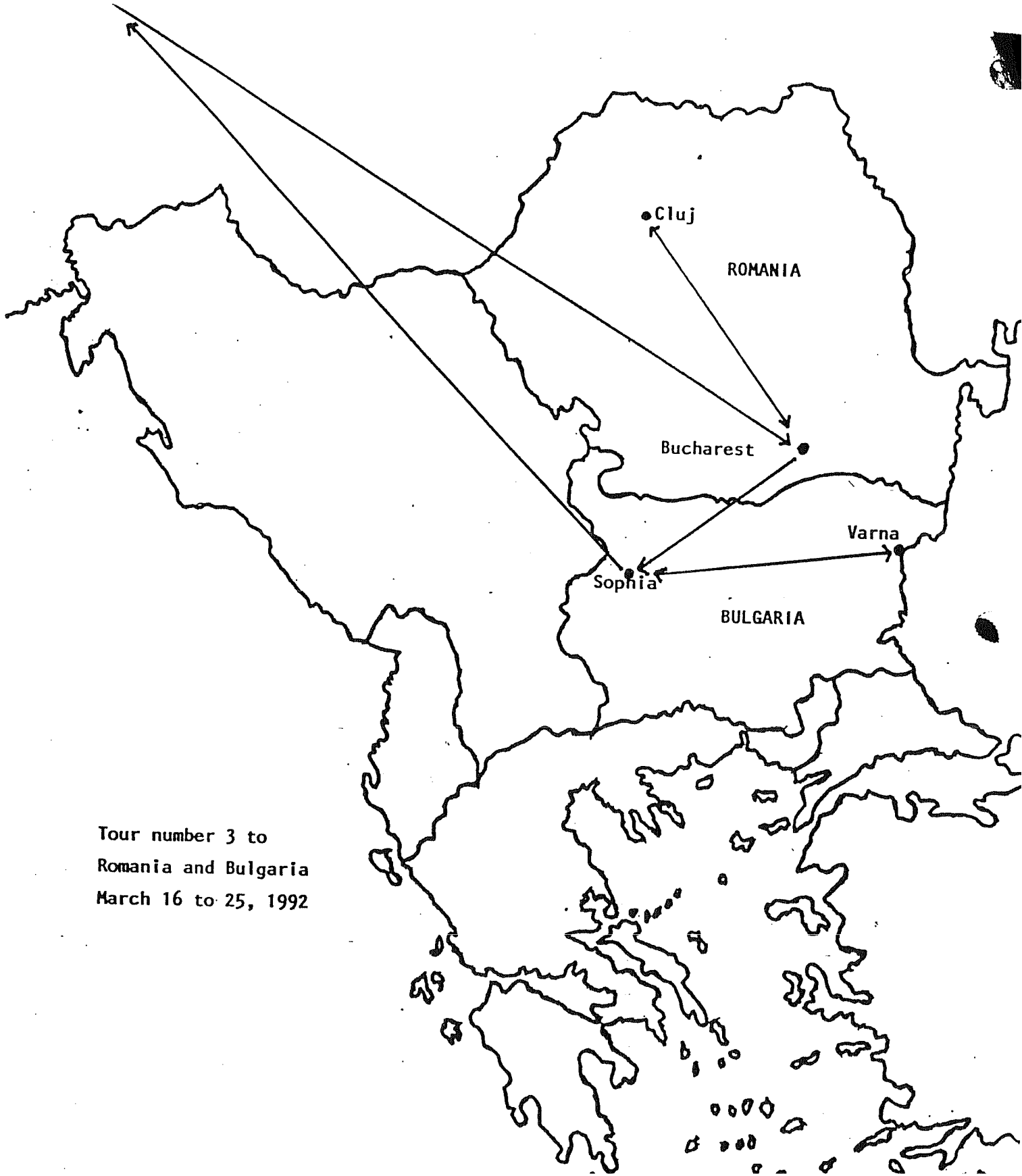
12. Are expatriate missionaries permitted to enter the country and work there as missionaries?
13. How difficult is it to gain entrance and remain?
14. Can we work without undue pressure from government agencies, other Christian churches or para-church organizations?
15. Is the government stable?

III. Day to day living and working

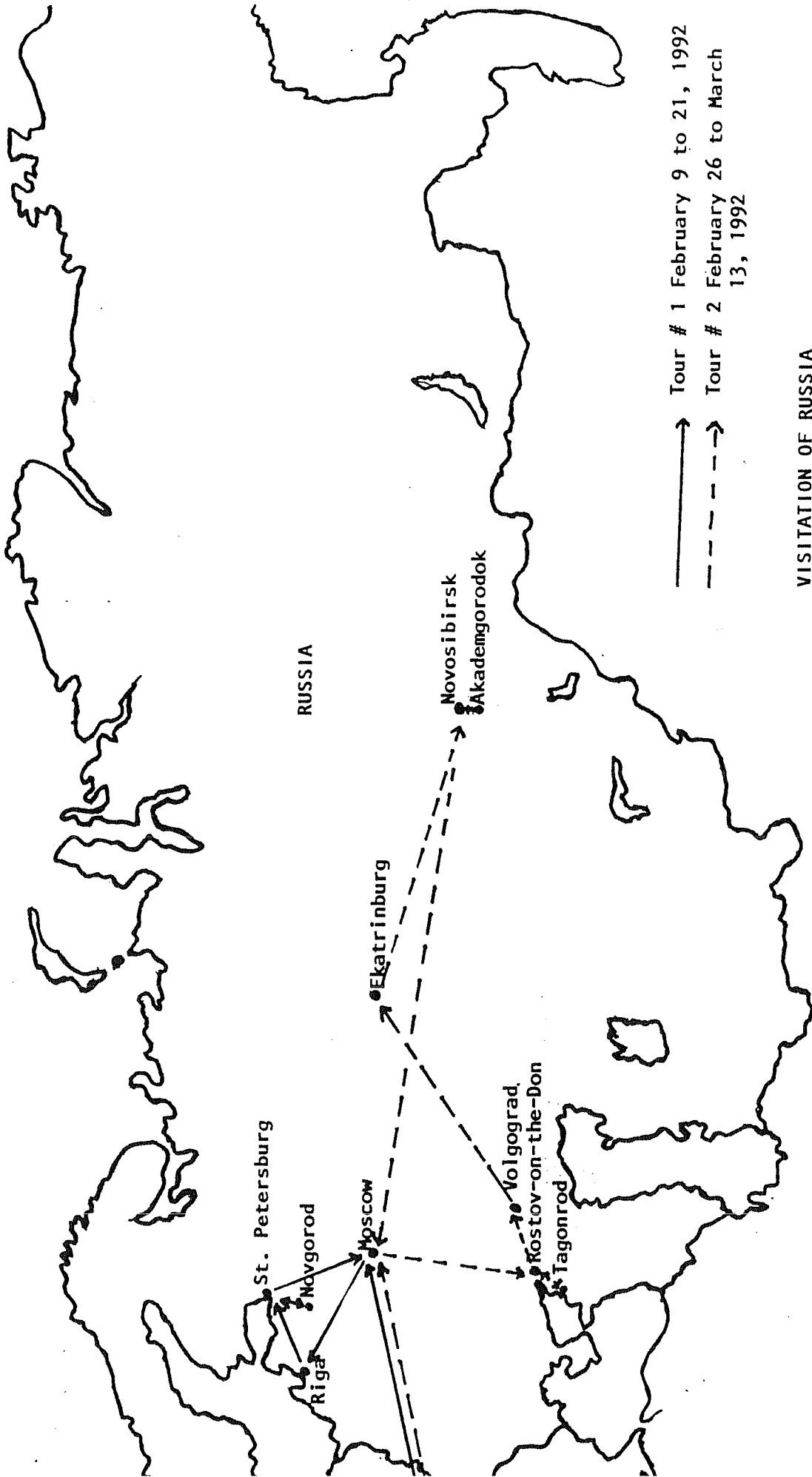
16. Are expatriates safe in the country?
17. Is the general attitude of the people toward Americans friendly?
18. How easy is the language to learn?
19. To what extent would entry and maintenance of workers be economically feasible?
20. How easily could missionaries adjust to living conditions?

APPENDIX 3

Maps of the Committee for Mission Expansion's visitations of Russia, Romania and Bulgaria. Taken from Essmann's report of the visitation.



Tour number 3 to
Romania and Bulgaria
March 16 to 25, 1992



→ Tour # 1 February 9 to 21, 1992

- - - → Tour # 2 February 26 to March 13, 1992

VISITATION OF RUSSIA

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