

"Century-End Challenges Facing Our Educational System in World Missions"
1999 WORLD SEMINARY CONFERENCE
Mequon, Wisconsin

WLS Faculty Exchange/Sabbatical Program

The question of whether professors from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary could and/or should serve in the seminaries of the WELS World Missions is not a new one. It has been asked ever since there have been seminaries in the world fields. The associated concept of a faculty exchange is likewise not new. From the beginning, however, there has been a problem. Implementation has been more difficult than agreement with the concept. How can the faculty exchange idea be carried out without causing problems for the educational programs involved, especially as far as the manpower and curricular needs at Mequon are concerned?

The exact date when the idea of a faculty exchange between seminaries was hatched has been lost in the mists of history's sometimes vague records. It is safe to say that it arrived as a real issue with the 1970s. In a letter dated 23 January 1970, the Reverend Edgar Hoenecke, Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions, wrote to Professor Wilbert Gawrisch of WLS about spending a sabbatical leave some day in "one of our fields as a seminary professor."

In the Fall of 1971 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's "Committee on Committees" listed a "Foreign Seminary Exchange Committee." Its membership included Armin Schuetze, chairman, Wilbert Gawrisch, Joel Gerlach, Edward Fredrich and John Jeske. It is apparent that this group was to serve as a liaison with the World Mission Board as the possibility of instituting the exchange program continued to develop.

When the WLS faculty met on 3 February 1972, the results of this committee's meetings were presented, along with the minutes detailing its meeting with the representatives of the World Mission Board. In addition Professor Gerlach and Executive Secretary Hoenecke had set up a program for conducting the faculty exchange. The program was discussed and several changes were suggested. Professor Gerlach was asked to recast the report and to present it to the faculty at a subsequent meeting.

As frequently happens in Kingdom work, manpower concerns were also expressed at this meeting. The need for an additional faculty position was envisioned to assist in covering the duties of the faculty member who would take part in the exchange. It was suggested that when

faculty member #17 was called, he should be a member of the pastoral theology department and part of his work should be to serve as that faculty member who, together with the World and Home Mission Executive Secretaries, would plan the Mission Seminar, which had been recently instituted as a student-generated program at the Seminary.

Professor Gerlach's revised report was presented to the faculty at a special meeting on 10 February 1972. After several additional revisions, the report was adopted. ("The World Mission Seminaries Faculty Exchange Program" is printed in full in Appendix A.)

This matter was quickly placed before the constituency of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In the April 1972 "Report of the Board of Control of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary" it was announced that a 15th, 16th and 17th professorships had been given the #1, #2 and #5 positions on the Synod's priority list for worker training institutions. "The 17th professorship would enable the implementation of the synodically-approved program whereby faculty members would be released periodically for service in world mission seminaries."¹

The 15th and 16th professorships at WLS were quickly approved to meet the needs of the school's growing student body. The 17th position, however, languished as other areas of Kingdom need received priority status. Nevertheless, there was fresh impetus to get the faculty exchange underway. At the 23 January 1974 meeting of the Board for World Missions, representatives of WLS were in attendance. The implementation of the World Mission Seminary Exchange Program was

again urged and taken under advisement. A consensus was reached to endeavor undertaking this exchange program on an experimental basis when the call to the sixteenth professorship at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has been accepted and this professor has assumed his full teaching assignment.²

The Commission on Higher Education endorsed this resolution at its February 1974 meeting.

A year had passed without any further progress in the Faculty Exchange Program, when it was reported at the 6 March 1975 meeting of the WLS faculty:

The Executive Committee of the Board for World Missions has asked that Prof. Lawrenz be released during the 3rd quarter of the next school year to spend that time in Central Africa at the Seminary as lecturer and consultant. Prof. Lawrenz asked the faculty to express itself on the matter. The motion was made and carried to have a faculty committee study the problem, the committee to consist of Professors Gawrisch, Habeck, and Vogel. Prof. Lawrenz felt that the 2nd quarter would be more suitable than the third.

¹ Report to the Nine Districts, April 1972, p 9.

² Report to the Ten Districts, May 1974, p 11.

This committee did not drag its feet. It had its recommendations ready for the faculty's 10 April 1975 meeting:

The report was read and discussed. It was pointed out that Prof. Lawrenz's absence would not be impossible even if Prof. Blume's position is not yet filled.³ The administrative work could be covered by dividing the work. Pastor Pless, chairman of the board, suggested that the faculty make nominations for faculty members who might cover the various areas of work and that the board would make the assignments.⁴ The motion was made and carried to close the nominations which were suggested by the committee.

Later in 1975 it was reported to the Synod:

In spite of the loss of a faculty member . . . , the seminary faculty and board are still determined to abide by this agreement. The seminary board has informed the Board for World Missions that it will endeavor to release Professor Carl Lawrenz during the second quarter of the 1975-76 school year from his administrative and teaching duties so that he may serve as consultant and guest lecturer at the seminary of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa at Chelston, Zambia, during that period. A synodical committee appointed to make recommendations to implement this exchange program had made the request for Professor Lawrenz with the explanation: "It is our opinion that with the development of the seminary in Africa a man of mature judgment, of experience and ability to guide and inspire, is desirable for the first visitation."⁵

Finally, on 6 November 1975, Professor Lawrenz announced to the WLS faculty that he and Mrs. Lawrenz would leave for Zambia and Malawi on Wednesday, 26 November 1975, and that they, God-willing would return on Friday, 27 February 1976. After almost five years of formal and informal discussion, the first World Seminary Faculty exchange was a reality.

During his sabbatical Professor Lawrenz served as a guest lecturer at the Bible Institute and Seminary of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa at Chelston, Zambia. He participated in a series of faculty meetings in which the entire worker training curriculum was reviewed. He also observed the graduates and students of the Bible Institute and Seminary in congregational settings, at Synodical Council meetings and at the LCCA Workers' Conference. The 1976 Report to the Ten Districts noted that President Lawrenz' efforts were "pursuant to a request by the Board for World Missions" and they were "in keeping with a resolution of the Wisconsin

³ The Lord had called Prof. Blume to himself as he taught a Middler class in December 1974. As a result the WLS faculty was already below full strength at a time of record enrollment.

⁴ In a meeting of 26 March 1975, a special committee had examined how the faculty would cover President Lawrenz' classes and administrative responsibilities. As the board chairman had suggested, they had nominated individuals to assume the president's duties on a temporary basis.

⁵ Book of Reports and Memorials, 43rd Biennial Convention of the WELS, 6-13 August 1975, pp 12-13.

Lutheran Seminary Board of Control.”⁶ This became the standard procedure for WLS faculty involvement in the programs of the Board for World Missions: a formal request from the BWM, discussion on the part of the WLS faculty and official permission from the WLS Board.

No sooner had Professor Lawrenz returned from his successful African trip than there was another request. At its 1 April 1976 the WLS faculty discussed whether Professor Siegbert Becker might be released for a quarter in an exchange program at Biblicum in Uppsala, Sweden. A faculty committee – Professors Hoenecke, Gerlach, Panning and Kuske – was formed to discuss the proposal and return a recommendation to the faculty.

“Should he (Becker) be asked by the World Mission Board to spend a quarter in Sweden, would it be possible?” This was the question considered in a special faculty meeting on 8 April 1976. The outcome of the discussion – “It was decided that the WMB be informed that it would be possible to carry out the plan.”

This matter came before the Board of Control at its Fall meeting. At its 4 October 1976 meeting the board minutes note: “A motion carried to grant, with the encouragement of the Board for World Missions, the request of Biblicum and release Dr. S. Becker during the 3rd quarter to serve Biblicum in Up[p]sala, Sweden, under the auspices of the Board for World Missions.” At the 7 October 1976 WLS faculty meeting it was reported: “The board accepted the faculty recommendation. It was pointed out that Dr. Becker’s work would be to help plan the function of Biblicum as a research center for conservative Lutheranism and as an incipient seminary of the church body affiliated with us.” According to the plans made, Dr. Becker spent March, April and May 1977 in Sweden.

During this same period there was also a move to have Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary establish a position closely associated with mission work. Although WLS did not institute a “Chair of Missions” as a permanent faculty position, since the arrival of Professor Ernst H. Wendland on campus in 1978, the Seminary in Mequon has benefited from the continual presence of at least one faculty member with World Mission experience. It was also with Professor Wendland’s arrival that the WLS faculty members began to make more frequent trips overseas. Without detailing each instance, the originally established procedure was followed: a formal request from the Board for World Missions, followed by WLS Faculty discussion and Board approval.

⁶ Report to the Ten Districts, May 1976, p 10.

The following listing is offered as evidence of the frequency with which the BWM and WLS collaborated in overseas projects. This list is not exhaustive. Minutes of the WLS Board of Control and the WLS Faculty as sometimes painfully vague in reporting details. This list was gleaned from the above minutes, as well as from published synodical sources, such as the Book of Reports and Memorials and the Reports to the Twelve Districts. It should also be noted that this list does not include faculty members who went overseas at the behest of other boards, for example, Evangelism or the CICR.

Professor Ernst Wendland	December 1979	Cameroon
Professor Ernst Wendland	November 1980	Nigeria
Professor Siegbert Becker	September 1980	Sweden
Professor Ernst Wendland	December 1981	Nigeria
Professor Ernst Wendland	27 Nov – 20 Dec 1982	Cameroon
Professor Ernst Wendland	28 Nov – 16 Dec 1983	Nigeria
Professor Ernst Wendland	Nov – Dec 1984	Nigeria
Professor Ernst Wendland	28 Mar – 4 April 1985	Brazil
Professor Ernst Wendland	Nov – Dec 1985	Nigeria
Professor David Valleskey	15 April – 6 May 1988	Southeast Asia
Professor John Brug	May – June 1991	LCCA, Africa
Professor David Valleskey	6 trips, February 1991 - 1995	India
Professor Harold Johne	July 1992 – July 1993	Nigeria
Professor David Valleskey	2 – 15 December 1993	Nigeria
Professor John Schuetze ***	July – August 1997	LCCA, Africa
Professor John Hartwig	3 trips, November 1997 - 1999	India
Professor Leroy Dobberstein ***	July – August 1998	LCCA, Africa
Professor John Brug	February – May 1999	Russia
Professor Alan Siggelkow ***	July – August 1999	LCCA, Africa
Professor Armin Panning	February – May 2000	Bulgaria

This synopsis of WLS faculty involvement overseas, however, does not suggest that the above assignments were all formally part of the Faculty Exchange Program. Although Seminary professors went at the request of the Board for World Missions, they often did so in response to specific needs rather than as a part of an on-going program. In 1991 when Professor Brug served as a visiting lecturer to the students of the LCCA Bible Institute and Seminary, it was described as “a revival of the former ‘Seminary Exchange Program.’”⁷

⁷ Report to the Twelve Districts, June 1992, p 6.

Note: At its 22 October 1979 meeting the WLS Board of Control had suggested that the faculty consider a better name for the Seminary Exchange Program. There is no evidence that this advice was acted upon, since the title was still extant in 1992.

The individuals in the list marked with a triple asterisk (***) were participants in a more recent venture between WLS and the Administrative Committee for Africa Missions. This ongoing effort sends a seminary professor each summer to Africa. His destination rotates between Malawi and Zambia.

This synopsis also does not suggest that it was possible to honor every request. In May 1994, for example, Professor Brug was called to take a one-year leave of absence in order to teach in Russia. At that time the Seminary's faculty size had been reduced due to the diminishing size of the student body. The faculty concluded that it was not feasible to ask men whose schedules were already overloaded to take on additional assignments. At its 12 May meeting the faculty noted that there was a need to return to its previous manpower in order to make leaves and sabbaticals feasible.

The WLS Board of Control had repeatedly pointed out to the CHE and its successor that there was a need for additional manpower at Mequon. At its 16 October 1980 meeting the board pointed out the need for a 17th and 18th professorships. At that same time the board approved a motion to send to the CHE a "request [for] an 18th professorship for reasons expressed in the Seminary Program Statement." History records that the size of the faculty contracted before it finally returned to sixteen positions in 1997.

The planned addition of a "Sabbatical Professor" in January 2000 will permit the "Sabbaticals in Ministry" program, which began in 1998 on a limited basis, to be carried out as a regular WLS program. It will permit each faculty member to return to Kingdom service off-campus for six months every eighth year. The "Sabbaticals in Ministry" effort is intended to permit professors to spend time in stateside parish ministries. This does not automatically eliminate a cooperative effort with the Board for World Missions. It does, however, demand advanced planning, since faculty sabbaticals are planned two and five years into the future.

The Seminary Faculty Exchange Program has existed for almost a quarter century. Its implementation, however, has tended to be reactive to immediate needs rather than proactive as a part of a long-range plan. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary stands ready to work with the Board for World Mission in establishing a viable exchange program on a continuing basis.

It should be noted, however, that the "Sabbatical Professorship" is presently not a part of the Seminary's regular budget. It is being funded initially by a combination of extra-budgetary funds and by contributions from the bodies the professors will be serving on their sabbaticals.

This will mandate a change or, at the very least, a rethinking of Point 5 of the World Mission Seminaries Exchange Program 1972 proposal, which indicated:

- a. The W.L.S. professor will continue to receive his regular salary and housing from the Seminary budget.

Another part of the original document will also need additional consideration, clarification and development. Point 9 states:

At the same time, every endeavor will be made to involve professors from world mission seminaries in lecture courses on missions at the W.L.S. while on furlough. This is to be facilitated by reducing the deputation lecture and preaching schedule of the world seminary professors.

Given the structured state of the WLS curriculum and the school year, it is not easy to insert courses at a variety of times. While it is certainly possible and desirable to have capable professors from the world seminaries utilized at WLS, the questions of feasibility remain. How can we best use the talents of world seminary professors at WLS? In what areas can they serve without disrupting the normal course offerings to WLS students? These and other questions will need to be addressed before this part of the proposition can become a reality.

Perhaps this indicates the need to reestablish, although I am not certain that it was ever functional, Point 6 of the 1972 proposal, which suggests:

The program is to be coordinated by a standing committee consisting of one man from the W.L.S. faculty, one man from the Board for World Missions, and the Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions.

This standing committee, or a newly constituted group, could begin to address the issues involved in establishing a vibrant seminary exchange that would benefit all the constituencies.

Manpower and budgets are powerful concerns in our circles. Yet we appear to be in a better situation to address these matters than at any time in the recent past. If the Seminary Exchange Program was originally established for the greater good of the Kingdom, then we would be remiss for not pursuing its regular implementation today.

Soli Deo Gloria

James F. Korthals
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Mequon, Wisconsin
12 August 1999

WORLD MISSION SEMINARIES FACULTY EXCHANGE PROGRAM

1. The objective of the program is to promote the preservation of our common Lutheran heritage in all the Seminaries, to benefit mutually from the exchange of professors, and to encourage and strengthen the World Mission Seminaries by means of periodic guest professors' visits from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.
2. This objective is to be achieved through:
 - a. Conferences of the visiting professor with the respective World Mission Seminary faculty.
 - b. Guest lecture courses on topics suggested by the Seminary to be visited and agreed upon in advance.
3. The duration of these visits is to be a minimum of three months to enable the visiting professor to become well acquainted with the field he is visiting.
4. For the program to be most effective it would be necessary that the faculty members of the seminary visited carry on their teaching routine.
5. The program is to be financed in this manner:
 - b. The W.L.S. professor will continue to receive his regular salary and housing from the Seminary budget.
 - c. His travel and maintenance expenses will be paid from the budget of the Board for World Missions.
 - d. Normally the professor who serves at the foreign seminary will go to the field alone to avoid problems of his housing and also prohibitive expenses for his family.
6. The program is to be coordinated by a standing committee consisting of one man from the W.L.S. faculty, one man from the Board for World Missions, and the Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions.

7. The field to be visited by the W.L.S. professor is to be designated by the standing committee upon consultation with the Executive Committee of the field visited, the Mission Council, and the faculty involved in the field (through correspondence).
8. A report on the visit is to be filed with the Mission Council and the faculty of the field visited, the faculty of the W.L.S., the Executive Committee of the field visited, the Executive Secretary of the Commission on Higher Education, and the Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions. For the sake of mutual information and improvement, it may also be wise to send the report to the other seminaries' faculties in the world fields.
9. At the same time, every endeavor will be made to involve professors from world mission seminaries in lecture courses on missions at the W.L.S. while on furlough. This is to be facilitated by reducing the deputation lecture and preaching schedule of the world seminary professors

10 February 1972