

THE FORMATION OF THE WESTOWNE MISSION

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The Formation of the Westowne Mission

In the 1920's a humble subdivision began to develop in Waukesha County. This area was located west of the city of Waukesha in the town of Pewaukee. It was known as Westowne. Westowne was separated from the city of Waukesha by the "Terml," the electric railroad right-of-way often simply called the "Interurban."

During the 1920's building codes were not as stringent as they are today. Many of the families living in Westowne therefore, because of limited personal resources and the economy of the area, built garages and adapted them as living quarters on a temporary basis. As you may have guessed, Westowne was the poorest area of town.

But although Westowne was poor in material resources, the Lord made sure that it would have the opportunity to gain spiritual riches. This is why the Lord led men to bring the Gospel of salvation to this poor area called Westowne. Through a Wisconsin Synod mission called simply, "The Westowne Mission," the message of Calvary and the empty tomb went out into this community. So, as it is with any study of Christian Church history, we can see God's grace in action.

But church history is never devoid of secular history. The Great Depression of the 1930's caused many who had wealth to lose it while those who were already poor got poorer. Westowne was no exception. The people there remained very poor. Many remained in their garages. The depression had taken its toll on the area.

The Synod also felt the pressures of the Great Depression. The Synod felt severe financial troubles. The Synod debt rose during the late twenties and early thirties. But by God's grace the Synod's debt was terminated through a special synod-wide offering. Yet the Wisconsin Synod had little funds left after the debt was paid. This meant that in 1939 there were little funds available to open new

missions. This also meant that the Westowne Mission would be started in a poor area of town without strong synodical backing.

The Founding of the Mission

Nevertheless the Lord shewed his people that there was indeed a need for a mission in the western end of Waukesha. Among these concerned people was Pastor Harry Shiley of Waukesha's Trinity Church. Pastor Shiley realized that there were certain areas within the city of Waukesha and its surrounding area that were not being covered by either his congregation or Grace Lutheran Church of Waukesha. Being on the Southeastern Wisconsin District's Mission Board, Pastor Shiley had the opportunity to express his concerns for these areas of Waukesha. In 1939 he therefore expressed the need for a mission.

The mission board wasn't as experienced as it is today either on the district or synodical level. They had rarely started missions in cities without initially having some sort of nucleus. Before they opened a mission in Waukesha they deemed it necessary to see if there would indeed be a nucleus. They also needed to determine if there were any possible prospects in that area. These concerns are also carefully thought out today before a mission is begun. We think of this stage as the exploratory stage. However, the impression is that in 1939 this whole concept was novel. But be that as it may, the mission board originally decided to start a mission if feasible south of College Avenue and between East and West Avenues. So they sent Pastor James DeGalley to make the initial canvass. Pastor DeGalley recalls how he responded to this assignment. When asked if he would canvass an area in Waukesha he responded, "What's a canvass?" The mission board explained it to him and he went. He still remembers his drive out Cleveland Avenue to conduct that canvass.

Pastor DeGalley also remembers what happened on that canvass.

He found that many of the people in this area of town were already churched. Many of them belonged to the downtown churches. And those who were non-churched did not appear to be good prospects. Pastor DeGalley comments, "Humanly speaking, I'd given it a 0% chance."

Perhaps this is why the attention was turned to Westowne in hopes that a mission still could be started. As was said earlier, the people of Westowne were generally poor both materially and spiritually. The area was depressed. The outlook for the future seemed bleak. But the grace of God was to be proclaimed in Westowne. Pastor Nommensen, the Mission Board Chairman and Pastor Shiley came upon six empty lots that were up for sale. The mission board bought them. Step one was completed. The mission board had committed itself. A Waukesha mission would be opened in Westowne.

Westowne Receives its First Pastor

Seldom would a person of my age expect to learn about the strangeness of calling procedures in the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. I really never knew there could be any strangeness to the call. But the story about the first pastoral call to Westowne is indeed a strange one to a person in the 1980 WELS.

It seems that the Mission Board didn't as yet realize that it could call a missionary in behalf of the Synod, ordain and commission him, and then send him to bring the Gospel into a specific area. Instead, they issued a temporary call to a man, and sent him unordained to an area. The man was to work trying to establish a church. If he was successful he received a permanent call. If he was unsuccessful he was reassigned or, as was the case many times in the 1930's, he was sent home to await an opening. To 1983 seminarians this practice seems strange.

But this is how Mr. Waldemar Hoyer came to Westowne. (A copy

of his initial call letter to Westowne has been included with this paper. You may find it at the end). Pastor Nommensen sent a letter to Mr. Hoyer while visiting his daughter in Ohio. Mr. Hoyer had graduated the previous year (1939) from the seminary but was not assigned a call because there were none. Instead he taught fifth and sixth grade at ~~Waukesha~~^{Winneconne}. He received this letter while in ~~Waukesha~~^{Winneconne} recuperating from the flu. He was so happy in receiving this letter that he got out of bed, got dressed and headed for Waukesha. The flu...?

Mr. Hoyer's call had a number of stipulations worth mentioning. The letter stated that there were a number of prospects. It also mentions that Pastor DeGalley canvassed the area to find this out. However, Hoyer wasn't called to work in the same area that was canvassed. Westowne had not been canvassed. Where did the board learn that there were prospects?

The letter also outlined Hoyer's assignment. He was to gather people together for regular worship services and for Sunday School. He was allowed to baptize and bury but he was not to marry or administer the Lord's Supper (this was because he wasn't ordained).

Pastor Hoyer's situation continued until April 4, 1941. In that month the new mission received its first permanent worship facility as we shall later discuss. That worship un~~ti~~^{til} meant that Mr. Hoyer had a church. It also meant that he had gathered a flock for regular services. His work had proved to be moderately successful. As a result his temporary position was changed into a permanent call. Pastor Hoyer was ordained in the dedication service of the new chapel. (One interesting note is that Pastor Hoyer received his permanent call in May. However, Pastor Nommensen dated the call earlier so that Hoyer formally would have had it before his ordination. The letter that accompanied this call is also attached at the end of this paper). The Mission Board fixed his salary at \$831.24 per annum. He was also to receive adequate housing. This is how Pastor Hoyer finally and officially became the Westowne Mission's first

pastor after only nine months of service in Westowne.

The Mission Church Worship in Westowne

Pastor Hoyer arrived in Westowne in the fall of 1940 and immediately began his work. One of his first duties was to secure a place to worship and then to begin worshipping on a regular basis. The Supreme Bottling Works, a soft-drink company with world wide exposure, had vacant space on the second floor of its warehouse. Hoyer secured this space to conduct services in Westowne. On September 8, 1940 he held his first worship service in that building on Sylvan Terrace. Either sixteen or eighteen attended that service. Nobody is completely sure. I suppose that both the worshippers and the Mission Board desired a better place of worship. After all, the only way to the second floor of the warehouse was via an outdoor fire escape. But these quarters would suffice until other arrangements could be made. And so Mr. Hoyer began to preach the Word regularly in Westowne.

In the meantime, six lots had been found with the intent to build a chapel for the mission. However, the Synod had also been hard hit by the economic times. Remember the country had just gone through a depression and was now about to enter the war. They couldn't afford to put a lot of money into a mission which still was questionable as to its success. But the Lord provided. The Mission received \$1200.00 from the Synod to purchase the six lots.

Given all these circumstances the people attending the Westowne mission must have realized that they probably would be worshipping in the bottle works warehouse for some time. Pastor Hoyer encouraged patience while continuing to spread the Gospel. They were grateful for the blessings they had received from God's hand. He would never forget this little flock.

Unexpectedly the Lord gave another blessing. This blessing

is a story in itself and well worth retelling. The blessing was located in a barn on Milwaukee's north side at the time. The blessing was a used, demountable (ie. prefabricated) barracks building. The mission found out that it could purchase this building for \$100.00. But where would the money come from?

Pastor Nommensen answered that question. He agreed to make a personal loan so that the old barracks could be bought, transported and erected. The building went up quickly. The mission held its first worship service in their "new home" on April 6, 1941. It was dedicated three weeks later on April 27, 1941.

Soon after construction and dedication the members of the mission learned that their building would require extensive work before the state would approve its use, especially because of the school. This building had had quite a past. Originally the Great Lakes Naval Installation used this building but the US Government sold it as surplus before World War I. It was then used for various things until it ended up in Whitefish Bay Wisconsin where it served a Wisconsin Synod mission.

Occasionally a story about that first Westowne Lutheran church building surfaces which as Pastor Martin Stern, the present pastor at Mt. Calvary, states, "May be apocryphal but, given the circumstances, could have more than one kernel of truth." The story goes something like this. Supposedly a state building inspector had condemned this particular building while it was still being used in Whitefish Bay. He apparently assumed that it would then be destroyed. Several years later that very same inspector, while driving through Waukesha on business, happened to notice the building on the mission's site. He inquired about its origins and confirmed that it was indeed the same building. Needless to say he immediately "recondemned" it.

The foundation for this building had been laid by the Hollmann Brothers Construction Company of Milwaukee. They also erected the building. The Hollmann family belonged to Mount Lebanon Lutheran

Church of Milwaukee. Pastor Mahnke alerted the Mission Board chairman, Pastor Nommensen, of their availability. The mission accepted the company's work.

But the inspector found many things unacceptable about the building, no fault of the builders of course. For instance, the eight inch block used for the footings was unacceptable. To keep the building a four inch buttress needed to be poured around the ~~four~~^{eight} inch block. But there was no money to hire the job out. Neither were there many members to form a work committee. So a number of pastors from the old "horseshoe conference" volunteered their services for a day. They not only poured the buttress but also dug a septic system and erected a lean-to on the building's north side. After this work the building met the requirements of the inspector and was finally ready for service.

To bring the story of this chapel to a close, the chapel provided the early congregation with not a few problems. It seems that the congregation was forever having difficulties with the furnace. The organ(s) also were frequent items for discussion. But all in all the building with its workings and furnishings, problems and maintenance was regarded as quite a blessing from God. It surely was an improvement over the bottling works warehouse. They recognized the blessing.

The Westowne Mission Formally Organizes

After constructing a permanent worship facility and ordaining its first pastor the mission set its goals on formally and legally organizing as a congregation. Pastor Hoyer confirmed his first adult class that first year in the early part of 1941. These men became his first church council and were the only voting members of the congregation. These men then set the goal.

These men, together with their pastor, began a move to formally organize as a legal congregation. On September 29, 1941,

five men signed the certificate of organization of the Westowne Mission. The names of the signing members were: Raymond C. Miller; Ralph R. Moass; Richard Stolte; John Shane; and Harold Swanson. They signed the document in the presence of Pastor Hoyer and Notary Public, Mr. Jack Roberts. It was officially registered on September 30, 1941 in Waukesha County Courthouse as certificate number 244014.

At this official organizational meeting the members of the mission also needed to decide on a name for their church. They chose the name, Mount Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church. What a fitting name that is! First of all, the "Calvary" was to remind that little flock of why it was organizing itself into a church. The congregation only existed because Jesus died for their sins and chose them to be part of his fold. Secondly, the name was to remind them of their Savior's life, death and resurrection as they themselves took up the cross and follow^{ed} him. But most important of all this name was their confession of faith that they would proclaim to Westowne for years to come under the Lord's guidance. By God's grace the name, "Mt. Calvary" is still heard on Waukesha's west side.

Part of organizing the church also meant that leaders were needed to run the congregation. Mt. Calvary elected its first church council on Sunday, October 12, 1941 after church. The congregation elected six men, all of whom were adult confirmands. They elected Mr. Miller as chairman, Mr. Korth as treasurer, Mr. Shane as financial secretary, Mr. Stolte as secretary, and Mr. Harold Swanson and Mr. Ed Swanson as the other two members. Pastor installed them the following Sunday, October 19, 1941 during the service.

Still the final stage of organization needed to be completed. Mt. Calvary needed a formal constitution under which the congregation could operate in an ordered manner. The standard constitution for mission congregations prepared by the synod provided the basis and form for Mt. Calvary's own constitution. With this help Mt. Calvary's constitution was completed by early January 1942.

The congregation officially adopted their constitution and by-laws on January 11, 1942. The work of organization was thus completed.

Mount Calvary Instructs its Youth

The members of Mt. Calvary realized the importance of reaching the youth with the Gospel. They knew that it was essential for the growth of their parish and their outreach into the community. The best way to reach the youth was to open a Christian Day School. In September of 1942 Pastor Hoyer began teaching Grade-School. He had seventeen students. Without much research he simply opened a school by starting to teach.

The chapel also served as the school. The building was divided into two sections. The west end became the worship area while Pastor Hoyer taught school on the east end of the building. The chancel separated the two sections. This then was a typical one room school, with seventeen students, teaching and learning in an old army barracks.

Mt. Calvary received many blessings through this school. The school provided a slow but steady means for growth. Many of the children were confirmed and became members. Sometimes their parents also came into Christ's fold because their children attended Mt. Calvary school. So the school was not only used to teach member children but also to preach what happened on Calvary to the community.

1942 to 1983

Mt. Calvary never became a "boom" congregation. Its growth was very slow. Some years saw a moderate increase of souls but many more years were spent on plateaus. But the Lord blesses in his own time. Bless he did. The church is presently self-supporting. The average attendance is around 275 per Sunday. The school is taught by four teachers.

Mt. Calvary has had many faithful called workers over the years. Three pastors have served the congregation. Pastor Walde~~mar~~mar Hoyer served Mt. Calvary from 1940 to 1945 when he accepted a call to Flagstaff Arizona. Mt. Calvary's second pastor was another Waldemar, Pastor Waldemar Zarling now president of the Michigan District. Pastor Zarling served the mission church from December of 1945 to July of 1950 when he accepted a call to serve at St. John's Lutheran Church of Newburg Wisconsin. The third pastor of Mt. Calvary is still the pastor today. Pastor Martin L. Stern came to Mt. Calvary in July of 1952 from Northwestern Academy of Mobridge South Dakota. The Lord used these three men to minister over the small mission in Waukesha. All of them faithfully preached the Word of God in Westowne. But the Lord gave the increase.

Over the years twenty~~four~~four other people have served their Lord by faithfully teaching Jesus' lambs at Mt. Calvary. All but four of these teachers were lady teachers some of whom were either pastor's wives or are now pastor's wives. Of the four men who taught in the school only two were male teachers. The other two men who taught were Mt. Calvary's pastors. Both Pastor Hoyer and Pastor Zarling taught classes in addition to their other duties. But although there have been many teachers and three pastors at Mt. Calvary the message has remained the same.

Thus it has been with Mt. Calvary church. It has preached but one message since it began in the bottling works warehouse. The message continues to be: "Jesus Christ and him crucified on Calvary." So a humble beginning has meant little as far as the work is concerned. The size has never been important. The message has. Truly the study of Mt. Calvary is a study in grace.

Many were helpful in getting Westowne Mission off the ground. Pastor Shiley of Trinity in Waukesha especially lent his support. There are also the untold and unknown (ie. to us) believers whose prayers concerning this mission were answered by the Lord. Then there were those people of the mission itself. Yet none of these things would have mattered if God had not caused the increase.

Perhaps Pastor Hoyer's recollections about this mission would be an appropriate close for this paper about the starting of a mission. "To sum it up, Westowne was a mission and a school both begun on a shoestring; a young inexperienced missionary; no facilities; six empty lots; a nation at war; in the poorest section of Waukesha; disapproved by the pastor (Woyahn) of Grace (Waukesha) who was building his own new church, who knew that 'trash' out at Westowne, and who saw no reason why they couldn't join his church. And so it is: 'I planted, another watered and God gave the increase!' And all because the Gospel is God's power unto salvation and word shall not return unto him void and shall prosper in the thing where unto he sent it.'"

I suppose the Synod Mission Board would shutter to think a mission could be started, much less prosper, under such circumstances. But it did and it does. God granted the increase.

Zanesville, Ohio.
July 23, 1940.

Mr. Waldemar Hojer,
Shinneconge, Ohio.

Dear Brother Hojer, -

The Mission Board has decided to start a new mission in Shannock, Ohio. - Rev. de Galley canvassed the field a few weeks ago and has found a section of the city which has quite a number of prospects. We would like to have you work in this field. Yours will be a temporary position. If the work proves successful a permanent call will be extended, if not successful, the work will be dropped.

You will receive \$69.29 a month, plus an allowance of at least \$15.00 monthly for room rent. Gather the people, hold regular services + Sunday School. You could baptize and officiate at funerals, but weddings and socials - ministering of Holy Eucharist Supper either Rev. Shiley or Dr. Hojak - would attend to.

Work the field with a zeal for the Lord and may He bless His rich blessings upon your efforts.

Am spending this week with my daughter in Zanesville. Write your answer to my So. Milwaukee address. He hopes that you will be able to commence with the work in the very near future.

Yours in the service of the Lord

O. B. Nommensen, chairman.

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The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States

SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN DISTRICT

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MISSION BOARD
904 MICHIGAN AVE., SO. MILWAUKEE, WIS.

April 30, 1941

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Rev Waldemar Hoyer, -

Waukesha, Wis

Dear Brother Hoyer, -

Enclosed you will ^{find} your real call to the great mission at
Westowne. You will note, that I dated it April 25, 1941.
Then you had the call before you were ordained as pastor
of that mission.

Kindly write a letter of acceptance, so we have your answer
to the call for our files.

Have written a full detailed account of all bills paid for
Westowne. Will send it to you through Pastor Shiley. *Probably*
you ought to have all the receipted bills, so the congrega-
tion later on knows exactly, how much the building cost a-
mountéd to and for what it was used.

Kind regards and God's blessings for your work.

Fraternally

O. B. Nommensen
O B Nommensen.