

EVANGELISM CHALLENGES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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Anyone who has been to the Pacific Northwest shares similar sentiments. The weather is beautiful. The scenery is fantastic. The activities are plenteous. To the careful observer, there is one more characteristic: Mission work in the Pacific Northwest is not an easy task.

I was sent to Maple Valley, WA, just southeast of Seattle, for my vicar year from August of 2009 to August of 2009. While I was there, I too was captivated by the beauty of the region, but I was also able to observe that strange phenomenon regarding mission work. Many times throughout my stay in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), I also heard pastors speak about the region as a “different kind of animal” when it came to mission work. Realizing that every region has its own challenges, I was interested to see exactly what type of challenges made the PNW such a difficult place to do mission work.

In order to do this, I went through articles, reports, and essays to see what kinds of challenges faced the missionary work in this region from the beginning of the Wisconsin Synod’s work in Washington to the present day work in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska. I also interviewed the district President of the Pacific Northwest to compare the struggles of an early mission to the struggles of a today’s missionary. This paper is the result of my findings.

Birth pains of a Beginning (1884-1917). The first traces of the Wisconsin Synod in the PNW, actually came about when an Ohio Synod church and pastor sought membership with Wisconsin. In 1894, Pastor R. Wolff and his congregation, St. Paul’s in Tacoma, joined the Wisconsin Synod. This group had formed in 1884 and was worshipping in a frame church by the turn of the century.¹ The Wisconsin Synod was enthusiastic about the prospects there. In the forty fifth proceedings of the Wisconsin Synod, they state, “Through the coming in of Pastor

¹ Widmann, Warren L. “Proceedings of the 39th Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix V: District President’s Biennial Report.” WELS Synodical Reports: Pacific Northwest District. Assembled at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church/Evergreen Lutheran High School in Kent, WA, June 14-16, 1992, 26.

Wolff, Tacoma, WA, we have our eyes on the far west and it is possible that the church finds itself in a profitable field for our work.”² Though Pastor Wolff was “faithful and energetic,” St. Paul’s remained the only church of the Wisconsin Synod in the entire region until 1905.³

In that year, Pastor Ernst, who had taken over for Pastor Wolff, was “invited to meet with three Lutheran men in Yakima who were anxious to have a church of the Wisconsin Synod in that city. In and of itself, this must have been quite a trip for Ernst to undertake. He would have had to cross the Cascade near Mt. Rainier and avoided lakes as he wound his way to the eastern valley of Yakima.”⁴

On October 22, 1905 Grace Church was organized under the guidance of Pastor Ernst. J. Ebert, a former member of the Missouri Synod, became its first pastor. Thus the state of Washington had two WELS churches in it, albeit there was much difference between them. This problem of distance would plague the Synod in the PNW for years to come, but was particularly a problem for young missionaries with the desire to spread the gospel to all people. Lueckel wrote about this in his tract:

In 1907 new opportunities for mission work presented themselves in Washington...the Mission Board in Wisconsin sent candidate M. Raasch to serve them...Pastor Raasch was a traveling missionary in the true sense of the word. He was a bachelor and lived in Leavenworth...Pastor Raasch’s field, however, embraced all of North Central Washington – Chelan, Douglas, Grant, and Okanogan Counties. It was an immense territory and a chronicle of those days tells about the hardships and difficulties under which the missionary served the scattered Lutheran families whom he contacted. “Anyone familiar with the topography of the State of Washington and the means of travel available at that time – those were horse and buggy days – will understand that this was a difficult field to serve.” When Raasch served Okanogan where he had contacted a few Lutheran families, he went by train from Leavenworth to Wenatchee and waited there many hours for a branch line train to take him to Okanogan 95 miles to the north. This was a trip of 120 miles from home. When he served Mansfield he again traveled to Wenatchee by train and waited for

² “Verhandlungen der fünfundvirzigsten Versammlung der Deutschen Evang.=Luth. Synode von Wisconsin u.a. Staaten gehalten zu La Crosse, WI vom 26. Juni bis 2 Juli 1895.” Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI: 1895, 55.

³ Lueckel, William. “History of the Pacific Northwest District.” Written for the Occasion of the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Organization of the Pacific Northwest District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1918-1968, 3.

⁴ Using the roads of today, which weren’t around back then, Tacoma to Yakima is about a 160 mile journey.

hours until he could travel another 75 miles to Mansfield on a combination freight and passenger train. When he went to Low gap (Grant County) he traveled 75 miles by train to Quincy where a member of his flock met him with horses and a lumber wagon and drove him 15 or 20 miles to the south over a lonely trail through sage brush country. He said that on his first trip he breathed a sigh of relief when his farmer host at last said, "In about thirty minutes we will be home." Tired and hungry the missionary was finally welcomed by the farmer's family.⁵

In 1910 the District Mission Board (DMB) called Seminary graduate, F. Stern to Mansfield as a third pastor in the PNW. Distance hindered his work as well:

Stern, too, was a traveling missionary. His trips into the Okanogan country were sometimes made with a hired horse and buggy via the Brewster Ferry over the Columbia River. Such a trip would consume the better part of a week. More often, however, he traveled by train which meant a round trip of 340 miles. But train service was frequent and reliable in those days before autos, busses, and trucks had taken over so much of the railroad's business. But sometimes even the reliable railroad failed. In the winter of the big snow the combination freight and passenger train from Wenatchee to Mansfield became snow bound at Douglas, some 18 miles from home where a wife and family were anxiously awaiting the missionary's return. Stern and a traveling salesman, whose destination also was Mansfield, borrowed a hand sled from the store keeper in Douglas on which they tied their traveling bags and then walked to Mansfield across the snow covered wheatfields, following the telegraph poles along the railroad right of way.⁶

Pastor Friedrich Soll, who was called to Grace, Yakima in 1912, recorded an anecdote in the Gemeinde=Blatt detailing how distance affected one of his trips. Normally this journey would be a 60 mile journey by taking the streets with a car, but Pastor Soll didn't own a car. As a result, he was forced to take a 120 mile trip that went from Yakima to Kennewick by train, then to Hansford by motorboat and finally to White Pass by stagecoach. He explains,

As I wanted to take the motorboat on a cool morning in Kennewick, the new pastor Fr. Reddin was also on the landing dock. After a delay, we both took the boat upstream. Because we had to remove ourselves from the speed of our boat seven miles upstream, the trip lasted about four hours until we landed in Hanford. Here we received an order to take the stagecoach to White Bluffs. Something called "Blowouts" appeared before and during the trip according to the driver, but we still made it to our destination. The conference was convened at a determined time on the first floor of the church and the general teaching and business negotiations were for another time. On Sunday evening carpenters worked and cluttered things, because the church was still not finished.⁷

⁵ Lueckel, 4-5.

⁶ Lueckel, 5.

⁷ Soll, Friedrich. "Aus der Reisepredigt im Staate Washington." Ev. Luth. Gemeinde=Blatt May, 1918, 183.. -my translation

The severe distance made things difficult for early congregations. One might think, then, that the church in Yakima, which was near a Missouri Synod church, would benefit from its close neighbor. Unfortunately, the Missouri Synod church was more of a detriment than a blessing.

(The Yakima church) had to struggle for existence from the day of its organization. Lacking a house of worship, the congregation met in the rented Sunday school rooms of a Presbyterian church and also in an Adventist church. But the antagonism of a Missouri Synod church in Yakima was an even greater hindrance to the work and the growth of the new mission. Grace Church was denounced as an "opposition church" and the situation developed into an intersynodical "case" which was not adjusted until 1912. An intersynodical committee made an investigation and ruled in favor of the Wisconsin Synod mission.⁸

In his proceedings of the 39th Biennial Convention of the Pacific Northwest District, District President Warren Widmann discusses those years:

Mission work in the Pacific Northwest was slow going but it was eventful and interesting. In several areas there were problems with the congregations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the young Wisconsin Synod group was accused of being an "opposition church". Gradually the large group accepted the smaller group and a fellowship which existed nationwide between the two Synods began to develop in the Northwest.⁹

As a result of the long distances, a feeling of isolation developed among the pastors in the PNW. There was so much distance separating the very few confessional Lutheran pastors that existed. The land itself was almost like a foreign country. Pastor Soll lamented this:

O how barren! From Kennewick or some five miles farther from Richland to Wenatchee, on a corner some 140 miles from the Columbia, there is only a Presbyterian church. It is, simply, a "Union Church" with which, whatever one tolerates at such a place is common as a shared good faith. And on the entire path is our Pastor L. Krug, the only settled Pastor, who subscribes to our Evangelical Lutheran confession.

⁸ Lueckel, 4.

⁹ Widmann, Warren L. "Proceedings of the 39th Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix V: District President's Biennial Report." WELS Synodical Reports: Pacific Northwest District. Assembled at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church/Evergreen Lutheran High School in Kent, WA, June 14-16, 1992, 26.

Overall, men with small and large families live in the wasteland. What should become of them? Heathens? There are many of these already. Should we walk past them? Maybe the feeling is too empty?—O no, here there are spiritual possibilities, yes more than spiritual realities, spiritual work and fruit.¹⁰

In spite of these conditions, Soll was elated about the progress that had taken place. On September 15th, 1912 Pastor Krug, a missionary to Portland, Oregon, had his first service in a Presbyterian church with 13 people. The congregation in White Bluffs even laid a cornerstone for a church building. Soll even proves that the distances, while a hindrance, was not impossible to overcome when he happily reports that three cars full of people came from Yakima for the groundbreaking.

From 1910-1916, the number of missionaries in the PNW fluctuated. As a result, congregations suffered many vacancies and mission work was stifled. Lueckel describes it this way:

It was difficult to get anyone but a Seminary graduate to come into the western mission field. Older and experienced men in the central States were reluctant to go to Washington which some people looked upon as the "burial ground" of the Wisconsin Synod Seminary. Graduates received their first call into the public ministry through an Assignment Committee. Then there was always the temptation for those who did come west, to accept a call to a well established congregation in the Middle West. If the missionary had a growing family, financial reasons could play a big part in reaching the decision to leave the western mission. In 1918 when World War I was at its height and the cost of living had climbed, salaries were raised to \$60.00 per month and then to \$75.00. But the missionary was obliged to furnish his own means of transportation. If his field included several missions and preaching stations he usually traveled by train. If he had well to do parents or rich "inlaws" he might venture to buy a Model T Ford on the installment plan. And, finally, when a prospective mother-in-law in Wisconsin let a bachelor missionary in the West know that he would have permission to marry her daughter when he accepted a call to Wisconsin, that could be an added temptation to leave and let someone else take over in the west.

In the light of what transpired in the Wisconsin Synod during the intervening years one is forced to conclude that missions and established congregations in Wisconsin e.g. could have survived a protracted vacancy in the ministry much better than the infant missions in the Northwest. At one time, due to sickness, death, and removal, F. Soll in Yakima and W. Lueckel were the only workers left on active duty to serve all the missions in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.¹¹

¹⁰Soll, Friedrich. "Aus der Reisepredigt im Staate Washington." Ev. Luth. Gemeinde=Blatt May, 1918, 184. —my translation

¹¹Lueckel, 8-9.

These Reports to the Synod were supposed to excite people for mission work and implore them for help. But many interpreted as a warning to stay away from the District. They saw the PNW mission work as slow and lonely and since the perception was so negative, they thought that the work in the PNW was unnecessary. Soll responded in this way:

Some have called our work unnecessary, expensive, and superfluous. We are not able to agree with that here. Was our mission here nothing more than his Christian hobby with a romantic background? A sport? A luxury? If that's true, then we could, no, we should give up. But it comes down to you dear pastors and congregation members. Come. Share in our work. Come out here, you dear pastors and congregation members, and look at our work! It will widely warm your heart and you will turn back with the decision: the sturdier ones should help the people!

One certainly could say in our community that everything is not as it should be in an old, established, Christian community. I answer: My friends, the charge is true. All kinds of trouble and ailments have happened to us. We have to fight with all kinds of difficulties. We still don't harvest much. We sow. We certainly push missions. We say to the people: the son of man has arrived, to look for and to save what was lost.¹²

Soll must have been elated when the PNW was not only given a new missionary in R. Lallemand, but in 1918 the PNW was accepted into the Synod as a new District. Soll would be elected the first president.

Struggles of a New District (1918-1928). From July 18—21 the PNW held its first official meeting. Lallemand noted in the Northwestern Lutheran that, even for such a monumental occasion as this, only “seven pastors were present and delegates from five congregations while one pastor was unable to attend on account of illness and the delegates from five congregations had been unable to leave their work during these days of strenuous activity.”¹³ It quickly became clear that simply “becoming a district” wouldn't immediately solve the

¹² Soll, Friedrich. “Aus der Reisepredigt im Staate Washington.” Ev. Luth. Gemeinde=Blatt May, 1918, 184. – my translation

¹³ Lallemand, R.C. Ave. “Meeting of the Pacific and Northwest District.” The Northwestern Lutheran, August 25, 1918, 134.

problem of isolationism. In fact, distance was one of the first problems that was addressed at that meeting:

Because of the great distances the expense account of travel to the synod is a considerable item in this district. To lighten the burden one pastor and his delegate had come a distance of over 200 miles by automobile; two other pastors with delegate came by automobile over the mountain passes where they found occasion to prove their general fitness by helping the motor mount the steeper grades through the exertion of personal push. Overnight they camped in the open, in the morning, refreshed by cold mountain water, they moved onward.

The expenses of travel this year are to be covered by collections taken up in the several congregations of the district, for the future a committee is to submit a plan for meeting this rather serious item of expense.¹⁴

The problem of vacancies also continued. Lueckel revealed that these problems were so great because of “death, the influenza epidemic, and by removals from the District: F. Epling died from a stroke...S. Probst of Kennewick...accepted the call to Northwestern college. R. Ave Lallemand, W. Hass, and G. Haase accepted calls respectively into the Minnesota, Southeastern Wisconsin, and Michigan Districts of the Synod.”¹⁵

Though missionaries were leaving, very few were replacing them. The numbers again were not growing in the PNW. Lueckel records a comment made to President Soll by a pastor friend of his from Milwaukee: “After all, Fritz, what do you have out there in Washington? I have more communicants in my one congregation than you have in your entire district.”¹⁶

Vacancies, in fact, were becoming so distressing that Pastor Soll wrote an article in the Gemeinde=Blatt in order to entice people to the PNW. The article, “The Critical Juncture of our Mission in the Pacific Northwest,” preached a bit of law. It appears that he aimed it at the entire

¹⁴ Lallemand, R.C. Ave. “Meeting of the Pacific and Northwest District.” The Northwestern Lutheran. August 25, 1918, 134-5.

¹⁵ Lueckel, 14.

¹⁶ Lueckel, 15.

Synod. Then he preached gospel with the hope that this would motivate more pastors to take calls to the district. He writes:

The caption of this article doesn't mean much. It serves to make the pastors and the like familiar with these thoughts that it won't be long before we stand on this rule: either we staff the vacant congregations of the Pacific Northwest mission or let them phase out! At best I brought each congregation the news that next Sunday a new pastor should be brought in. I would really like, when I am commissioned to be able, to say with certainty to a congregation: the commission will send you a new pastor soon.¹⁷

At one point in the article, Pastor Soll sets forth the very real possibility that if the Wisconsin Synod did not send pastors soon, it would make more sense for parishioners out in the PNW to simply create their own Synod from which they would get pastors. Soll wondered if the Wisconsin Synod was going to let the PNW mission die, because of the Old Adam's influence! Soll concludes his article:

What will happen if at some time we no longer have any missions, such that even our pastors participate in the dance of the golden calf and just like the sectarians we have a loving large congregation with every comfort, rather than doing mission work? When this fall happens, it will mean the death of our whole spiritual work, for men who forsook and embarrassed themselves to serve the great shepherd of the sheep, always wherever he wants to have them. They are then not his friends, but their example is the prophet Jonah. All mission work is both planting a seed and harvesting. We want to do both without neglect and only where God calls us to do that. But it is a tough test for us here in the Pacific Northwest that we have so many vacancies for such a long time. Now then, you dear pastors in the east, who will come out here and help us? You dear congregation members, when just your pastor, whom you would like to keep, receives a call out here, is excited about it, and even wants to accept it, don't hold him back! Let him in peace move to us. It is work of the Lord. As we ask him according to his word and promise for such a long time to send worker into his harvest, so we ask you for his sake and in his name: help us! And help us soon!¹⁸

President Soll clearly understood the struggles of vacancies. In his report on the 2nd District convention, he relays his own experiences: "it fell to the undersigned to serve the congregations at Ellensburg, Cle Elum, Kennewick, Clarkston and Palouse during the time they

¹⁷ Soll, F. "Die kritischke Lage unserer Mission im Pacific Northwest." Ev. Luth. Gemeinde=Blatt April, 1919, 136-137.

¹⁸ Soll, F. "Die kritischke Lage unserer Mission im Pacific Northwest." Ev. Luth. Gemeinde=Blatt. April, 1919, 137.

were without a pastor; this work added to his duties in his own congregation, (and) was hardly of great benefit to any of the congregations concerned, for thorough work and home and elsewhere was out of the question.”¹⁹ This information was passed on at the Synod Convention in 1920. After the representative of the PNW enumerated the seven pastors and seven places that they were specifically called to, he explains, “These indicate only the main places of our missions out there. A great number of preaching stations have been power outside of those by our missionaries. If we had only the necessary missionary and mission fields, this mission field would be doing just as well as the others.”²⁰

As the Synod work in the PNW became more widespread, another difficulty was realized. In a “Report on the Pacific Northwest Conference held at Ellensburg, WA,” the observation is made that the Wisconsin Synod simply came to the PNW too late. He wrote:

Ellensburg might have been one of the best fields in the Pacific Northwest, it might have been the hub also of our Lutheran activities in the far West, but alas! Like the great West in general, it became our mission field altogether too late. We are now picking up the crumbs where years ago we might have sat ourselves to a full table. Ellensburg has been following out the Wilsonian policy of “watchful waiting” for the past decade, watchfully waiting for Synod to give a little attention to its orphaned child. One does not know the vitality of a man until he has had to fight with death. That has been Ellensburg’s fight for these past twelve years. Those who were intimately acquainted with the field doubted not its inherent vitality and its potentialities for growth and they heartily deplored the fact that it was not even given a chance.... We have hopes to believe that this chance has now come.... We are thankful for such enthusiasm, also for the one or two conservatives who will act as a helpful brake in our new undertaking; our funds were not easily gotten and we don’t want to squander them recklessly. We will buy our future church home, praying God for understanding and applying our hearts unto wisdom.²¹

This problem was recognized by Lueckel in his tract as well:

¹⁹ Soll, F. “Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the Pacific Northwest District of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin a. o. States held in Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church at Yakima, Wash., June 23-27, 1920,” Synodal Berichte: Pacific Northwest Distrikt, 6.

²⁰ Spiering, Ad. “Synodal Bericht: Verhandlungen während der Fortsetzung der vertragten fünfzehnten Versammlung der Allgemeinen evangelisch-Lutherische Synode Von Wisconsin u. A. Staaten.: Bericht der Allgemeinen Missionskommission: Pacific Northwest.“ 33.

²¹ R.A.F., “Report on the Pacific Northwest Conference held at Ellensburg, WA.” The Northwestern Lutheran. May, 1923, 157-158.

In the early years the Wisconsin Synod had a different conception of mission work than it has today. Mission opportunities in cities like Seattle and Spokane were not exploited. The first missionaries in Washington soon saw the need and the advisability of sending a man to explore new fields in the more populous communities of the State and the wisdom of providing a chapel for his work if necessary. It took many years before the Synod saw the wisdom of such a procedure. One might concede the necessity of sending a Pastor and building a chapel in order to do mission work among the Indians. The white heathen in cities like Seattle, Spokane, and Portland did not elicit such consideration. The work of the Wisconsin Synod in the Northwest was for too many years limited to activity in smaller towns and villages. This is one reason why it is sometimes difficult to begin new missions in the larger cities of the West today, where other Lutheran Synods have already been active for 75 years. Today many old Wisconsin Synod Lutherans are members of other Synods and the sectarian churches because there was no Wisconsin Synod church to serve them when they came west.²²

Because the Reformed churches had been to the Pacific Northwest before the confessional Wisconsin Synod, their doctrine and way of doing things was ingrained into the heads of Synod members. These practices then would try to infiltrate the PNW churches through the ideas and fancies of its members. This was enough of a problem that it continued into the 1938 convention, when President Soll addressed it:

President Soll's report brought timely words of warning and encouragement to us in these days of modernistic tendencies in the Church. We were forcibly reminded that the syncretists, who throw overboard all conviction that the Lord can reveal His truth in an unmistakable way, should cause us, as true servants of Christ, to be firmly resolved to become even better acquainted with the means of grace and to give ourselves over to diligent study of the infallible Word, so that our stand be a definite one for Christ and His Church.²³

Pastor Soll addressed the problem again in his "Versammlung des Pacific Northwest Districts" which appeared in the Gemeinde=Blatt. A brief version also appeared in The Northwestern Lutheran.

Out of the five sessions, four of those were given to Director Kowalke's lecture called, "Of Christian Freedom, its Use and Misuse." Such a fundamental theme is important for a pioneer district, as we are and will be for a long time. Namely, the speaker explained his thoughts very felicitously, that each new congregation must always work with the foundation methods. However, for us the matter is not only for those young congregations, but in great measure it was

²² Lueckel 6-7.

²³ W.P.A. "Pacific Northwest District." The Northwestern Lutheran, July 31, 1938, 251-252.

for the older ones as well. Some of our members have previously never belonged to our church. Some have been won back from the Sectarians. And all have been exposed to the teachers and methods of the Reformed. People like this are here in such a great number that it easily presents the question, "How many of you are actually here?" For such people this question of the Law has been decided as with the conviction of Christ. And I ask, "Do even the best of our congregation believe in him?" Their kingdom is from this world and is bought with earthly means. These heretics don't have any understanding that the kingdom of Christ, the communion of saints, that is, the true believers, *actually* exists and that Christ rules his church only through the Gospel. Rome and the Reformed are similar in that they push aside the clear Word of God and instead hold their self chosen service for God in high esteem. How necessary and practical, therefore, is the teaching about the freedom of Christians. A teaching—a stupendous, deeply founded word, brought about by the early Martin Luther. How necessary already for us and our members here, where continually they are influencing the work in order to move us so that we make it this way or that way just like the Reformed! "No," we will say, "You have a different spirit than we do—and we know why. In this way, the Lord blessed the hour that we heard and learned what the freedom of a Christian is—its uses and its misuses. We also thank the speaker that he spoke to us from the Scriptures and confessions in such an enthralling way.

Ours is a mission district, in which fourteen active pastors work—eleven as missionaries. In this way, we are given our direction. It is the work of a collector. Through the preaching of the gospel, we call sinners to Jesus, we collect them to a congregation and look to reach out farther from them. The field is ripe for harvest, but the workers are few. From a few fields, beautiful progress has been reported, but whenever we survey the entire landscape of activity and see our small number and power, one would like to grant the question of the opponent as correct—"What do you Lutherans want? How many are you even?" Still, Jesus says, "Do not fear, you little flock, for it is our Father's good will to give you the kingdom."²⁴

We owe it to our members to fortify them against the fleshly argument of the Reformed sects; and how can they be strengthened but by the Gospel? How can we ever hope to build the Church except on the one foundation which is laid, Christ?²⁵

Despite these difficulties, the fact that the PNW was now a united district would bring about closer ties among the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in that area. Pastor Soll knew this, hence his encouragement that members of the Wisconsin Synod take these opportunities to strengthen one another in their mission. It was for this reason that Pastor Soll spoke at the 1923 PNW Conference about the importance of gathering pastors in the PNW together for a pastor's conference. R. A. F. reports:

Because not all our laymen in the West, and probably in the East also, are clear in their minds as to the real purpose of pastoral conferences, the local pastor asked Rev. F. Soll of Yakima, President of our District, to give a talk during the last session, when the congregation was especially invited,

²⁴ Soll, Friedrich A. "Versammlung des Pacific Northwest Districts." Gemeinde=Blatt, October, 1940, 326-327. —my translation

²⁵ Soll, Friederich. "Meeting of the Pacific Northwest District." The Northwestern Lutheran, October 20, 1940, 332-332.

on the subject; Why do pastors meet in conference? Rev. Soll pointed out that such meetings were necessary for the pastor's worship, their mutual edification, their scholarship, and to satisfy their natural craving for sociability.²⁶

Growing Pains (1928-1944). The excitement of becoming a part of the Wisconsin Synod as a district positively affected the PNW. In the years following, the District made great progress. On its Tenth Anniversary in 1928, there were 9 pastors and 17 congregations in the PNW and the communicant membership went from 447 to 626.²⁷ As a result, there were quite a few church dedications mentioned in 1928. Those dedications were well attended by members from other churches that came to celebrate the Lord's kindness to their brothers and sisters. Again, this may have been spurred on by the new unity found as a district. For instance, the dedication at Palouse, which had struggled to get a pastor to come on a weekly basis, had no problem bringing neighboring members for their dedication service:

Twenty-three members of the neighboring church, St. John's, Clarkston, including the choir, had come 52 miles by auto to take part in the celebration. At first services were held in a small Mormon chapel, then in the South Methodist church and finally in the spacious home of Mr. Hy. Elmer. Palouse, once a live lumber town on the Wild West order, is now a quiet and lovely country town; but it is very well situated, affording good connections by rail and auto; also it is close to Pullman, the home of the Washington State college, where usually a number of students from our churches may be found. Rev. Kirst makes the trip to Palouse every two weeks; the Sunday after Dedication he encountered a severe snowstorm.²⁸

Similarly, the dedication at Faith, Tacoma saw many members from the Synod come to join the celebration that followed a long building project, made possible only by a Synod loan.

On the evening of the last day of the conference, February 15, the chapel of Faith Mission at the southern city limits of Tacoma was dedicated by an appropriate service. The conference attended in body. Faith mission was begun by Pastor Arthur Schafer less than two years ago in the building now dedicated. A Sunday school was started with eleven members present. Soon preaching services were begun. The work gave promise of a larger future and the local Mission board made application to the Church Extension Fund to help acquire the property, consisting of two lots and a

²⁶ R.A.F., "Report on the Pacific Northwest Conference held at Ellensburg, WA." The Northwestern Lutheran, May, 1923, 157-158

²⁷ Lueckel 17.

²⁸ Soll, F. "Church Dedication at Palouse, Washington". The Northwestern Lutheran, January 22, 1928, 29.

modest church building with annex. With this loan the property has been bought and is temporarily held in trust by St. Paul's congregation until the organization is completed. Pastor Arthor Matzke, the present missionary, is hard at work organizing with as large a charter membership as possible. This is the second of three project missions in Tacoma. The beginning was made with *Hope* and after *Hope* was *Faith* launched, *Faith* was begun. For *Charity*, four lots were donated by a land company of Tacoma, which are held in trust by St. Paul's Congregation. Thus the preaching of the Gospel in old St. Paul's Church is ever reaching out in wider circles to the glory of God's holy name and the eternal blessing of immortal souls.²⁹

1928 also marked the first appearance of the PNW Convention Report in the Gemeinde=Blatt. The article, written by Soll, explained some of the difficulties that the PNW had in bringing people to church. First, he reminds of the heterodox background of many among the PNW missions:

A longer account of proceedings of the PNW district might appear to some as superfluous, for we are only a small district; yet we are still able to talk about the great deeds of God under us."Most people are unchurched. This is a blessing...but many of the non "transplants" went to churches that would be more accepting of them...Yes, we work partly under entirely different conditions than our other districts. We are able to say that all our congregations, which include independently, the mission congregations and those which we are working on, are often mission material. Certainly, some people who have migrated here come to our church without special invitation and without a diligent push. We are thankful from our heart for this blessing which we receive. But they are few. Most people who are Lutheran by name are outside of the church and indifferent such that some sectarian church has already accepted them. Since it simply needs to be a church, the acceptance of these churches pleases many. They like how they can participate in horrors and beyond that they give praises about these false churches instead of how with us they can be called to atonement.³⁰

Second, he explains that many people have a problem with the German language, but makes that case that the problem is deeper:

When we talk about the left over non-Lutheran folks, they sometimes resent our German language and that our work is not entirely German. This is again very convenient, for them, one can half heartedly hold himself to the evangelical Lutheran confession and the pure teaching under the excuse that "It is made in Germany." They do this as if the church has to do its job in nationalism, nativism, and chauvinism. They say this as if it makes a difference before God and true

²⁹ Sydow, Arthur. "Dedicate Faith Chapel in Tacoma." The Northwestern Lutheran. April 1, 1928, 109.

³⁰ J. A. Friedr. H.R. Soll "Sechste Versammlung des Pacific-Northwest-Districts." Ev. Lutherische Gemeinde Blatt. July, 1928, 226.

Christianity, if the true church and the pure Gospel hold to its origin in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Wittenberg or Milwaukee.³¹

Then, Soll again cries out for more workers:

The crop is large, but the workers are few and our headway thus far has been slow. Our work is still always foundational work...It is very easy to say: "A winning mission is one that is self sufficient in two years, at the latest: three." It is easy to judge that a pastor who has not made a mission congregation self sufficient inside of five years is not good for his office. Such ramblings show full ignorance about the relationships and about dear, poor disposition. Still it is not hard to hold to this conclusion: whoever has dwelled outside of our district for a long or short time in the east, it is our friendly suggestion that you open your heart and announce privately and publicly that this is *our* work.³²

Soll ends the article on more positively, as he notes that the PNW is still growing.

In regards to my calling here, people often advised me to stay for at least four years and then progress worth mentioning would be shown. Yet, for 8 years I saw the attendance in church, NOT GROW, but I saw the members of voting age shrink to less than were here in the beginning. These church problems would stay! Over the years, some have poured it over in their head and asked, "What makes you an outsider? Why doesn't it move forward?" Then the progress came up as a spring overnight! The church problems were wiped away, and in four years the congregation doubled in congregation members. This great step happened by itself with trust in God and it has until today held through. This is a personal example of how things work in our entire district.³³

In 1934 the complaint had changed a bit. The PNW was still lacking, but they were lacking money not workers:

Our Lord...in mercy places at our disposal a goodly number of fine, well-trained workers, eager, anxious, filled still with the fire of love, to enter into the fields white and ripe to the harvest in both church and school: and yet they are standing idle in the market place, because not sufficient funds are flowing into our mission treasury to enable us to put them to work. Sad, isn't it?³⁴

³¹ J. A. Friedr. H.R. Soll "Sechste Versammlung des Pacific-Northwest-Districts." Ev. Lutherische Gemeinde Blatt, July, 1928, 226.

³² ³² J. A. Friedr. H.R. Soll "Sechste Versammlung des Pacific-Northwest-Districts." Ev. Lutherische Gemeinde Blatt, July, 1928, 226.

³³ J. A. Friedr. H.R. Soll "Sechste Versammlung des Pacific-Northwest-Districts." Ev. Lutherische Gemeinde Blatt, July, 1928, 226.

³⁴ Schulze, W.J. "Missions" The Northwestern Lutheran, July 22, 1934, 233.

Soll also commented on lack of funding in the 1936 “Versammlung des Pacific Northwest Distrikts.”

The list also brings us to print the unfriendly fact that we still don't have a congregational school teacher and because of local reasons, we still can't have one.

That we remain mostly mission congregations is understandable. The average settler brings either enough money with or, whenever that is missing, a great family, of which the working force can replace the missing capital....The settler without any means who moves here, goes wherever the land is cheap, which is far from the majority of settlers and also is far from the church. As a result a congregation might place an impressive swarm of children, and may still not have a school, and also doesn't have the means to become self standing any time soon, for the cheap land brings very little in.³⁵

The account of the dedication of a new *Gartenhouse*, a youth group area, also shows that money was scarce for the small PNW congregations:

Since 1926 we had tried to collect a building fund, but when the depression hit us, we became stalled. In our July meeting, however, the congregation formulated a workable plan, and within a week the building operations started under the active leadership of our member S. Brockelmann. It was arranged that everything will be paid by December 1, leaving the church free of debt. The members did all the work they could do, hiring only the bricklayer, electrician and plumber. In spite of the midsummer heat (to 107 degrees) and the urgent field work our members turned out in good numbers. The Lord has blessed our enterprise. He has made us of one mind, has given us the means. No outsider has been asked for his money or help; nor is there a cent in it from dinners, suppers, socials, bazaars, sales, etc. Direct giving in an evangelical spirit will every time beat the worldly makeshift by which some churches try to keep above water. Our Lord is a Giver and not a beggar, and He says to His Church, Follow Me!³⁶

Finally, Pastor's Hoenecke's essay at the Pacific Northwest Convention of 1938 dealt with this very issue:

Pastor Hoenecke's essay, “Christian Stewardship,” proved to be clarifying on the subject. The essayist called attention to the wide scope of the word “Stewardship,” as embracing not only temporal belonging, but also every phase of the Christian's existence, physically and spiritually. He then dwelt upon the stewardship of material possessions and stressed the necessity of proper education, beginning with the young, in this matter. The essay was concluded with the reminder that we, as children of God, are accountable to Him for our stewardship of the manifold gifts which He has entrusted to our care.³⁷

³⁵ Soll, Friedrich A. “Versammlung des Pacific Northwest Distrikts.” Gemeinde=Blatt. September, 1936, 277-278.

³⁶ Soll, Friedrich A. “Dedication of a Parish House at Yakima, Wash.” The Northwestern Lutheran. October 9, 1938, 334.

³⁷ W.P.A. “Pacific Northwest District.” The Northwestern Lutheran. July 31, 1938, 251-252.

By 1939, many were aware of the problems in the PNW. Arthur Sydow also wanted to make the Midwest members of the Synod aware of the specific struggles in the next decade. He did this in the October 22nd article of The Northwestern Lutheran, "Recent Hurdles in the Pacific Northwest," by reporting on distance struggles, a shortage of pastors, worship space problems, and financial pitfalls.

It is true the Pacific Northwest is building the largest dam in the world, it has the finest stand of timber in the country, it has more potential hydroelectric power than any other section of the Union, its scenery is unexcelled, and its climate unsurpassed.

But as far as the Wisconsin Synod is concerned it has very little to boast of. It has no schools, no colleges, and no institutions of mercy. All it has is a few widely scattered congregations and mission stations. But these have the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and His Holy Sacraments pure and unadulterated. Because of this it has faith that overcomes obstacles in its path of development.

On the western slope of the cascades is a little lumber town called Snoqualmie. Interest was aroused in it by a demand for Lutheran services three years ago. For over a year these people were served by pastors from Tacoma 66 miles away. Services were held in a room of the lumber company's club house on Sunday afternoons. Very little progress was noted until a missionary was called to take up his work there exclusively. After two months activity on the part of the new missionary congregation was organized...Snoqualmie is a strategic point. Ours is the only Lutheran work in the Snoqualmie valley, a distance of forty miles.

In the cutover timber land of Western Washington is a little town called Rainier...In 1935 the undersigned took over an old abandoned Lutheran Church there. A mere handful of the original congregation remained....After some months a resident missionary was placed there.

In the little mining town of Roslyn, Washington, on the western slope of the Cascades the Word of God has been administered off and on for many years. In 1938 a group of believers got together and organized a congregation, pooled their financial resources, and bought an abandoned Mormon chapel. Not enough, they renovated it inside and out, and furnished it with church furniture. At the dedication last November all bills were paid.

(About the congregation in Rainier) They owned an old public school building that had roughly been converted into a chapel and a small cemetery...the church building was thoroughly renovated by voluntary labor, then the combination parish hall and parsonage was built, and in 1939 a chancel and sacristy were added to the church to make room for the increasing number of worshippers. Now there is a very presentable property there.

(About the Snoqualmie group) They are still worshipping in the club house. As this is proving unsatisfactory more and more, this small group recently purchased 1 and a half acres of land in a very desirable location for future building developments.

Down in Gresham, Oregon, one of our newest missions had the courage to buy lots in 1938 and in 1939 began building a much needed place of worship. All volunteer labor.

Faith Church, Tacoma, is worshipping in an old abandoned sectarian church building which was purchased some years ago for \$500.00. This summer the underpinning threatened to give way. The congregation promptly raised the building, and while they were at it improving the premises, they grasped the opportunity to make a much needed fill on the lot without cost. A convenient narthex was arranged in the tower space and the social room finished inside making it fit for use. In spite of this extra expenditure the congregation enjoys the reputation of the highest financial rating in the district.³⁸

Perhaps Sydow understood the problems in the PNW well, because his own congregation went through these struggles. In a recounting of the Snoqualmie congregation's history, E.H. Zimmermann notes that, in November of 1936, they were served by Pastor Sydow, who lived in Tacoma 66 miles away. Finally, they received a graduate in August of 1937. The next struggle for the Snoqualmie congregation was finding enough money for a place to worship:

As time went on the dire need for a proper place of worship presented itself. The congregation together with their pastor finally appealed to the mission board to find some way to make a building program possible. At the same time the undersigned drew up plans for a building, a combination church, parsonage, and parish hall, and likewise presented them to the mission board with the promise that the congregation and its pastor would erect the parsonage and the parish hall for \$3,500.00. After the proper investigation and procedure on the part of our mission board we were finally granted the permission to build. This was good news to both congregation and pastor. A \$3,400.00 loan materialized through the kind act on the part of one interested in missions, whose name I am not at liberty to mention. We were now ready to proceed with our building program. The congregation purchased a very attractive building site in Snoqualmie, Wash., for the sum of \$500. The property covers a 200 feet front on a concrete highway.

On April 16, 1940, the first shovel of earth on our building site was removed by the pastor with the prayer that the Lord graciously bless and guide us that our building program be a success. The Lord never fails His own and He most certainly did not fail us. We were able to conduct our first service in our new chapel on December 22, 1940. How fortunate for us, for on December 15 we were informed that the Community Hall where we had been conducting services would not be a suitable place for services during the strike at our local mill which was not settled until April of 1941. We no sooner finished building when we learned that a small local mill which had given us reasonable prices on all building materials had burned to the ground. How fortunate are we that the Lord guided us to build prior to this time of ever mountain prices. Through the cooperation of the congregation and its pastor who had complete charge of construction and supervision, we were able to complete our building within the bounds of \$3,500.³⁹

³⁸ Sydow, Arthur. "Recent Hurdles in the Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. October 22, 1939, 342.

³⁹ Zimmerman, E.H. "Snoqualmie." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 27, 1941, 233-234.

When Rev. Roepke of the Mission board came to the PNW Delegate Conference in 1941, he spoke about the struggle of the district, highlighting the nonchalant attitude of the people:

The Rev. Roepke, chairman of the general Mission Board, was guest. He read a practical treatise in which he outlined the "present-day problems of home mission work." Since the Pacific Northwest District is principally a mission district, this paper was especially to the point and provoked much discussion.

The essayist set forth the effect of present-day world conditions as well as local environment upon the thinking of our church members. Concerning home mission work he deplored the so-called "spiritual birth-control" of our work, and expressed the hope that more of our larger congregations would adopt an attitude of paternalism toward the small missions and toward prospective mission fields.⁴⁰

Perhaps responding to the admonition of Roepke, the conference continued:

Many practical matters, both concerning local problems as well as those of Synod, received attention. There was a recounting of blessings received, and a frank admission of mistakes made...to conserve and properly use our man-power, two mission fields were amalgamated.⁴¹

The mileage, money, and manpower problems continued. A report on the Big Bend Parish in 1942 described these problems:

Our Wisconsin Synod has maintained the preaching of the Gospel in this Big Bend Country since 1907, beginning first at Mansfield....Throughout most of these years the pastor has resided at Mansfield. At times, however, the territory was served by the Pastor from Leavenworth, 75 miles away.

The questions that will naturally arise, as we consider the rather disheartening picture here presented, is, "Why does our Synod continue to support such an unpromising field?" Two solutions are possible. One, that we be practical, humanly speaking, withdraw pastoral activity, and use our manpower and money in places where there is more hope of visible success. The other, that we recognize the fact that there are certain places which perhaps will never reach the point of being self-sustaining and will always have to depend on our synod for support. The latter proposition is not outside the bounds of Christian love.

The Big bend parish, however, is not lacking in spiritual life. In this country of great distances, poor roads and severe winters, it is only at the expense of personal effort and sacrifice above ordinary that services and Christian instruction can be maintained at all. And the members are fully aware of all they are receiving from our Synod and are not as lack in appreciation and

⁴⁰ Wiechmann, H.H. "Report of the Pacific Northwest Delegate Conference." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 27, 1941, 234.

⁴¹ Wiechmann, H.H. "Report of the Pacific Northwest Delegate Conference." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 27, 1941, 234.

gratitude. It is their hope that neither a materialistic attitude nor present day economies will bring it about that their souls go hungry for much needed spiritual food.⁴²

Distance was a problem for a new mission in Central, Washington:

In the Hanford=Richland Area in Central Washington the Mission Board placed Pastor G. A. Sydow, who has been conducting services at Hanford since July attracting ever larger attendance. Since no residence for the pastor has been found in the area he has taken up temporary residence in Yakima, 65 miles from his field of labor.⁴³

Finally, due to an unforeseen evacuation of military workers and the continued lack of missionaries, two missions were closed in 1944.

In the spring of 1943 the village of White bluffs, Washington, has been evacuated for military purposes and our mission, which was organized and served during its entire existence by Pastor L. C. Krug, now retired, has been liquidated.

Due to the fact that the Pacific Northwest District has no general missionary, nor any available foot-loose worker, the work in the Hanford Military Area had to be suspended for the time being. Whether the opportunity to take up the work there in the future will present itself is highly problematical.⁴⁴

Despite all these problems in these years of growth, the PNW was again grateful to their God for all the blessings he had bestowed upon their district. T. R. Adascheck wrote in the Gemeinde=Blatt, "With a short look back to the two past years in our Pacific Northwest District, we can do no differently, then think back with praise and thanks to the benevolent God, that he has been with us and that we should be allowed to experience his gracious rule."⁴⁵

⁴² Sydow, Gilbert A. "Our Big Bend Parish." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 26, 1942, 230-231.

⁴³ Sydow, Arthur. "Pacific Northwest District." The Northwestern Lutheran. September 19, 1943, 283.

⁴⁴ Sydow, Arthur. "Our Missions: The Pacific Northwest District." The Northwestern Lutheran. August 6, 1944, 166.

⁴⁵ Adascheck, T. R. "Pacific Nordwest Distriktsversammlung." Gemeinde=Blatt. August 27, 1944, 180.

Joyful Progress. (1945-1957). In the years following WWII, the PNW district was blessed with joyous occasion after joyous occasion. A new mission in Spokane reported difficulties in the past, but great progress by 1945:

Special attention was given North hill district of Spokane. This district has a population of about 15,000. Since this district was not served by a Lutheran church it was chosen as a good mission field. It is separated from other districts by a bluff and a gulch. An old abandoned store building was rented, chairs bought, and an altar and a pulpit built by the pastor....The work was hampered by the lack of a real church home. Two Sunday schools were conducted with an ever increasing number of children. At an early date in its existence the congregation began to acquire materials with which to build a church edifice. It has now on hand most of the critical material and all the dimensions of lumber necessary for the contemplated church. Three lots were acquired in the spring of 1945 and permission to build has been granted....the summer school this year has an enrollment of 53 and an average attendance of 51. The congregation has 28 communicant members and 80 souls. Trinity is the pioneer Wisconsin Synod Church in Spokane, the capitol of the Inland empire. We invoke God's blessing!⁴⁶

In 1947, Grace in Zillah dedicated a church building and the Seattle mission area dedicated its first chapel. The March 2nd edition of The Northwestern Lutheran reports on the mission activity in that city:

Up till now services had to be conducted in a home which served as parsonage and chapel. For the past four years, shortly after the organization of the mission, the congregation desired to build a permanent place of worship with the aid of a loan granted from the Church Extension Fund. Due to conditions and circumstances created by the war, this was, however, not possible. Immediately after the close of the carnage, the appointed building committee of the mission secured plans for an appropriate church edifice for our conditions...The skeleton of the structure was barely erected when the Civilian Production Administration notified us that work had to be discontinued, since we would be exceeding certain government regulations. After explaining to the civic board that the members were doing all the work and there was no labor cost involved, we were again permitted to proceed with the work. Untiringly the member and friends of the mission devoted their weekends and evenings to the task of making out of a barrack, a temporarily suitable, serviceable, and churchly edifice. And well did they succeed without a great indebtedness.⁴⁷

The joyful news continued. In the July 26 edition of the Gemeinde=Blatt, E.F Kirst reports that in the PNW:

⁴⁶ Sydow, Arthur. "Our Mission Fields: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 22, 1945, 152.

⁴⁷ Stern, F.E. "Chapel Dedication at Seattle, Washington." The Northwestern Lutheran. March 2, 1947, 76-77.

Missions were the main thing. The conference gave this enough time... God's blessing was praised and we were encouraged not to make ourselves casual in order that we could get to the mission prayer through this progress. Joyful progress has occurred in the following fields: Trinity, Omak and Withrow Lutheran are self sufficient! In Snoqualmie a congregation school has opened! Trinity, Spokane built a new church! Grace, Seattle has acquired a property and built a chapel! Good Faith, Cle Elum bought a church and parsonage. Withrow Lutheran, Withrow and Grace, Zillah stand ready to build a new church!⁴⁸

Shadle Park, Spokane, WA is another example of a Wisconsin Synod mission field that the Lord richly blessed. In an article about the church's history, K. L. White tells about the change in worshipers from their first service "with one adult and 16 Sunday School children in attendance," to the service of dedication for their new chapel just one year with "33 communicant members and 55 enrolled in Sunday School." White writes:

The Lord has blessed the activities of our small mission. On behalf of the Shadle Park congregation, we give thanks to God and express our thanks to the Wisconsin Synod for having brought us the Gospel. Synod's business guidance and financial assistance has the heartfelt appreciation of every one of our members. May our blessings continue in the true knowledge of the Triune God, building a firm foundation for our house of worship.⁴⁹

In a 1951 article, George Frey told about the impressive mission work in the Yakima Valley. Zilla, which started in 1940, had grown to 54 members. Perhaps most impressive is the work in Yakima itself. When Western Yakima was identified as a place for a new mission, Grace quickly sprang into action, sending 17 families from Grace to help start up the new church. The Synod also generously supported the new congregation. This support and the fact that Pastor T. R. Adascheck could travel to this mission spot in a short amount of time made for quick growth. The LORD blessed the mission with 70 souls. With so many more people moving to the beautiful Yakima Valley, Frey spoke positively, "While indications based only on human

⁴⁸ Kirst, E.F. "Pacific Northwest Delegatenkonferenz." Gemeinde=Blatt. July 26, 1947, 230.

⁴⁹ White, K.L. "Shadle Park Ev. Lutheran church, Spokane, WA." The Northwestern Lutheran. August 27, 1950, 277-278.

considerations give excellent promise of wonderful mission opportunities in this area, we base our hopes on the power of God's Word adding to His church daily such as should be saved."⁵⁰

The Crisis (1957-1959). For years in the PNW, there had been tension between the Missouri Synod churches and the Wisconsin Synod missions. Missouri thought that Wisconsin was closing in on their territory. As tensions rose because of fellowship practices for the Synod as a whole, so did tensions between the pastors in the PNW. Some were disgusted with Missouri's action, while others remained optimistic that a schism could be avoided. Taking a look at what had transpired nationally, the PNW District Convention came to these conclusions as a whole:

The first reaction of many of us to this report of our Church Union Committee was hopeful and optimistic. However, the more we studied and discussed the St. Paul resolutions of The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, the less reason for rejoicing we could find in them, because they seemed to us to be mainly negative.

In the end, the PNW convention voted to reject the recommendation of the Church Union Committee to break fellowship with Missouri. Instead, they approved the substance of the minority report prepared and presented by President M. J. Witt. Why did they take this approach? According to Albrecht, it was a difficult decision, but one that may have to do with the distance of the district. The PNW convention felt that it was so far away from the actions themselves to make critical judgments. As a result, they felt uncomfortable in making hasty judgment and chose to think positively of all Missouri's actions.

After lengthy and serious discussion, in which Prof. G. Hoenecke and vice-President I. Habeck, representing the Church Union committee took an active part, this writer would analyze the situation only in this way: The consideration that moved the majority of our church union Committee to find grounds for optimism in certain Missouri Synod resolutions was the spirit of humility and the conciliatory attitude which they sensed at the St. Paul convention. Not having been there, it is impossible for us to evaluate such an intangible, genuine and sincere though it may have been. We could base our judgment only upon the resolutions, and there we could find no indication of a change of heart. Being a small District far from the geographical center of the

⁵⁰ Frey, George. "Mission Work in the Yakima Valley." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 29, 1951, 236.

Synod, we must get along with a minimum of direct contact and participation in Synodical affairs, but perhaps it is also possible that the separation of distance gives us some small advantage in looking at the situation objectively. That is what we attempted to do in sincerity and in the fear and love of God.⁵¹

At the 1957 Convention of the Wisconsin Synod, the Synod decided not to sever fellowship with Missouri but only to practice a “vigorously protesting fellowship.” Shortly after the announcement of this decision, at the PNW Pastoral Conference the District president M. Witt resigned from office. His successor, G. Sydow, soon did the same. Beyond this three more pastors in Spokane and the pastor in Clarkston, together with their churches, withdrew from the Synod.⁵²

In his opening report, President Elmer Zimmermann struck a note of sorrow which recurred often throughout the convention, when he noted the fact that five pastors and six congregations have withdrawn from our district since the 1957 New Ulm Convention.

The District nevertheless voiced a protest against the continued practice of fellowship with the Missouri synod once again. It adopted a report which in essence stated the conviction that the Synod should have broken fellowship with the Missouri Synod last year in New Ulm, and that the present discussions should be carried on according to the principles of II Thessalonians 3:14, 15, viz., as a final stage of brotherly admonition, during which the normal practice of fellowship with the offender is suspended. It was made clear, however, that the District does not mean this protest as a charge of sin or doctrinal error against the Synod, but only as the statement of our conviction as to which Scriptural principle should be guiding our Synod at the present time.⁵³

Though there were many blows to the district at the end of this crisis, the PNW focused on its blessings in publication. It spoke of the challenges overcome by Faith, Tacoma in the building of its chapel:

Faith is not a new mission. Its growth, however, has been hampered by its own peculiar set of circumstances, among which were an old shabby building and a very poor location. These two hindrances have been rectified by our recent building and relocation project made possible by our Synod's church Extension Fund... This project has brought us rich blessings. Not only do we have a beautiful building in a good location, but the effort has knit our congregation into a good harmonious family. Friendships were fostered and deepened; new members became better

⁵¹ Albrecht, G. Jerome “Pacific Northwest District Convention.” The Northwestern Lutheran. September 2, 1956, 281-282.

⁵² Lueckel, 20.

⁵³ Haag, G. “Pacific Northwest District Convention.” The Northwestern Lutheran. August 31, 1958, 283.

acquainted by working together with their brethren; interest in church affairs increased, not only among our members, but also among their friends. These are by no means the least of the blessings of a building program dedicated to Him from whom all blessings flow.⁵⁴

Another article spoke of the work in Eugene, OR. It describes the common problems to a PNW mission: isolation because of distance, the uncaring attitude of the people, and the church's need for a new place of worship:

In spite of the excellent prospects of which we have written, the congregation in Eugene scarcely exceeds 50 souls in number after six years of work. A number of circumstances contribute to the slowness of the mission's growth. In the first place, this is an outpost of the Wisconsin Synod, the closest neighboring congregations being the two in Portland, 120 miles north. There is no congregation of the Wisconsin Synod within 1,000 miles to the south or the east, although a missionary is being called to the San Francisco area. Consequently, few new members are received by means of transfer from sister congregations. The principal source of growth is the confirmation of adults. A recent nation-wide survey revealed that the State of Oregon had a larger percentage of unchurched people than any other state. This is an indication of the great need for mission work in Oregon, but at the same time it is an indication of the general apathy and lack of interest in spiritual values with which we must contend.

Another difficulty is the kind of transient population that is common to areas experiencing very rapid growth. Of the original members of Trinity Congregation no one remains with us. Some have moved away, while others have attached themselves to churches with more comfortable facilities and a more elastic message.

Without a doubt the greatest handicap to our work in Eugene is the fact that the congregation has been worshipping in public-school multi-purpose rooms for over six years. In preparation for each service it is necessary to check the furnace, set the church sign outside the school entrance, improvise a "chancel" by lowering sections of a hinged platform from the wall, bring in hymnals, altar appointments, lectern, and piano, and set up folding chairs. A school lunch table must serve as the altar. Depending upon the season of the year, the room may be decorated with witches and jack-o-lanterns, valentines, Easter bunnies, and the like.

Needless to say, these "temporary" facilities do not provide an inviting, churchly appearance or atmosphere, and the skepticism of the unchurched of the community grows with the months and the years. With dozens of other churches and about a dozen Lutheran churches of other synods in the general area, few unchurched are much interested in becoming acquainted with the spiritual benefits offered by a small, struggling congregation with no place of worship to call its own and no idea when it will be able to build one. The majority will naturally sit back and wait, at best. By the time you read this, the rental of these "temporary" facilities will have cost the Synod almost \$3,000. Although still reasonable, the rental cost per service is now more than double the original figure.

So far the Church Extension Fund has not been able to grant a loan for the construction of a chapel in Eugene. The limited funds available simply did not reach. There were other mission stations where the needs were equally great or more urgent or of longer standing. Under the circumstances,

⁵⁴ Nitz, Paul E. "Among the Blessings of the C.E.F. Faith Lutheran Chapel, Tacoma, Washington." The Northwestern Lutheran. September 30, 1956, 312.

Trinity Congregation can only continue applying for a C.E.F. loan until the funds finally can be made available. The length of the time involved will depend upon the support given to the C.E.F. throughout the Synod. Meanwhile we can continue to preach the Word, to pray, and to plan, being encouraged by reports of the immediate benefits experienced by other mission congregations just beginning to use long-needed places of worship. May god graciously speed the day when we can report such visible blessings from the outpost in Eugene, Oregon!⁵⁵

The split of the Protestants did make its presence felt in other congregations that did not leave the district. Paul Nitz reported that “since an opposition group has begun services in Tigard, Oregon, where Pastor Julius young had done groundwork, and in view of the manpower shortage in the Synod, the District board for Home missions reluctantly decided to table calling a man for this West Portland field after the latest call was returned.”⁵⁶

In the January 31, 1960 edition of The Northwestern Lutheran, it is recorded that Grace in Portland, OR celebrated its 50th anniversary in the past year. Despite its many struggles, one can't help but notice that the struggle that received the most attention is the difficulty the church faced from a nearby Missouri Synod Church. Was Wisconsin championing its victory in that region?

Its purpose and its very right to exist were challenged from the very beginning, and most of its 50 years reads like the story of a well-planned “obstacle course” for churches. The services were moved from place to place, the first pastors remained but a short time, and by 1918 the congregation seriously considered disbanding, but a resolution to do so was defeated.

A turning point came in 1919 when the Rev. Carl H. Bernhard was called as pastor, the congregation became self-supporting, and in the fall of that year purchased its present church plant from the Universalists for \$11,000, dedicating it to the service of the Triune God in January of the following year. However, the congregation's severest trial was yet to come. Troubles developed which led to the exclusion of the congregation from its synod. In 1929 it was accepted into the Pacific Northwest District of the Wisconsin Synod, but it took another 20 years before “the Portland Case,” an intersynodical matter, was settled.

Though external peace was a rarity to this flock through all these years, the precious Gospel was being preached in its midst nevertheless, bringing God's peace in Christ to many souls...Scarred by the many battles of its troubled history, and yet surviving and even thriving, the congregation

⁵⁵ Albrecht, Jerome G. “News from our Missions: Eugene, Oregon.” The Northwestern Lutheran. March 29, 1959, 103-104.

⁵⁶ Nitz, Paul E. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest Changes in the Field.” The Northwestern Lutheran. December 6, 1959, 391.

deeply feels and readily acknowledges the only possible explanation: "The grace of God was upon us."⁵⁷

Because the split from Missouri didn't happen sooner, the PNW suffered. Lueckel makes a case that no other district was affected more by the split than the PNW:

No District felt the effect of this crisis as keenly as the Pacific Northwest District. In rapid succession this smallest Synodical District had lost about one third of its pastors and the churches which they served. In the Spokane area where the Wisconsin Synod was at long last fostering four mission churches and where church Extension Fund loans had built churches and parsonages, all mission work as far as the Pacific Northwest District was concerned came to an abrupt stop.⁵⁸

Building Buildings (1960-1967). In the years following, the PNW district grew and grew. One of the biggest challenges this year was the need for worship facilities. But as the reports indicate, the district, armed with C.E.F. dollars, was up to the task.

On April 10, 1960, a new church was dedicated in Bellevue, Washington. Thomas Henning reported that "the congregation looks forward to the use of its newly completed building."⁵⁹ This was the first place that the congregation could call its own. They were also excited about their new parsonage. Since the Northwestern Lutheran would be read by so many pastors not in the Pacific Northwest, one wonders if the description of amenities is provided to encourage any future call candidates to consider taking a call to Bellevue. "The house is comfortably built. It has three bedrooms, a study, a kitchen family room, and a living room. The congregation prays that the Lord will ever grant his blessing to those who live in this parsonage

⁵⁷ Sabrowsky, Lee. "Fiftieth Anniversary: Grace Lutheran Congregation Portland, Oregon." The Northwestern Lutheran. January 31, 1960, 39.

⁵⁸ Lueckel, 21.

⁵⁹ Nitz, Paul E. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. January 29, 1961, 167.

and who will in the future live there that they may bring the pure message of salvation to those who are without hope in the world.⁶⁰

With funds flowing more freely than before, a report in the February 28, 1960 edition of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, joyously details the many building projects in the Pacific Northwest:

Some of our missions which have been, and are, hampered by inadequate facilities are eagerly looking forward to alleviation of their various needs. The chapel project of Trinity, Eugene, Oregon, which was placed on the priority list of Synod's Church Extension fund, is gaining impetus. Modest chapel plans are being presently considered. Since construction of its parsonage-chapel was authorized before the end of last year, Calvary, Lake Hills (Seattle), was granted an extension for its use of a public school for worship services. Construction of the well-planned unit has reached the half way point. After beautifying its chapel by installing a new tile floor, Grace of Zillah, Washington, has turned its attention to house plans to furnish adequate quarters for its pastor. Woodland Park Congregation, Portland, Oregon, is not allowing itself much rest after completing its parsonage. The members are busily engaged in preparing preliminary plans for application of a chapel loan to replace their present place of worship, a small, remodeled house. Now these mission congregations are awaiting the fulfillment of fond hopes. Grace of Yakima, Washington, our largest self-supporting congregation, is taking giant strides toward a major relocation project. Concerted efforts of members and pastor in reaching their building fund goal have brought them to the point where they plan to break ground shortly for a \$120,000.00 church school unit. A parsonage will be built on their new property when the present church, school, and parsonage are sold.⁶¹

In this article, Pastor Paul Nitz also makes note of that fact that the difficulty in distance, while still a factor, is lessening. He joyously spreads the word that the first ever pastoral study group had gathered:

Building of another nature has also been going on in our midst. The district's first missionary conference, held at Zillah, January 19 and 20, was a great help in sending our pastors back to their fields with added knowledge and renewed zeal. Another "first" occurred January 9, when a combined pastoral study club met in Tacoma. This group, consisting of three Seattle area pastors and of four pastors in Tacoma, (including two Evangelical Lutheran Synod pastors), plans to meet every three months for mutual study.⁶²

⁶⁰ Nitz, Paul E. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." *The Northwestern Lutheran*. January 29, 1961, 169.

⁶¹ Nitz, Paul E. "Direct from Our Districts: Pacific Northwest Progress Report." *The Northwestern Lutheran*. February 28, 1960, 76.

⁶² Nitz, Paul E. "Direct from Our Districts: Pacific Northwest Progress Report." *The Northwestern Lutheran*. February 28, 1960, 76.

In one article, A.H. Zimmermann comments on this new drive that has overcome the district. He says that “(It is) apparent...the renewed eagerness and zeal for reaching and gaining the unchurched in our midst. Discussions regarding the opening of new missions and various methods and means of gaining the unchurched took up a great deal of time during the sessions and also outside the regular sessions.”⁶³ In another article, he comments on the trend he sees as a result of this zeal:

A wholesome trend has developed in our district, namely, that more and more emphasis is being placed on the winning of adults from among the unchurched. From scattered reports it is evident the missionaries of our District are conducting more and bigger adult classes than ever before. This trend is also evident in the growing interest within the District toward the work of the Board for Information and Stewardship and the commission on Evangelism. After years of dawdling and even a degree of indifference toward this vital phase of the Church’s work, this new and wholesome trend is gaining in strength day by day. It is only a trend now, yet it is a beginning. We in all the District ask the prayers of all of you, so that the work of reaching the precious souls of the unchurched in our midst may be pursued with all diligence and zeal.⁶⁴

This new zeal was needed, because the lethargic perspective on religion was still a main part of the PNW spirit. A new mission in Eugene, OR dealt with this firsthand:

Some general characteristics of the population might also seem to advise against our working out here. The people are mobile. Most of those who live here were not born here, and many of them will not be living here a year or two from now. This helps to explain the fact that there is a very casual attitude toward church membership. The percentage of people who even *claim* membership in a church is lower than anywhere else in the United States. Here it is considered normal *not* to go to church, and the family that attends regularly is looked upon as something of an oddity. The White Water Parade down the McKenzie River east of Eugene, which began at 10:00 A.M. on Palm Sunday, attracted an estimated 25,000 spectators. That same morning our church service attracted exactly 27 worshipers.⁶⁵

Funding for the churches was a problem as well, but the Synod responded in a big way. In a “Home Missions Progress Report” of 1962, the Board for Home Missions made it clear that

⁶³ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran. June 4, 1961, 184.

⁶⁴ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran. November 19, 1961, 374.

⁶⁵ Albrecht, G. Jerome. “Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Eugene, OR.” The Northwestern Lutheran. May 19, 1963, 151.

they were going to try and start a “12 missions per year” plan. They were attempting this because the Synod had the fields, the men, and the funds through the newly adopted C.E.F. program.⁶⁶

This was good news for Eugene, Oregon. In July of 1961, it was reported that they had “received permission to begin construction of their chapel. This mission had been forced to worship in a rented schoolroom for over five years. Pastor Albrecht and his congregation are eagerly looking forward to the completion of this vital part of a mission plant. They are confident it will be a great aid to their mission endeavors.”⁶⁷ Reports of the chapel’s completion are found in the September 9, 1962 edition of The Northwestern Lutheran.⁶⁸

Pastor Habben was called in 1961 to Tigard, Oregon, the same place that the Wisconsin Synod had pulled out of due to opposition in 1959. One year later, his mission group organized into a congregation. Gethsemane Lutheran Church had 32 communicants, 15 voting members and 32 children in Sunday school.⁶⁹ In May of 1963, the congregation struggled to speed up its building of a new church because they had “been notified that its present place of worship, an old clubhouse, (had) been condemned by the state fire marshal and must be vacated by June 1.”⁷⁰ Again the C.E.F. came to the rescue and on September 8 the church was dedicated.⁷¹

It was at this time of building prosperity that Lutheran Elementary schools became more common. An article at the beginning of the school year, reports the numbers:

⁶⁶ Wiechmann, R. L. “Home Mission Progress Report: Mission-A-Mission Plan---C.E.F.” The Northwestern Lutheran, September 9, 1962, 277-278.

⁶⁷ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran, July 16, 1961, 236.

⁶⁸ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran, September 9, 1962, 283.

⁶⁹ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran, February 11, 1962, 42.

⁷⁰ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran, May 19, 1963, 157.

⁷¹ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran, September 3, 347.

The three Christian day schools in our District opened with a combined enrollment of 143. The oldest and largest school at Grace Lutheran Church in Yakima, Washington, enrolled 102, with 45 in the grades and 57 in two kindergarten sessions....Faith Lutheran School in Tacoma, Washington, enrolled 21 with one teacher and the Salem Lutheran School in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, enrolled 20 with one teacher.⁷²

Mission work was flourishing. In fact, it was going so well, that there was another shortage of workers in the District.

For a number of years the Lord has blessed our little District in this way, too, that there were few vacancies. At the present time, however, we have three pastoral and one teacher vacancy. Grace of Zillah, Washington, has been without its own pastor for nine months. Just recently Pastor Henning of Calvary in Bellevue, Washington, accepted a call to St. Paul's in New Ulm, Minnesota. Pastor Steffenhagen of Withrow, Washington, has also accepted a call to begin a mission in Spokane, Washington. The teacher vacancy is at Salem in Mountlake Terrace, Washington.⁷³

This problem did not last long. One year later, Zimmermann writes, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for He is good." So might we of the Pacific northwest District pray at this time. Once again in His love and mercy the Lord has given our District workers in all our fields. On April 8 Pastor Walter Lindke was installed at Grace Lutheran Church in Zillah, Washington. The mission was vacant for nearly one year."⁷⁴ In fact, the surplus was so great that a missionary was called to begin a new field in Spokane. Pastor Lee Sabrowsky spoke about this at the 1962 convention. He was thankful that "in these days when there are not nearly enough pastors and teachers to meet the needs of our Synod, our District, so small and so far removed from the center of Synod, should have every pulpit and every classroom supplied with workers."⁷⁵ In

⁷² Zimmermann, A.H. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. October 21, 1962, 382.

⁷³ Zimmermann, A.H. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. March 25, 1962, 91.

⁷⁴ Zimmermann, A.H. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. June 17, 1962, 182.

⁷⁵ Frey, G. "Pacific Northwest District Convention." The Northwestern Lutheran. December 2, 1962, 380.

conclusion, Sabrowsky challenged the district that “we with renewed zeal and devotion apply ourselves to the tasks which the Lord has placed before us and that we continue to search out and evaluate new areas which present the greatest promise for future missions, and that these be brought to the attention of our General Mission Board.”⁷⁶

With this in mind, the District began work in a new field by February of 1963. Due to the Synod wide struggle with manpower issues, they were not supplied a new missionary for the field. The District went ahead with the mission any way:

For many years the District Mission Board has recognized the urgent need of establishing a mission of the Wisconsin Synod in this area of Seattle. Not only were many Wisconsin Synod members moving into this area and then drifting away to other churches, but the area also has a vast mission potential. Upwards of 100,000 people live within six or eight miles of this mission. The closest Wisconsin Synod church is 18 miles away in North Seattle.

In May 1962, permission was granted by the General board for home Missions to begin services in south Seattle. However, because of the great shortage of manpower within the Synod, the condition was attached that the work had to be done with local manpower.

As a result, the DMB called Pastor Zimmerman from grace in North Seattle. Again, the manpower issue was somewhat of a problem:

In spite of the many difficulties, such as the early hour of services made necessary by having a part-time pastor and the use of rented quarters and the lack of time to do the work necessary in building a mission properly, the Lord has richly blessed this new mission. He has brought about 20 communicants together and about 45 souls...It is now our prayer that the Lord may see fit to send Holy Trinity a full-time pastor and to give this new congregation its own property and church.⁷⁷

As the District continued its “boom”, the biggest challenge was the need for facilities. There were struggles in Cle Elum: “The old hall that was used for the services is beyond repair, and plans are being made to supply this mission with an adequate place for worship,” and in Spokane:

⁷⁶ Frey, G. “Pacific Northwest District Convention.” The Northwestern Lutheran. December 2, 1962, 380.

⁷⁷ Zimmermann, A.H. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran. February 24, 1963, 59.

The new mission in Spokane has been hindered because no suitable place has been found in which to hold services. Pastor W. Steffenhagen has been conducting services in his living room, but this hardly satisfactory. He now reports that a vacant store may have to serve as temporary place of worship until a chapel can be built. We pray that the Church Extension Fund may soon be able to supply all our missions with adequate facilities.⁷⁸

Both of these needs would be met in the coming years, as well as, the need for a new chapel in Portland, OR:

The work of Bethesda, Portland, is being blessed with new fruits following its move to a new chapel...since the first of this year 14 adults have been received into communicant membership and two children have been confirmed. Also, many parents are bringing their children to be baptized, and new faces are continually appearing in Sunday School. Dropouts and rapid turnover of membership, however, continue to be problems at Bethesda. Pastor and members continue to work and pray for a deepening and stabilization in the congregation's life. It is evident again in his report from Bethesda congregation that an adequate place of worship is a great help in carrying out the Lord's command to "make disciples of all nations."⁷⁹

At the 1965 Spring Pastoral Conference of the Pacific Northwest District, Zimmermann noted that "it is evident from this report that the Lord has continued to bless our District, not only with faithful workers, but also with more and better facilities and, above all, with a gratifying increase in communicant membership."⁸⁰ As if to make this point emphatic, he reports that Calvary in Bellevue, WA dedicated its new church to God's glory on May 2 and Grace, Seattle, WA dedicated its new church on May 16th. Zimmermann had more good news, as all the vacancies in the district had been filled. This even included the vacancy at Trinity in Eugene, OR, which had been called unsuccessfully 15 times.

Unification and New Horizons (1968-1980). In the district's 50th anniversary, Zimmermann preached a sermon on Psalm 34:3 with the theme "O magnify the Lord with me,

⁷⁸ Zimmermann, A.H. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. May 19, 1963, 157.

⁷⁹ Zimmermann, A.H. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. July 12, 1964, 224-225.

⁸⁰ Zimmermann, A.H. "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." The Northwestern Lutheran. June 27, 1965, 202.

and Let us Exalt His Name Together.” In his sermon, Zimmermann, reflected on the Lord’s undeserved grace and loving compassion upon the congregations and pastors of the Pacific Northwest district, not so much in regard to numerical growth, but,

for the manner in which He with His pure Word, under adverse circumstances, at first cared for the spiritual needs of the many Lutherans scattered over the less populated areas of the Pacific Northwest, and, in recent years for broadening the scope of his gospel proclamation to include the metropolitan areas where many more lost souls have been brought to treasure their Savior above everything else in life. God preserved the District through many a crisis, even when about a third of its pastors and congregations were lost during the Synodical problems of a decade ago. It was also emphasized that the Lord, by preserving His Church has not only proven his abiding faithfulness to His own, but, is preserving it for the purpose of reaching out, as never before, with the precious Word of Life in the rapidly growing industrial areas of the Pacific Northwest which are fields white unto harvest.⁸¹

In light of the 50th Anniversary celebration and with the Synod in good financial shape, the PNW started new missions in Bremerton and Kennewick, WA, in Bend, OR.⁸² Besides these new missions, many other missions were reaching milestones. Warren Widmann, the District President at this time, wrote about the struggles and victories of mission work in Oregon:

At the end of the 1950’s, there was one self-supporting congregation and two struggling missions fighting for survival in the whole state. The self supporting congregation and one mission were in Portland, and the other mission was in Eugene some 100 miles to the south. Since 1960, however, this situation has changed greatly as mission work in Oregon has moved forward with firm, steady strides.

In the 1960’s and early 1970’s, the two struggling missions have become well established and are moving steadily toward self-support; two missions were opened in Tigard and Bend and are already self-supporting congregations; and two other new missions have been opened and are in various stages of development. In addition, preliminary surveys have been made in other parts of Oregon with the hope of opening missions in one or more of those areas in the future.

Bethesda (of Portland) had its beginnings in the mid 1950’s but grew slowly during its early years. Growth was hampered by its location in an area which became mostly commercial. Later it suffered the pains of a lengthy relocation program. Since the relocation in the early 1960’s Bethesda has grown much more rapidly and by the end of 1971 numbered 111 communicants and 176 souls. The main question of finances which comes up in Bethesda congregational meetings

⁸¹ Pankow, Paul. “Let Us Exalt His Name Together. Pacific Northwest Convention—June 25-27, 1968.” The Northwestern Lutheran. September 15, 1968, 302-303.

⁸² Teske, M.F. “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran. April 12, 1970, 131.

these days is, "when can we assume the responsibility of self-support?" the answer "Now," will likely come within the next year or two.

Trinity of Eugene has a history similar to that of Bethesda. It also was begun in the mid 1950's and experienced slow growth for the first few years because of a number of problems which often plague new missions. In recent years Trinity has stabilized and has grown steadily. The congregation recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of the dedication of its church building, and is looking forward to the day when it too can become a self-supporting congregation; an event which the congregation hopes will become a reality in 1974.

July 30, 1972, was a date which for Immanuel of Salem brought to fulfillment a dream which began in 1966. In June of that year, the Pacific Northwest District Mission Board sent its newly called District missionary to begin work in Salem, the capitol city of Oregon, located halfway between Portland and Eugene.

The District missionary began his work in Salem with a nucleus of Wisconsin Synod people. Twenty-six were present at the first service. The first year of work in Salem produced good results as a number of other Lutherans who were unhappy with the liberal trends in their church joined our growing nucleus.

Less than a year after the first service was held the congregation organized, purchased land, received permission to call its own pastor, and saw the district missionary move to a new field because his work in Salem was finished. A series of setbacks then beset the young congregation. There was a lengthy vacancy before its first permanent pastor was ordained and installed, and growth was also hindered by location and building problems.

All of these factors are now past history. On July 30, 1972, a new house of worship was dedicated to the work of the Lord. The congregation is now looking at new goals, namely, to win souls for Christ in the area in which its beautiful new house of worship is located, and to bring this new mission to the goal of all new missions – self support.⁸³

In a similar article, Pastor Paul Pankow discusses the struggles Washington missions had in the past years:

Some 60 years ago the Lord moved our Synod to lengthen its cords to the Pacific Northwest... These pastors faced the difficulty of long trips to minister to these widely scattered Christians. The small congregations worshiped in private homes and public buildings. Some congregations did not endure. But God blessed these humble beginnings so that we now have self-supporting congregations in Omak, Withrow, Yakima, and Zillah. A few are still receiving synod assistance, such as the joint-parish, Good Hope in Ellensburg and Good Faith in So. Cle Elum, and Redeemer in Yakima. In recent years these parishes have erected attractive worship facilities with the help of CEF loans and are making realistic strides toward the day of self-support.

In the Puget Sound area with its million and a half population, Faith was founded at Tacoma in 1930, Grace at Seattle in 1941, and Salem at Mountlake Terrace in 1951. But struggling under the limitation of worshiping in parsonages and antiquated chapels, the outreach and growth of these missions were hampered. Yet, this densely populated region beckoned us to continue opening

⁸³ Widmann, Warren. "God's Growing Church in Oregon." The Northwestern Lutheran. September 24, 1972, 322-323.

fields. Calvary was established in Bellevue, East of Seattle, in 1958. Holy Trinity was founded in Kent in 1964, to bridge the gap between Seattle and Tacoma.

The following year funds were made available to Grace and Calvary for constructing their first chapels. This was a decisive factor in helping both congregations attain self-support within five years. Holy Trinity and Salem (which moved to Edmonds) later erected their church plants, and since then have evidenced a steady growth. In 1966, Divine Peace was begun in Renton. Its chapel was dedicated last year. Your Synod is now well represented in the Puget Sound region with congregations strategically placed some 15 to 20 miles apart.

Our most recent missions were established in 1969...to include the tri-cities of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland...King of Kings presently worships in a storefront in Kennewick. Land is soon to be purchased, and the congregation looks forward to planning its permanent worship facilities. In the same year Christ the King was begun across the Puget Sound from Seattle at Bremerton...they were served for three years from a distance of 35 miles by Pastor George Frey of St. Paul's, Tacoma. Last July seminary graduate Theodore Lambert was installed as the first resident pastor.

The usual problems facing missions have confronted most of our Washington congregations: years without adequate facilities, shifting population which often cuts deeply into the numerical growth, and even severe economic recession when major industries lay off thousands of employees. Such trials, however, do not come to Christians without accompanying blessings. Faith and conviction are deepened, fervency increased. The evidence of this is seen in the readiness of our members to serve in and to support the Lord's kingdom. Many congregations have organized programs of evangelism to bear witness of their Savior to the unusually high percentage of unchurched people in the State of Washington—estimated at 70 percent of the state's population.

Valuing daily instruction in the Word for their children, some mission congregations, at great sacrifice, have begun and maintained Christian day schools. At present, Faith in Tacoma maintains a two-room school with an enrollment of 47. Salem in Edmonds has a one-room school with 27 students. In 1971, only a year after reaching self-support, Calvary in Bellevue was able to open its school to 18 pupils. The same year St. Matthew's of Spokane, under a new provision of the general board for Home Missions, began its school without synod subsidy. The present enrollment is 20. Redeemer in Yakima is privileged to send some of its children to the day school at Grace. God alone knows what strength these agencies will bring to His future Church in Washington, or for that matter, what eternal values they will hold in store for the children of our mission congregations.⁸⁴

The District also made its way into new horizons at this time. They entered Idaho, British Columbia, and even Alaska. David Zietlow, the missionary called to Anchorage, wrote about what his congregation did to encourage them as they patiently awaited a place of worship:

When the children of Israel left Egypt to go to the promised land of Canaan, they had to trust in the Lord for guidance, help, and safekeeping...Finally they reached the Jordan River and camped opposite the promised land. The Lord told them to cross over, and they did. As they walked through the dry river bed that the Lord had opened for them, they picked up stones. When they reached their stopping place that night, they took stones and built an altar so that future

⁸⁴ Pankow, Paul. "The Prophet's Plan pursued in Washington." The Northwestern Lutheran. January 28, 1973, 21-22.

generations would know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; and that they might fear the Lord their God forever (Josh. 4:24).

It was just a little while ago that something similar happened among God's people in one of our new mission fields, Anchorage, Alaska. It happened on a bright, brisk Sunday afternoon that the leaders of this congregation picked up some stones and carried them up the gentle slope of a hill. It is there that the congregation plans to build its church; and the stones that were picked up that day are to be fitted into the altar so that they and we, yes, all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is might; and that we might fear the Lord our God forever.

As God was with the Children of Israel, so God has been and always will be with us. He is with His children in Alaska. For most of them, moving to Alaska meant leaving father and mother, brothers and sisters, other relatives, and longtime friends. For most of them, the move to Alaska meant a long journey over the wilderness of northern Canada. For most of them, it took not only trust in the Lord's guidance to make the journey, but also confidence in the lord's promise: "I will be with you."

God keeps His promises! Here in Alaska God is very much with us. Through the Pacific Northwest district Mission Board of our Wisconsin Synod a pastor has been called and has been in residence for a year and a half. Through our Synod's Church Extension Fund a site has been purchased in this rapidly growing area. Through a second loan, granted from our Synod's Parsonage-Teacherage Fund, the congregation built a parsonage. They did almost all the work themselves. By means of a third loan a modest chapel is now being built by the congregation. They eagerly look forward to assembling there to worship the Lord, to grow in His Word, and to be guided further by His counsel.⁸⁵

The Anchorage mission dealt with the same problems that many PNW missions before it had dealt with: long distances, poor facilities, lack of finances, and a lack of desire among the people for church. Zietlow described it this way:

It was difficult to persuade total strangers to come and worship in rented facilities. In this day when there are so many transients, so much that is unstable, even churches that are here today and gone tomorrow, it seems almost futile to invite people to our "church." They are very prone to take a "we'll wait and see if things pan out" attitude. But we always have God working on our side—never forget it! His promise assures us: "Lo, I am with you always." We worshiped in the Seventh Day Adventist Church for 2 1/2 years while we acquired land, planned for a church and parsonage, and finally built the parsonage and then the church. It was done in that order because that is the way the money became available. We would rather have had our chapel first, but it is much easier to borrow money on a resalable home than on a chapel.

Since we are the only church of our Synod in Alaska, we serve distant points throughout the state such as Homer, Cordova, Soldatna, and Fairbanks. We use taped services, we hold church in trailer houses, living rooms, funeral parlors, and vacant stores; but the message remains the same. "Come and hear with us Christ's way of salvation." We are hoping to start a new mission church in Fairbanks soon. Because of the great distances involved, round trips of 500 to 800 miles, we are unable to serve all of these places regularly.

⁸⁵ Zietlow, David. "What Mean These Stones?" The Northwestern Lutheran. March 15, 1970, 80.

The mission in Anchorage continued to grow and in 1977, Faith established the first Elementary school in Alaska for the Synod. Full of thanks Zietlow wrote:

Again Faith Lutheran found itself on its knees, thanking the almighty and gracious God for the blessings He had bestowed on their efforts. In nine years, He had brought them a long way—from that tiny group standing outside a rented Seventh-Day Adventist Church, welcoming all who would come in, to a financially self-supporting mission church. During this time He has led 120 adults and 54 teenagers to be instructed in the truths of His Word and to join the church.⁸⁶

In modern years, communications improved. This made it easier for PNW Congregations to receive help from far off places. The problem of distance was no longer as crippling. The Anchorage mission, for instance, made use of a program called “The WELS Soul Conservation.” This program originated in Detroit, MI and appears to have been a way for Midwesterners to introduce the Anchorage mission to family members OR former WELS members in the area. Zietlow comments,

I want to personally thank you for the work you are doing for us in the WELS Soul Conservation. I know the time and effort it must take on your part, and much of it, without even a “thank you” from us. But believe me when we do get a new name from you, it is a joy and I do appreciate it very, very much. It is a great help to us missionaries, and without such help from you, sometimes many of these people would be lost to other churches.⁸⁷

As the years went by, the use of modern technology continued to improve things:

Two Sunday School Teachers’ Institutes were held recently in the district. Pastors and teachers from five congregations in Anchorage, Wasilla, Eagle River and Kenai participated in the Alaska institute on October 17 at Faith, Anchorage. The institute was video-taped for the benefit of the congregations in Fairbanks and Sitka, whose participation was impractical because of distance⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Zietlow, David. “First Lutheran Elementary School in Alaska.” The Northwestern Lutheran. March 6, 1977.

⁸⁷ “Alaska Uses Soul Conservation.” A letter from Rev. David Zietlow to Pastor David Valleskey. The Northwestern Lutheran. January 3, 1971, 10.

⁸⁸ Oldfield, Jim. “In the News: Pacific Northwest District.” The Northwestern Lutheran. May 15, 1988, 197.

Another innovation that brought the Pacific Northwest closer was the commercial airline. With this fast mode of transportation, suddenly contact with the rest of the Synod was much easier for the Pacific Northwest. A quick article in the March 12, 1972 edition of the *Northwestern Lutheran* demonstrates this:

The second week in December brought Prof. Delmar Brick, recruitment officer at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, to our District. By combining a slide presentation with a warm, personal message, the professor brought the story of DMLC, its curriculum, activities, and the blessings of higher Christian education to the attention of our congregations at Seattle, Tacoma, Yakima, and Spokane, Washington; Portland, Oregon, and Anchorage, Alaska. Living as we do in an outlying District of the Wisconsin synod, our pastors, teachers, and parents greatly appreciated this live contact with one of our Synod's training schools. We hope that more boys and girls of our area will be encouraged to attend one of our Synodical schools.⁸⁹

As highways improved, transportation became more reliable in getting from place to place. The PNW churches took advantage of this and created fellowship activities for a number of congregations to gather for. This created a better sense of brotherhood in the District and offered encouragement to all who attended. An example of this was at the grade school level, where a forensics competition was planned for the five Puget Sound area school. One sixth grader realized the value involved in getting together with other Christians. He said, "We did it because we could become better acquainted with children from other Christian day schools and to have fun. That is called wholesome Christian fellowship. We had a lot of fun doing it."⁹⁰ In fact, all who attended shared this sentiment: "Let us make the Forensics Contest an annual event so that more Christian fellowship and wholesome scholastic competition can be enjoyed by one and all."⁹¹

One other difficulty that was overcome in this Era began with a special District Convention in June 1973. There delegates took initial steps toward Christian education on the

⁸⁹ "Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest." *The Northwestern Lutheran*. March 12, 1972, 95.

⁹⁰ "Direct from the Districts." *The Northwestern Lutheran*. July 13, 1975, 222.

⁹¹ "Direct from the Districts." *The Northwestern Lutheran*. July 13, 1975, 222.

high school level, when they approved the organization of the Pacific Northwest Lutheran Academy Conference. This conference was to look into beginning a high school in the PNW.⁹² Eventually, it was decided that the school would reside South of Seattle and in 1978, the first faculty of Evergreen Lutheran High School was installed as “over 200 grateful worshipers were on hand to welcome the new faculty to the area and to the fledgling school...an offering of over \$600 was received for the school...The gratitude of parents and members of the PNW District is extended to the God of all mercy and grace for making this Christian education center a reality.”⁹³ The first school year would be from 1978-1979. Undoubtedly this further cemented the unity of the district. Congregations of the PNW rallied around it and the many events hosted by Evergreen offered more opportunities for Christian fellowship. Writing about an academic Olympics in 1979, Errol Carlson wrote: “It was a delightful opportunity for all involved to become more closely acquainted with the high school, and it must have been exciting for some of the students in the area to see what may be their future high school.”⁹⁴

One final pull toward complete unification of the district was the 1977 Pastor-Teacher conference at the Seaside Hotel in Oregon. “This was the first time that the entire working force of the Pacific Northwest District, including wives and husbands, had gathered at one time—some 80 strong—from almost 40 WELS and ELS congregations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, and British Columbia.”

Amidst a financial boom, the Synod was able to help the PNW dedicate many more churches in the eights: Pullmann, WA, in 1981, Medford, OR in 1986, Kenai, Alaska, in 1987,

⁹² “Direct from the Districts: Pacific Northwest.” The Northwestern Lutheran. December 16, 1973, 411.

⁹³ “Evergreen Lutheran High School Installs First Faculty.” The Northwestern Lutheran. October 15, 1978, 341.

⁹⁴ Carlson, Errol. “Direct from the Districts.” The Northwestern Lutheran. April, 29, 1979, 141.

and Coos Bay, OR in 1987. Meanwhile, Holy Trinity of Kent, WA was reaching great heights in the district as it celebrated its 25th anniversary with 335 members.⁹⁵

Syndoulos Church at Fairbanks, Alaska had its church dedicated on July 1, 1979. The congregation had waited 6 years to make this happen. Perhaps the unusual name described the newfound camaraderie with the Wisconsin Synod that the Pacific Northwest now enjoyed. ““Syndoulos” means “serving together,” serving Christ together in Fairbanks and serving him worldwide as part of the Wisconsin Synod.””⁹⁶ At the 75th anniversary of the district, District President Warren Widmann focused those present at the 1992 District Convention on thankfulness. He had this two say about the past years of God’s grace:

And what has happened during the last twelve years? The preaching of the gospel throughout the geographical confines of our District which encompasses Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, and British Columbia has continued. God’s Grace and the power of His Spirit have likewise continued and our District continues to experience the joy of God’s blessings and growth. After seventy-five years we have the following numbers: forty-five pastors serving forty three congregations with our thousand six hundred and seventy tree communicants and six thousand six hundred and nine souls. There are now nine schools with three teachers and five hundred and sixty six students. Our one area Lutheran High School continues to grow. God’s Word of Power and Grace has truly been passed from generation to generation in our midst.⁹⁷

Modern Mission Work (1992-2010). The 75th Anniversary was a time to look back at God’s blessings in the past, but also a time to look forward to God’s blessings in the future. Unfortunately, finances quickly became a problem for the district and the Wisconsin Synod as a whole. In 1992, Widman reported that “a great deal of concern exists throughout the Synod regarding the downturn in the Synod mission Offerings. Each year less of the Synod’s Budget is

⁹⁵ Blum, Jay S. “In the News: Pacific Northwest District.” The Northwestern Lutheran. November 1, 1989, 377.

⁹⁶ “Dedication near the Arctic Circle.” The Northwestern Lutheran. April 27, 1980, 137.

⁹⁷ Widmann, Warren L. “Proceedings of the 39th Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix V: District President’s Biennial Report.” WELS Synodical Reports: Pacific Northwest District. Assembled at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church/Evergreen Lutheran High School in Kent, WA, June 14-16, 1992, 26.

funded by the Synod Mission Offering and more of it is funded by Special gifts.” In the next year’s proceedings:

As stated in the home Missions Report...the Home Missions budget for 1994-95 makes provision for only one new opening. Obviously that affects how much and what we will be able to accomplish in the near future. We can only hope and pray that the renewed emphasis on Synod Mission Offerings will be blessed, and God’s people will respond with generous gifts for reaching the lost with the saving Gospel.⁹⁸

Unfortunately, finances weren’t the only struggle for the District. President Widmann pointed this out in 1996:

A struggling mission congregation was going about the Lord’s business as usual when suddenly it became apparent that there was trouble. Members were leaving the church, accusations against the pastor and his family were being hurled about and before anything could be done the damage was beyond repair. Confidence and trust were undermined and all but lost and the result was a pastor’s resignation from his Call. The congregation is regrouping, a pastor is being called and the healing has begun.

A thriving self-supporting congregation was being richly blessed by God. The congregation was vigorously reaching out into the community; souls were brought into God’s kingdom at a rapid rate; the school was thriving. Suddenly and without much warning a powerful divisive spirit had invaded the school. A teacher was under attack and parents were suspicious of each other and of the teacher. By the grace and help of God disaster was averted, a plan for addressing the problems has been put into place, and the healing has begun.

Called workers are going along faithfully fulfilling their callings when health problems strike and they are unable to carry on in the same manner as before. Fellow called workers step in and assist as needed and help the stricken brethren work through the situation. A congregation finds itself slowly getting smaller. Members are moving away, being transferred to heaven, or are going elsewhere. The current situation isn’t the best and so relocation seems to be the best option and is being taken. A high school finds itself experiencing “growing pains” and begins to seek, and work and struggle to find a solution. “Graying” congregations find themselves moving in the wrong direction and begin to realize that the only solution is to establish a vigorous outreach program through which the saving gospel is preached daily to those who haven’t heard it. Outreach exploratories are going more slowly than expected and plans and focus need to be addressed and perhaps adjusted.

I am sure that each one of us sees himself and/or his congregation or situation in this listing of struggles in the Pacific Northwest district. As a result of this listing we might be inclined to ask, “In what kind of shape is the District?” We are in great shape. Why? Because we are addressing

⁹⁸ Oldfield, James. “Proceedings of the 39th Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix VI—Report of the District Mission Board.” WELS Synodical Reports: Pacific Northwest District. Assembled at Evergreen Lutheran High School in Kent, WA, June 12-14, 1994, 36.

the problems as a District, as individuals and as congregations. We are addressing them in the only way we know how – we proclaim the promise – we preach law and gospel.⁹⁹

One problem that was plaguing the rest of the Synod, but not the PNW was the problem of vacancies. In 1998, Widmann reported:

After all of the teacher and pastor candidates for 1998 were assigned a few weeks ago, there still remained about 70 vacancies in each category. Our family has much work to do and the workers are scarce... we are truly grateful to God for the faithful workers which He has supplied for our District. Many of the pastors and teachers in our District have received Calls during this past Biennium but most of them also have been led by our Lord to decline those Calls. At the present time the only pastoral vacancy we have in the District is the new opening at Covington to the east of the greater Seattle area.¹⁰⁰

Because of the lack of funding, but lack of vacancies in the District, exploratory work began in Maple Valley, WA in 200, only to close down by 2002. In 2003, work began in Maple Valley again along with a Vietnamese mission in Boise, ID. Still the District as a whole was struggling. Newly elected President Ted Lambert addressed what might have been the problem:

It is not secret that over the course of the past five years our WELS tent has shrunk in numerical size. Yes, we can point to changing demographics, population shifts away from the Synod's heartland, a depressed economy in the rust-belt, the fact that we are not a more "contemporary" church, but we cannot escape the uncomfortable truth that in many places a decision has been quietly reached that our local tent is quite comfortable and expansion would require more than we are willing to give. Do not look to find this in the minutes of a congregational meeting, for we would be too embarrassed to say this openly. It is, however, a decision subtly affirmed when congregations serve only themselves, when outreach consists primarily of welcoming WELS transfers, when mission and synod support are shrinking, single-digit percentage of a congregation's budget and sent in only after all local needs have been met. It is an attitude of which we must first of all repent and ask our Lord's forgiveness. And second, resolve that with God's help we will not be afraid to reach out to the nations, and particularly to the world that has arrived in our own neighborhoods¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Widmann, Warren. "Proceedings of the 40th Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix II—District President's Biennial Report." WELS Synodical Reports: Pacific Northwest District. Assembled at Evergreen Lutheran High School, Kent, WA. June 15-16, 1996. 23-24.

¹⁰⁰ Widmann, Warren. "Proceedings of the 41st Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix I—District President's Biennial Report." District. Assembled at Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, WA. June 13-14, 1998, 16-24.

¹⁰¹ Lambert, Ted. "Proceedings of the 44th Biennial Convention Pacific Northwest District Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Appendix I—District President's Biennial Report." Assembled at Evergreen Lutheran High School, 2004, 20.

A Comparison.

From the early days of mission work in the district, unique struggles have plagued the PNW. In comparison with today, Many of the challenges throughout the history of the PNW have changed, been meet, or are simply not a factor anymore. Geography, for example, has been overcome, to a certain extent in recent years. As documented throughout this paper, better roads, the availability of cars, and the creation of airplanes have made far off congregations more accessible. Yet, there is still somewhat of a challenge presented by the geography. President Ted Lambert explained to me in an interview:

Geography still plays somewhat of a role in making evangelism in the PNW difficult. Even in the Puget Sound where we have a dozen churches, it is typically a 30-40 minute drive between most of them. In Eastern WA where we have 9 churches, most are an hour to two and half hours apart. Modern roads have enabled people to get together better than in the past, but the West is still expansive and distance does play its role. Often transfers from elsewhere, who are used to having their church close by, are not used to driving such distances and many have opted to join an LC-MS or other church that is closer rather than make the drive.¹⁰²

Similarly, President Lambert comments on the isolation that was felt in the earlier years. He says that “We still have some very isolated locations in WA and OR, but for the most part the idea that being sent to the PNW is equivalent to going to Timbuktu is no longer the case. The men who come out today genuinely enjoy the region and all it offers—along with its ministerial challenges.”

At its inception, the PNW received little funding from Synod. But as the years went by, this changed immensely. Now funding issues depend more on the state of the Synod’s wallet. For instance, the Budget crisis in recent years has made money a problem throughout the Synod. In 2009, Home Missions reported:

¹⁰² President Ted Lambert (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 1, 2010.

Because existing ministries are places in which we are convinced we want to work and because the process of support has been evaluated and managed, the first reductions from our budget were the 20 efforts to establish new congregations plus 75 new ministry enhancements planned for in the 2009-11 biennium. The present financial realities mean that Home Missions has no funding available for new outreach opportunities in 2009. In addition, the realities mean that Home Missions has no funding available for new outreach opportunities in 2009. In addition, the expansion of the mission counselor program that was encouraged by the 2007 synod convention was placed on hold. Other problems? Presently funded ministries will be defunded...about 42% of all Home Missions...While God only knows, potentially 13 of the impacted fields could be lost.¹⁰³

As a result, financial difficulties cannot be overlooked as a difficulty for PNW mission work.

President Lambert explains:

In the '70s and early '80s a number of churches were planted in the PNW (E. Wenatchee, Kennewick, Redmond, Everett, Bremerton, Olympia (Lacey) and Vancouver in WA; Bend, Corvallis, Salem, and Milwaukie in OR.) All but one of these churches received significant help from the synod to get them started. Today funding is a problem because many of these congregations haven't grown much beyond the stage of self-support. So they struggle to stay even with current expenses. Milwaukie, OR, is a daughter congregation that was fully funded by Grace of Portland without any synod help. But effort also has cost in the sense that neither has been able to contribute to the synod as much as once was given by Grace alone. Lack of funds to do all we would like to do for the Kingdom in terms of outreach will, I think, plague the church until the day our Lord returns.¹⁰⁴

At earlier times, the lack of funding left congregations with terrible worship facilities.

Fortunately, this problem is not as prevalent anymore. It has been remedied throughout the years on account of the many C.E.F. dollars and other Synod funding. Now many PNW churches have very nice buildings.

One of the biggest goals for any congregation involves owning a Lutheran Elementary School. For the PNW district as a whole, this was true. Unfortunately, this dream took a long time in coming to fruition. It wasn't until 1947, 62 years after work had begun in the region, that an elementary school was in the PNW.¹⁰⁵ Because of this lack of schools, many considered the

¹⁰³ Hagedorn, Harry. "Board for Home Missions, Floor Committee #10" found in "Book of Reports and Memorials for the 60th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod" Assembled at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, July 27-31, 2009, 81-83.

¹⁰⁴ President Ted Lambert (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 1, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Kirst, E.F. "Pacific Northwest Delegatenkonferenz." Gemeinde=Blatt. July 26, 1947.

ministry in the PNW to be threatened. President Lambert commented on whether this is still true today:

Currently seven congregations in OR (2) and WA (5) have LES's. There is only 1 high school with an enrollment hovering around 100. Four other congregations in WA once had an LES, but they closed as congregation members aged or for lack of funds. Only a few of the present LESs have proven themselves to be an outreach tool.

The lack of schools in the PNW probably has been more a detriment to its called workers than to outreach. Pastors, in some cases, have accepted calls back to the heartland in order to provide that Christian Education for their children.¹⁰⁶

The one challenge from the past that has not changed and still holds vehemently true today, is the nonchalant, non caring attitude of the PNW people. President Lambert's comments are good here:

This is the heart of the matter! In WA and OR only 30% of the people CLAIM church membership, and that includes the JWs and Mormons. Only 10% of the total population actually attends worship on a given Sunday. This reflects the attitude of the original settlers who came for fishing and logging. They were strong people, do-it-yourselfers who had very independent attitudes. Living in the outdoors, often isolated from towns or in very small communities, they had little time for and even less use for attending church. This spirit was passed down to their children. By the third generation there is no pattern of formal worship at all in their background. It is not unusual to meet someone in the PNW who has never set foot in a church and doesn't have a clue what goes on within those walls.

There is an old joke among pastors in the PNW: What looks like snow up on the Rockies and the Cascade Mountains, isn't really snow at all. Its people's church transfer papers dropped up there as they came west. There is some truth to this. We often meet people who came West to escape from family or the culture they came from. That included church, so that, too, was discarded with the move West.

The good news is that as more people move in from other states, they are bringing with them a desire for worship. The old rugged culture is giving way, grudgingly, to the newcomers who now outnumber them. These are a target group for our outreach efforts.¹⁰⁷

Pastor Thomas Gumm of Grace in Seattle concurs:

This is the Wild West. God is an option when in need. Church is only good when you can get something from it. Now the culture is multi-cultural and heavily gay/lesbian. Many WELS members come to Seattle to get away from God, family and "legalism", their description. They

¹⁰⁶ President Ted Lambert (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 1, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ President Ted Lambert (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 1, 2010.

want to live their lifestyle here and don't want family or church telling them they are wrong. Most common response to a visit or a phone call, "I don't need God at this time in my life."¹⁰⁸

When asked if there were any other challenges to PNW evangelism, President Lambert named three:

The I-5 Corridor. This is how we refer to the large population center that dominates politics and lifestyles in the PNW. It includes Seattle, Tacoma, Portland and all the little suburbs north and south of the same. The majority are notoriously LIBERAL in their thinking, voting, lifestyles, etc. This brings with it a large gay community (both Metros have Gay Pride parade days) ,has given rise to many rock bands (Seattle is the birthplace of grunge and Jimi Hendrix and Courtney Love and off-beat groups of all kinds). These have little use for church of any stripe, let alone WELS.

The Outdoor Life. This is a recreation paradise. Fishing, boating, hiking, skiing, hunting, art festivals, and kid camps of every flavor imaginable – all pull people away on the weekends. One WELS pastor in frustration once referred to the campers on the road on the weekends as "devil wagons." For many it is what they do "as family time." Anecdote: I once instructed a couple all the way through BIC, but they wouldn't commit to church because they were weekend campers. 20 years later one of their sons committed suicide. Then they wanted me to bury him and assure them that he was in a better place. I could only sadly recall that boy was in our Sunday school while his parents were in BIC, but didn't have opportunity to continue that walk with the Lord because of his folks' decision to be weekend campers. That's one of the hurdles that is very real in the PNW.

The Shallow Roots in Our WELS Churches Here. We haven't been out here for 150 plus years. Many of our congregations are less than 50 years old. As a result we don't have the long family history tradition of many Midwest WELS churches. Our turn-over of members due to moves is greater than most areas and we don't see a great influx of transfer growth. So members come in one by one. Many need to be nurtured along and their fragile roots need careful attention. Some leave us over the least little things – which wouldn't happen in most Midwest WELS churches where they have other family or relatives in the same congregation.¹⁰⁹

President Lambert concluded the interview this way:

There is a positive side to the PNW also, and I don't want the challenges to appear so overwhelming that no seminarian would ever want to be assigned out here. Adults who go through BIC and join us are often as or more committed to what they now believe than those in the Midwest who went through confirmation class as teens and haven't been to Bible class since. This commitment shows up in the willingness to drive long distances to church and even to meetings between Sundays. Giving per communicant is nearly double that of Midwest congregations. There is camaraderie between called workers that is exceptional. Conferences last days instead of hours and often include family as well. There is a loyalty to the WELS for its doctrinal positions that is quite high among most of our members. There is a love for the synod

¹⁰⁸ Pastor Thomas Gumm (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 2, 2010

¹⁰⁹ President Ted Lambert (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 1, 2010.

that supplies these called workers, supports the mission churches and provides such excellent spiritual helps. Seldom do we ever hear any “synod bashing” in the PNW.¹¹⁰

Conclusion. In the end, Evangelism in the Pacific Northwest has challenges. Some challenges have become obsolete with time; some will never leave; some are region specific and some can be found in other parts of the country. But regardless of the challenge, it can be overcome. Why? The Word of God is the power behind the Wisconsin Synod Pastors and Missionaries in the PNW. As Isaiah 55:11 says, “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ President Ted Lambert (of the Pacific Northwest District), interview by Phil Kiecker, December 1, 2010.

¹¹¹ New International Version, 1984.

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