

The Coming of the Wels to  
Texas

*~A Story of God's Grace~*

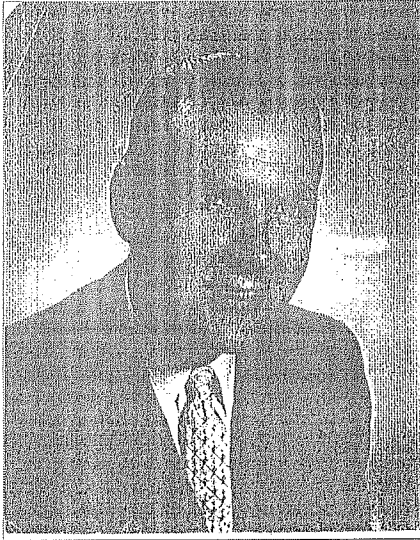
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## Introduction

From August of 1999 to August of 2000, I was fortunate enough to serve my vicar assignment at Immanuel Lutheran Church of Fort Worth, Texas. While I was there I couldn't help but notice that the South Central District of the WELS had a different spirit. The stark difference to anything that I had been exposed to in the past intrigued me. When it came time to fulfill the requirements of our Senior Church History project Texas was on my mind.

One man that came up in conversation time and again while in Texas was Pastor Walter Diehl. He was one of the early pioneers of our work in the vast state of Texas. My supervising pastor, Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht turned me on to a video that he had in his possession. The content of the video was of Pastor Diehl presenting the early history of the WELS work in Texas. However, all that remained of this conference presentation was the video. For my church history project I decided to transcribe the video into a hard copy paper that will be preserved for years to come. My intent was to allow the men who lived this exciting time in synodical history to tell their story.

C. Schroeder



Pastor Walter Diehl

"When Historians review the history of the WELS in the South Central District, the name of one man will figure prominently on nearly every page. Pastor Walter A. Diehl served thirty-five years on mission boards in Arizona - California, Texas, and the South Central District. For many years he served as chairman of these boards.

Pastor Diehl was one of three men who visited Texas in September, 1962. The team met with six families who were interested in a confessional Lutheran church. The visit resulted in the General Board for Home Missions giving permission, in November 1962, to begin our first WELS mission in Texas. Calvary Lutheran Church of Dallas became the first congregation in the four states which now make up the South Central District. Pastor Diehl later served Calvary congregation.

In talking to Pastor Diehl, one could not separate the man, the message, and the mission. He was a man of prayer. He was a friend. He was a servant of God. He was a pastor, faithful missionary, and an evangelist. The Lord blessed the man with over fifty-two years of service in his church.

Pastor Diehl was fond of talking about the mission congregation he served in Weslaco, Texas, "down Mexico way." The mission has eighty-seven souls but its average attendance in the winter months is three hundred and fifty. This was the result of serving what Pastor Diehl called "winter Texans." Each of these visitors could be sure of a personal visit from their "winter pastor."

On May 8, 1987, the Lord called Pastor Diehl home. We thank God for the years of service given our district, our church and the church militant. By the Savior's grace Pastor Diehl reigns with his Savior in the Church Triumphant."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Winning Souls" 1987 Booklet By: Mission Coordinating Committee of Board for Home and World Missions

The Coming of the WELS to Texas-a Story of God's Grace!

Mr Chairman, Brethren,

The Coming of the WELS to the South, a Story of God's Grace.

“Arise, shine for thy Light has come.” These words have been and are constantly being carried out by God's grace. Especially interesting is as Isaiah continues, “Thy daughters shall come from far.” So too it turned out to be in the formation of the South Central District of the WELS. Requests came to us from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. A personal review of one who was permitted by God to share in this coming of daughters, particularly in Texas is the topic assigned. “The coming of the WELS to the South, a Story of God's Grace.”

The instructions for the essayist were, “what we would like would be more along the lines of vignettes, personal remembrances, even if it means isolated bits and pieces of the district history.” This is the approach followed by the essayist that will show how good God has been to us.

It includes a plea by the essayist that no one will be offended by not describing every place. Omission is not a sign of disdain or lack of interest but may well show less problems. That we are in Texas is a definite gift of God's grace. We cannot even find out very much about an abortive attempt around 1953/54.<sup>2</sup> A group was started and a missionary sent who began in Irving just outside of Dallas. According to rumor they acquired land and a simple building a Quonset hut for some four thousand dollars. When we tried to find out about it around 1966 – 1968 we could not find the property. Here God's grace is shown in its shining. Usually starting and then stopping delays any further

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<sup>2</sup> The mission in Irving, Texas was first served about 1958 by a Pastor Dornfeld. Brian Terell, a WELS member who currently is living in Tuscon, Arizona and his family were charter members of this early attempt of the WELS to enter the vast area of Texas.

chance to work an area for a long time. It did take another seven or eight years before God finally did bring us to Texas.

In 1962, a request was made by a number of people in the Dallas area<sup>3</sup> that we contact them about the confessional stand and practice of our Synod. It was received by President Oscar Naumann, who referred it to President E. Arnold Sitz of the Arizona/California District. He in turn asked the Mission Board to investigate. A visit was made to Dallas by the Mission Board in September or October, 1962. By God's grace it became evident that God wanted us there. At least three people who were at the first meeting moved away shortly and helped begin our North Atlantic District, however, they were used by God to encourage a plea for an exploratory station for the Dallas area. After the meeting with some five or six families from another synod, our Arizona/California District Mission Board resolved to request an exploratory station with manpower. What was interesting at the meeting was that the WELS was investigated as much as we checked the confession of the groups who invited us.

It showed God's grace in the earnest desire to confess Christ in his word in its truth and purity by both groups. The Board for Home Missions, the BHM, granted permission to explore in November, 1962. We began to call and were turned down until December, 1963. Then the gracious Lord led us to call a man who stood a colloquy and left the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). Pastor Robert Neumann accepted the call and began services in a [Crane, on Northwest Highway] funeral home in Dallas on February 2, 1964. Is God's grace evident? How could the group hold out through all the

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<sup>3</sup> The 1962 Group included families contacted by Lois Burgdorf. Mistakenly she received a whole bundle of Northwestern Lutheran at her doorstep one day. From the contents of that issue she was able to ascertain names of fellow Lutherans in the Dallas area looking for a confessional church body. Strangely,

delays? How did we dare come to the large state of Texas with one man? Surely God gave proof that he wanted us here and gave the patience to cling to the pure confession of his word. That summer a vicar for three months was granted by the Board for Home Missions and Myrl Wagenknecht came to help Pastor Neumann. Right from the first it was evident that there were two areas about twenty-six miles apart that were the best places to explore. One was the northeast part of Dallas and the other, Duncanville. We chose Dallas because that was the better-known name that people immediately knew where we were. Pastor Neumann began services in Duncanville that fall [after Vicar Wagenknecht had conducted services during the summer before returning to Seminary] and shortly after in Hillsboro [services began in a feed store in May 1964] where a group pleaded with us to come. Thus there were three services a Sunday that Missionary Neumann conducted. Then came a request from a group at Edna [which had been served by a former WELS pastor, Gilbert Seager] some three hundred miles away, roughly halfway between San Antonio and Houston. Our Board with President Sitz met with the Edna people. We petitioned the Board for Home Missions for exploratory and manpower stressing that though Edna was only nine thousand population it was a gateway to San Antonio and Houston. Pastor Neumann was instructed to serve Dallas and Duncanville each Sunday but Hillsboro and Edna every other Sunday. Later we learned that he held four services a Sunday, over three hundred miles of driving for four months without our knowledge.

Dallas was shortly given mission status and land purchase allowed for the now named Calvary Lutheran Church. A site was purchased but within a few months Calvary

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our work in Texas got its start in part because a gracious God even uses an erring shipping company to accomplish what he desires.

found a better site. It took special pleas to the Board for Home Missions and the Board of Trustees to sell the one and buy the other. It also meant that Calvary had to absorb the loss on the sale of the first site to buy the second. It was accomplished and is the present excellent location of Calvary Lutheran Church. Also the synod allowed the purchase of a parsonage and building funds for the church. God blessed the growth so that Calvary became self-supporting in just under five years. [The essayist became pastor at Calvary in 1967 – so the AZ/CA District Mission Board chairman became a Texas resident].

Duncanville<sup>4</sup> also showed growth. Mission status and permission to call were granted. Pastor Robert Hartman became the first resident pastor and also served Hillsboro. At Duncanville the CEF<sup>5</sup> purchased land. The congregation wanted to build a parsonage. The Board of Trustees held back permission to build a house because the amount requested was too little to build a decent home in their opinion. They were convinced that it could not be done at that price. Finally it was certified that by local mission labor and good contacts in buying, it could be done. Actually the final cost was even lower than the estimate. Again God's grace overcame misunderstanding and showed zeal on the part of the mission and good stewardship on the part of the Board of Trustees.

In 1965, the Board for Home Missions allowed a missionary for Edna. Pastor, now President Vilas Glaeske [1965 WLS graduate] was assigned there. A faithful group showed growth but the Board for Home Missions and the District Mission Board expected the missionary to get into San Antonio and Houston quickly. He began in San

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<sup>4</sup> In 1964, Services were begun in Duncanville by Vicar Myrl Wagenknecht. When he left the metroplex to complete his formal education he left Pastor Neumann to serve three churches in the fall of that year. In 1966, Pastor Robert Hartman came to Duncanville in January. Pastor Neumann had served three congregations for sixteen months. These congregations were Calvary, Mt. Zion and Duncanville.

Antonio. A sizeable group was soon gathered there. One charter member was a brother of people living in Phoenix, AZ. By visits and correspondence he was confirmed and joined our WELS congregation at San Antonio. He helped start our Lutheran church there.

Pastor Glaeske also began in Houston. It was a bit slower in growth than San Antonio but the District Mission Board insisted that he concentrate there. To facilitate the growth the District Mission Board moved Glaeske to Houston. It created a special problem for the District Mission Board especially its chairman, to point out that the missionary's call included the right to decide in which part of the area he was to reside and serve. Though it was mentioned when the candidate was called and when he arrived, unfortunately it was not given repeated exposure. The Edna congregation was disturbed and the missionary did some soul searching to see whether it was corrupt/correct [note Pastor Diehl's chuckle at this point] according to the Scriptures, but God's grace preserved the Edna congregation and gave the missionary peace of soul to zealously work in Houston. Edna called a new pastor [J.C. Neffendorf] who also served in San Antonio. Edna built a beautiful church, a great deal of the work by the members. Then permission was given to call a pastor to San Antonio. This missionary was shortly involved in starting work at Austin. Pastor William Krueger was this first missionary.

At Houston, Pastor Glaeske started a bit slightly west of the center of the city. The area where Christ the Lord Lutheran Church is now located. He also had a number from the north side of Houston and was given permission by the Board for Home Missions to hold exploratory services there. This became Abiding Word Lutheran

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<sup>5</sup> The Church Extension Fund or CEF is a fund that was developed by the WELS to aid new start mission churches in financing the rather extensive costs of beginning a new mission.



Church. He tried to \* fry \* the Mission Board chairman on one visit when he came to the area. He met the chairman in an open convertible with black leather upholstery in ninety-eight degrees and eighty percent humidity. Mission Board work has it's hazards!

He also started near N.A.S.A. at Clear Lake City southeast of Houston beginning what is now Lord of Life Lutheran Church at Friendswood. He was conducting three services a Sunday. He even served the Nebraska District by serving Louisiana by preaching there several times. When Abiding Word was given man power [its first resident pastor was William Gabb]<sup>6</sup>, he also started at Angleton/Freeport some fifty miles south of Houston. At Christ the Lord land was purchased and a modest chapel thirty by sixty feet was erected. God blessed the congregation so that a school was begun and a school building erected. Then an additional building, a barrack like shell was purchased and remodeled. Then the modest chapel was about doubled in size. God recently permitted a fire to gut the original school building but rebuilding is about to begin. We marvel at God's grace in giving Pastor Glaeske strength in serving three places at a time for years and help start Christ the Lord, Abiding Word, Lord of Life of Houston, and Our Savior of Angleton and still serve in Louisiana. Now he only has two services a Sunday at Christ the Lord. [Wayne Vogt was the first pastor in Angleton. Robert VanNorstrand was the first pastor in Friendswood].

At Abiding Word, permission to buy land was granted. Land was becoming scarce in this north section of Houston. You know that the Synod does not allow a mission to buy land on its own. It must go through the Board of Trustees and the real-estate manager. Because of the pressure in buying land a member of Abiding Word

bought four acres at five thousand per acre or twenty thousand dollars. He hoped it would be the site chosen but he knew it was fine property. As soon as he bought it he was offered double his cost or forty thousand. However, when the Board of Trustees heard that a member bought the land they felt that the mission was being forced to help out a member who had exceeded authority. It took quite a bit of explanation to show that the member was losing money by holding it for the mission and not selling for a higher price. Purchase by the Synod through the CEF was allowed. The land has been sought for some five hundred thousand dollars lately.

A relocatable chapel<sup>7</sup> [built in Fort Worth] was allowed as temporary church. It served to bring people to our site. It was used until a steel-framed church was built. Later the relocatable was used at Fort Worth, Temple, then Midland and finally sold. Costs have risen so high on such a building that it is no longer considered economical but it did get us started quickly in the four places on our own property.

At Abiding Word and previously at Edna, parsonages were built with a great deal of work by the members. It did put quite a strain on the congregations but God in his grace gave strength to complete the fine homes.

Immanuel in Fort Worth was started in 1970 from Calvary at Dallas. It received mission status that year and permission to call. Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht is the only resident pastor the congregation has ever had. Land, the relocatable, a church and a parsonage have been used there. It also has a parochial school. Its plea for a school brought about a new Board for Home Missions regulation. Request was first denied.

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<sup>6</sup> 1970 was a banner year for our WELS efforts in Texas. Four WELS pastors came that year: William Gabb to Houston, James Radloff to Austin, Myrl Wagenknecht to Fort Worth (still the only pastor that Immanuel in Fort Worth has had) and Wayne Vogt to Angleton.

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Then an appeal was made and denied and a second appeal was made and granted by the Board for Home Missions executives. The Board for Home Missions as a board heard of it and the appeals are no longer allowed to the executives.

The pastor (Wagenknecht) cooperated with the pastor (Diehl) from Dallas in starting Lubbock over three hundred miles away by driving or flying there every other week [with every Sunday services alternating Sundays]. The group at Lubbock was blessed with such growth that mission status and manpower was allowed in 1975. [Pastor Robert Sawall was their first pastor].

Wichita Falls was served from Dallas, Duncanville and Fort Worth through the military service at Sheppard Air Force Base for many years. It was granted exploratory and later mission status in 1978. A missionary was called [Pastor Thomas Valleskey] and an existing church and land were bought. Unfortunately membership declined, the congregation dissolved and the land and building are being sold.

DeSoto was begun about 1971. It had good growth for a couple years. It received land, parsonage and church but it declined in membership and now shows slow growth. It puzzles us that we have slow growth in that area of the Metroplex. God's grace must give us patience to experience the growth the area should show.

Austin was begun by Pastor William Krueger from San Antonio about 1970. Pastor James Radloff was the first resident pastor at Holy Word Lutheran Church. There we had a land problem. A larger area than allowed was requested because some unusable land was included. A stream and flooding and the topography made it difficult to buy

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<sup>7</sup> The relocatable chapel that was built in Fort Worth served Houston, 1971-1973; Fort Worth, 1973-1975; Temple, 1977-1979; Midland, 1979-1981. Then it was sold and was used as a temporary office building.

only the portion needed. The Board of Trustees was finally convinced that it was wise to buy the whole piece but the congregation had to make special payments to include it.

A relocatable building was moved in to serve as a church which was used as a parochial school after the beautiful church was built. Later an educational fellowship building was erected. It has let the former parsonage become the teacherage and gives a housing allowance so that the pastor may buy his own house. This concept, in my opinion still needs further study. Surely the growth of Holy Word at Austin is proof of God's grace.

South Texas started with occasional services once a month in Mercedes and Weslaco. A WELS couple found a group disturbed by the laxity of the LCMS and requested us to serve. Pastors flew or drove from San Antonio, Edna, Houston, Austin, even from Dallas. Services were held once a month in '70 and '71, twice a month in late '71 and '72, weekly in late '72 and '73. Then a missionary was allowed, a resident missionary [Gary Scheuerlein] but mission status was not given until November, '73. Land was purchased in '74 and a parsonage built and the church was lent CEF so that it would be dedicated in January of '78. It is likely the most unusual misbalance of any congregation in the WELS. It has only sixty-four communicants now with an average attendance of forty-six from July through September but rising to three hundred and seven average attendance from January through March of '86. It serves winter Texans primarily from the Midwest. It is self-supporting as of January of this year. It is a beautiful gift of God's grace which leads these WELS members to come twenty-five, fifty, even sixty-two miles away. The population is at least eighty percent Latin American. We regularly evangelize among them but our gains are small.

Their closest neighbor is Corpus Christi one hundred and fifty miles away. There is special interest in Corpus Christi. It began with Spanish services only in '73. It is the first Spanish language congregation under the Board for Home Missions since Tucson was transferred to the Board for World Missions. A student at the Seminary who presently is their pastor, Carl Leyrer, flew from the Milwaukee area to begin services. After internal struggles for two years, a solid remnant took charge. An old barracks was converted into a church by renovation. From it the word went out and the congregation grew so that a new church on a lot larger piece of land was dedicated on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1986. Though still primarily Latin American in membership it has regular English services and instructions and only a few Spanish services. It consistently shows the fastest growth of any of our district missions.

Temple began from Austin by Pastor Radloff. It showed steady growth and has a beautiful church and parsonage. [Trinity's first pastor was Mark Krueger]. It is also self-supporting as of this January.

Killeen grew from it, but since that \* serves \* a military base, it was hard to get a nucleus of permanent people. Killeen resolved to discontinue and reunite with Temple and the mission was closed.

College Station has shown solid gain since it's beginning in '82. It serves a large area west of Houston. Missionary Lauren Fritz is its first resident pastor. It now has land and a chapel.

Louisville now Flower Mound has been served by Pastor Thomas Valleskey. It serves the northwestern section of Dallas in the Denton area. It has land and a chapel.

Arlington is half the distance between Duncanville, Fort Worth and Dallas for many people. Pastor Gary Pieper began it and Pastor Bruce Bitter is missionary there. A new church and parsonage reflect steady growth.

Tyler has struggled for many years, one hundred miles east of Dallas. It was started as an extension of service from Dallas and Fort Worth. Growth is slow and spotty and seldom permanent. This beachhead is necessary in serving the wide area of east Texas. Pastor John Quandt is now there trying to find out whether the house should become a chapel or that section \* with the house \* be sold and a WEF built. It is God's grace that the station still exists in spite of the delays and slow solution of land and chapel problems.

Pastor William Brassow at Universal City near San Antonio and Pastor Michael Albrecht in northwest Houston are new mode missions. Both are in the land or building stage. Pastor Edwin Lehmann serves southwest Fort Worth. We hope a parsonage can be built on the land we purchased so that the missionary can be closer to the area we want to work. Pastor Larry Zwiig is our latest new mode man at Atascocita [northeast Houston] and is preparing to get services started there after months of preparation.

Pastor John Kuske is working at Beaumont as an exploratory. Pastor David R. Clark is hopeful at Risen Savior in South Austin that at last land is available and bought. Waco, Abilene, San Angelo and Sugarland puzzle us. They are needed but it takes manpower the Board for Home Missions has decided is more necessary elsewhere. Fredericksburg, we rejoice, has a resident semi-retired pastor, Pastor Floyd Mattek. After being served from San Antonio for many years after an exploratory did not persuade the Board for Home Missions to accept it as a mission.

Angleton also desires to call a semi-retired pastor but has not been successful to date. There are other places that should be described, especially Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, but are omitted for they were not a part of the developing history under the essayist. May none of them feel slighted for this is a series of personal vignettes!

Outstanding is the story of God's grace in the coming of the WELS to the South. It is amazing that God allowed our synod with one man to break the ice in Texas. As the glamour and reputation of Texas are world renowned, isn't it marvelous that God permitted us to come with such a small work force and no outward sign of land or buildings? One almost has to chuckle at the audacity of our meager uses of means to penetrate such a large and important and well-known state and area. Surely only God could have permitted his word and confession of his word to survive in such a large area. Partly sophisticated and partly set in its ways, quite often highly-churched territory. Truly it is a story of God's grace!

## Appendix

### A. Pastor Robert Hartman

Pastor Hartman was the first resident pastor at St. Mark's Duncanville, TX. He began serving the area in 1966. He followed up on the exploratory work of Vicar Myrl Wagenknecht. He currently serves our synod as a the administrator for the WELS commission of Evangelism.

### B. Pastor Armin Schuetze

Pastor Schuetze served as a seminary professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. At present he is retired from the pastoral ministry, but continues actively researching synodical history. He recently finished a scholarly work on the founding founders of the synodical conference.

### C. Pastor Vilas Glaeske

Pastor Glaeske serves as the district president for the South Central District of the WELS. He has served the Lord in that capacity since the inception of the district. He has served in the state of Texas his entire ministry.

### D. Pastor Carl Mischke

Pastor Carl Mischke was served as the president of the WELS. Prior to his work as the synod's president he served as a district president and therefore was intimately in the synodical dealings with our work in Texas.

### E. Pastor Marcus C. Nitz

Pastor Nitz served as the district President of the Arizona – California District of the WELS at the time of the founding of the South Central District.



**1. What are your perceptions about the goals and objectives of the BHM at the time of the WELS start in Texas?**

Back in the 60's our primary goal was to serve WELS members who moved to the area and other confessional Lutherans. Once on site, we also focused on reaching the unchurched. But our primary reason for entering a new field was to serve WELS and other confessional Lutherans.

In Dallas, Ted and Lois Burgdorf received by error a bundle of NWLs. When Lois opened them she discovered other families who also were receiving the NWL. She contacted them, set up a meeting and as a group they requested WELS services in the area.

Most "Yankees" who moved to Dallas moved to the North end of the city. Ted's used car dealership was in Garland, NE Dallas area. It was natural to begin in this part of the city where WELS and other Lutheran "Yankee" transplants would find housing.

In Duncanville, on the SW side of Dallas, the Swensons lived. They were a part of the original group. It was determined to begin as soon as possible a mission in Duncanville, which was rapidly growing, about 8000 at that time, now over 40,000. There was no Lutheran church in Duncanville.

I was called to be the first resident in Duncanville, arriving in January of 1966. Calling had been going on for about 18 months as I recall. Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht had served as a Summer vicar in the area, I believe, in 1964. You can confirm that with him.

When I arrived there were three families as a nucleus in Duncanville, plus two widow ladies, one a former LCMS pastor's wife, the other the mother of one of the 3 families. On installation Sunday in Duncanville, 30 were present with guests. On the first Sunday I held services, 19 were present, which was our nucleus, plus my family.

I also served Hillsboro, a group that came out of the LCMS church in Malone under Rev. Francis Machina. Richard, his son and family, is still a member at Duncanville.

The BHM had already purchased an excellent 3 acre site in Duncanville, now across from the high school and with direct access to I20. The congregation bought an additional lot for the parsonage.

What distinguished the Dallas and Duncanville congregations in the early years is that Dallas was mostly "Yankee", and Duncanville was composed of mostly "Texans." Dallas also gathered more confessional Lutherans, and Duncanville became more of a community church with many mission prospects and adult confirmations. Dallas had

many WELS based members, I had only 2 WELS based families, one a military couple and the other a transplant (for work transfer) from Iowa.

On the day, we moved into our rental home, within an hour after the phone was installed, I received a phone call from a lady asking if I were the new Lutheran pastor in town. She grilled me with many questions about confessional Christianity. She invited me over to meet her, her husband and sons. They became our first adult confirmands. They had been confessional, southern, Presbyterian background. How did she find me so fast? Her husband was the phone installer.

In years we achieved self support status in Duncanville (as a dual parish with Hillsboro), and built the parsonage, the church, and an addition to the church for fellowship and education. The congregation served as its own contractor for the construction, under the leadership of Ray Swenson. If I remember correctly, the total cost for the buildings and property was about \$70,000, a real bargain even in those days. We even built the altar, pulpit, lectern. When they wanted to know how high to make it, I stood there and said, this high. I might add that the pulpit seemed a little more roomy in those days. When I returned not too long ago to preach there, it seemed a little smaller, or is it that I am a lot bigger.

When we built the parsonage, the Board of Trustees balked at our approach, and said it couldn't be done for the maximum allowed amount of \$17,500. We took a loan for \$17,400 and they said, if it was unfinished at that price, we'd have to live in an unfinished house. We had it finished for just under \$16,000, and then added extras like a fenced yard (we had five children), cabinets in the family room, etc. We completed the house for \$17,200.50. They never congratulated us on accomplishing our work, but only sent a letter requesting a return of the \$199.50 of unspent money.

The Bd. of Trustees also balked at the fixed windows in the Duncanville church. They believed windows should be made to open. In the South with air conditioning this was not necessary. Norm Berg convinced them that we were doing it the right way for our area.

The Hillsboro chapel was also partially built by the members and designed by Richard Machina. Here too, we built the altar, lectern, baptismal font, etc. We picked up a carpet remnant for the altar area, and later received some used or surplus carpeting for the sanctuary through a member of the Dallas church. The chapel in Hillsboro, I believe, was built for just over \$7000.

Church services in Hillsboro were always held in the afternoon or in the evening, so the pastor could spend the morning in the primary mission field of Duncanville. That way I could be at Duncanville for worship, SS, and Bible Class, and do the same in Hillsboro. Hillsboro was treated more as a preaching station than as a growing mission field.

One of our early members was Judge Fred Hensel and his wife. His brother was Rev. Paul Hensel, a part of the Protestant movement. Fred Hensel had been around the Lutheran Church, WELS, LCMS, ALC a long time and had seen it all. He was a fascinating person who could speak with real understanding the history and workings of various Lutheran Church bodies.

Two of my early members were Jim Trapp (and his wife and daughter) and John Harrell (and his wife, daughter and two sons). They came for confessional reasons from a LCMS church in Dallas. When they showed up they announced that they would be my evangelism team and went out one night every week making calls on prospects. I spent one morning every week making newcomer calls. We would have 20 to 30 or more newcomers every week. Jim and John would make contacts on those who were not at home by day and also follow up contacts. They would also give me referrals for follow up contacts that I would make.

Serving in Duncanville was one of those instances of being in the right place at the right time. Confessionalism was strong and that was what marked our church and population growth was strong.

- 2. What were some of the compelling reasons for the WELS to get started in Texas?**
- 3. What were your personal feelings about going beyond the “heartland” of the WELS to start up new missions, especially Texas where we had no presence whatsoever?**

I had been pastor in Flagstaff, AZ, while not a mission congregation, certainly a mission area. My primary ministry focus was outreach, so going to Texas was a natural.

It was exciting to go to a new mission area. Dallas is one of the finest metropolitan areas in the country. It was a great place to live and work and serve. Dallas and Texas did not see as much of the unrest as did other areas of the country during the Vietnam war. Texas people for the most part were pro-God and pro-country.

- 4. How did the deterioration of the WELS/LCMS relationship affect our movement into Texas?**

Both LCMS and ALC people looked us up, visited and joined quite readily. It was a more difficult decision for LCMS people because of a greater synodical loyalty. I remember once speaking to a lady who said she had taken a vow at confirmation to never leave the LCMS. When I Church as it continued to teach the word faithfully, she replied that her pastor actually changed the words of the confirmation vow to read faithful to the LCMS until death. Some LCMS people visited , identified with us

confessionally, but could not bring themselves to leave the LCMS pointed out that the confirmation vow was a vow to remain faithful to the word and to the Lutheran.

**5. What were some apparent obstacles to beginning work in Texas?**

One early on obstacle was getting men to accept calls, Pastor Glaeske was assigned, while Bob Neumann and I were called from the field and I believe in both cases it took well over a year.

A second possible obstacle was the remoteness to the district. In Dallas we were actually closer to the SEW district than to the AX-CA district. One of our early fall conferences was in California. We simply couldn't drive there, attend conference and return for church by the next Sunday. So, Vi Glaeske, Bob Neumann, and I held our own mini-conference at Jim Trapp's house. I also remember flying with Ted Burgdorf in his plane to the church dedication in Edna, then driving with others all night to get to conference in Arizona. I also remember one all night bus trip to El Paso to connect with people heading to Arizona for conference. In due time, the district equalized the travel cost to conference and we began to fly to conference in Arizona and California.

The church dedication in Edna was a neat experience, as they held a real Texas barbecue. The hunk of meat the men took out of the smoke barrel fire was the size of small roasts. Really good stuff, especially when you add cooked pinto beans to eat.

The first official Texas conference or circuit meeting was held in Hillsboro. I can't off hand remember the year. But the ladies of Hillsboro did themselves proud in serving the group, which at that time included, Dallas, Duncanville, Hillsboro, Houston, Edna, and San Antonio. I believe there were five pastors in all.

We also hosted a number of youth retreats in the late 60's with teens coming from all the congregations. In particular I remember the one at the Bay house near Edna (at midnight some of the adults went through a marsh to a shallow lake to do flounder spear fishing. Walking the snake infest marsh (they didn't tell us that until afterwards) was a nightmare.) and the one at Whitney at Ray Swenson's cabin. We had a great group of teens.

**6. I understand that at the time that the WELS began its work in Texas, Edgar Hoenecke was a tremendous "Cheerleader" for world missions. Was there any counterpart in home missions who was able to move people to support the work in Texas?**

Norm Berg was the Synod cheerleader for all home missions, and he did it well.

**7. What was your vision for Texas?**

Expansion, expansion, expansion! Ring the big cities, and work in the smaller cities as we received requests.

- 8. To what do you attribute the rapid expansion in Texas? (the subtitle of my paper is “a story of God’s grace” so I think I have that part covered in my paper. With this question I’m trying to get at more the human contingency than the divine providence.)**

In the late 60’s when I was there, it was a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

- 9. What was the role of the laity in Texas through all of this?**

I already mentioned the names of some of our lay leaders.

- 10. Personal vignettes about the WELS work beginning in Texas?**

**Pastor Robert Hartman  
Duncanville, TX**

Appendix B –Responses to pertinent questions about the WELS coming to Texas  
~Pastor Armin Schuetze

Dear Christopher,

I shall not attempt to answer each of your questions but will simply respond with some thoughts that I had about our home mission expansion during my ministry, especially also in Texas.

In my early ministry I was often troubled that there were so many areas of our country to which we could not transfer members to congregations of our synod. As long as we had a good relationship with the LCMS and truly felt united in the faith, we were satisfied that we could at least transfer members to a sister church. But as this relationship deteriorated, especially after World War II, this became ever more troublesome. I was pleased when we in the 1950s finally entered California and Florida, areas beyond our synod's largely mid-western concentration of churches.

The break with Missouri certainly hastened our home mission expansion. The Lord had brought us through a difficult doctrinal controversy and blessed us during subsequent years, also leading us into Texas. Our synod called a full-time chairman for the home mission board, first in the person of Pastor Raymond Wiechmann, then in 1968 Pastor Norman Berg. Their vigorous leadership hastened mission expansion in our country. At the same time, the Lord also blessed us with larger classes at our seminary. The enrollment increased so that classes which had generally numbered in the twenties increased to the 40s and even reached into the 60s.

As to our moving into Texas, I was pleased when it took place. My impression is that it occurred especially with the help of smaller groups from the LCMS which formed the nuclei for our first missions. Since this was new territory for us and Missouri had been in Texas for a long time ( Missouri's President Behnken was from Houston) we could not expect rapid growth. But grow we did and by 1983 could form the South Central District of our synod, a move that no doubt also contributed to further growth in this second largest state of our country.

My personal interest in Texas grew when in 1970 our son-in-law, Pastor William Gabb, moved to Houston to serve a new mission and when in 1977 another son-in-law, Pastor Charles Learman, moved to Friendswood, a suburb of Houston, to serve there for over 20 years. It was interesting to watch these Texas congregations grow, and also establish Christian day schools. I was always amazed and pleased to see the financial support of our Texas congregations which far exceeded that of our larger, older congregations in the heartland of our synod.

The senior church history papers contribute to recording much of our synod's history.

I expect to attend the graduation of your class in May.

Yours in Christ,

Armin Schuetze

Pastor Armin Schuetze  
WELS Church Historian

Dear Chris,

The following are my answers to your questions:

1. I believe the goals and objectives of the BHM in 1964 were to carry the Gospel to as many people as they possibly could and to do so in an organized manner in keeping with the policies of the GBHM (as it was called at that time). Texas was a state in which we were not represented and we were also anxious to serve our people who were beginning to move to the Sunbelt.
2. Compelling reasons for getting started when we did focused on the fact that we had Lutheran people in Dallas who asked us to come and serve them. This was true in Hillsboro and Edna as well. I don't know about Duncanville. I suspect that there were people there also who wanted a confessional Lutheran church as well. Most of the people seeking us out at that time were former members of the LC-MS who had reached the point that they could no longer in good conscience support what their former church body was teaching and promoting.
3. My feelings were that the Lord had opened the doors for us to enter the state with groups of confessional people to serve as nuclei to begin mission congregations. There were large cities in the state which were growing at a rapid rate due to the petro-chemical industry as well as the beginning of the technological industry. The "fullness of time" had come for Texas.
4. I think that I already answered this question. It gave us a jump start with dedicated Christians with whom to work. These were also well informed followers of the Cross who gave strong spiritual leadership to our fledgeling presence.
5. Distance and lack of manpower and money to do what we would like to have done were the greatest hinderances. One man serving three and four missions spread us very thin. The wait for CEF money to buy land and build was about three years as I remember. It could even have been longer. In Houston we chose to get in line for CEL (Chapel Expansion Loan) money because that line was very short. I might add that the interstate highway system was just beginning in the state at that time. So most of the travel between cities was on state highways which were congested and slow due to going through all the stage stops along the way.
6. "Uncle" Ray Wiechmann was the Executive Secretary at the time. He certainly was an encourager. He was followed by Norm Berg who also pushed the line forward.
7. My vision was to stay ahead of the momentum so that I didn't get run over! Actually, having had the privilege of serving on the Texas Mission District Mission Board, our vision was to begin work in all the major cities in the state and then to begin to fill in the places in between. It worked pretty well, but the Lord's priorities were often different from ours. There is one goal I would still like to realize before I turn in my badge and that is to see a synod academy somewhere in the State of Texas. I believe that it is needed especially since our two existing prep schools are full and should not be expanded for the sake of good student management. A school in Texas would take the pressure off of Luther Prep and it would provide for the movement of people to the Sunbelt.

8. We had men of good Christian character in leadership roles in the missions. They were men who shared the outreach enthusiasm of the missionaries. The society was not as secularized at that time so that the Gospel did not meet as much philosophical resistance. By the late sixties that was changing when our nations youth was pushed toward atheism and agnosticism. Also we were blessed missionary wives who managed their families and patiently sat home along many a night praying for the safety of their husbands and the Lord's blessing on their work. On the weekend they traveled hundreds of mile with their families, often providing the music for worship. They are unsung heroines.

9. I think that I have made this clear in other answers. We had gems. The Spirit generated love for the Savior the laity had was reflected in their love for His Word and that spilled over into a love for the missionaries and their families who brought them the Means of Grace.

10. The Lord has privileged me to be around as the Holy Spirit has given birth to a number of mission congregations through the years. Typical of the blessing was the beginning of what has come to be known as Christ the Lord in Houston. I had contact with 10 souls at the time of beginning the first service. When I came into the motel meeting room for the first service that Sunday evening in 1966 I found 27 people waiting for me. Some one once asked me, "How do you begin a mission in one of the nations largest cities without any contacts to begin with?" I smiled and said, "I get a sandwich sign and put it on and walk the medians of the freeways during rush hour!" Ray Wiechmann told us, "Just do it." That by the way was about all there was to the mission handbook at the time. I think it was six half pages long. Now that I think about it, I don't ever remembering having one of those. Once the Mission District was established and I served on the mission board, I realized that Chairman Diehl read us the monthly reports from the missionaries. I asked him if I was supposed to have submitted a monthly report and he said that i should have done that through the years. I had never done so. I asked why he had never said anything. He said, Mrs.. Platzer, one of the members, had always sent him a bulletin each week, so he was current on what was going on. What a guy!

I don't know what else I could write. It has been exciting work. I have been privileged to work with the finest people on earth - God's holy, elect.

I am simply forwarding this on to you as a reply because I don't know how to send it in "rich" or "poor" text!

Vilas

Pastor Vilas Glaeske  
President of South Central District



During the early years of our synod our mission outreach was almost exclusively a matter of meeting the boats that came from Germany and organizing the immigrants into congregations, but eventually the boats stopped coming.

During the years that I was studying for the ministry (I was in the class of 1947 from the Seminary) the shift to English became complete, at least, as the predominant language. At the same time the inter-synodical controversy was heating up. As our members left the Midwest and went to other parts of the country they were no longer comfortable in many Missouri Synod churches. After the break with Missouri in 1961 it became imperative for us to provide for our own as best we could. During the late 50's, 60's and early 70's we were getting many requests from groups in Missouri who were no longer comfortable in their synod. They often came with people and money which accounts for our rapid expansion during those years. Incidentally, one could also cite examples of LCMS pastors and members who came to us for the wrong reasons.

By the end of the 70's we were nearly twenty years away from our break with Missouri in 1961, so those requests had pretty well dried up. So another shift in focus occurred in the late 70's and early 80's in which the emphasis now turned to reaching the unchurched. Obviously, growth was much slower. It took much longer to reach self-support in such groups. Earlier projections for mission openings were not met and the result was unassigned candidates for a while. The synod's program of planned and special giving, which is flourishing today, came into being in the 80's and gradually more revenue became available for mission outreach.

The above is by way of general introduction.

- **What are your perceptions about the goals and objectives of the BHM at the time of the WELS start in Texas?**
- **What were some of the compelling reasons for the WELS to get started in Texas?**
- **What were your personal feelings about going beyond the “heartland” of the WELS to start up new missions, especially Texas where we had no presence whatsoever?**
- **How did the deterioration of the WELS/LCMS relationship affect our movement into Texas?**

My perception is that the BHM saw the need to serve our WELS members who could no longer be transferred to the LCMS. At the same time they were taking advantage of requests from people leaving the LCMS who often provided (for better or worse) the nucleus for a new congregation. I have a feeling that Texas probably produced quite a number of requests for the WELS to come there, since in those years Texas had the reputation of being a conservative district. Missouri log-time president, John Behnken, came from Texas.

- **What were some apparent obstacles to beginning work in Texas?**

One of the greatest obstacles would have been isolation from brothers in the ministry. During our early years in Texas the nearest WELS church was quite a distance away. Are you aware that we tried to start there prior to the break in 1961? A Pastor Wilbur Dorn served there for a time, I think in the Fort Worth area.

- **I understand that at the time that the WELS began its work in Texas, J. Edgar Hoenecke was a tremendous “Cheerleader” for world missions. Was there any counterpart in home missions who was able to move people to support the work in Texas?**

It's simply Edgar Hoenecke, but J. Edgar Hoover. Perhaps the closest person to a cheerleader for Home Missions would have been Ray Wiechmann. He was the first executive secretary for Home Missions at a time when full time executives were not popular. I know that he had to defend his office over against some who wondered what he did and whether the office was indeed necessary. I also heard him defend the slogan, “Every State by '78” as simply a man-made goal, not an attempt to program the Holy Spirit as some were implying.”

- **What was your vision for Texas?**

I don't think my vision for Texas was any different than it was for any area outside the Midwest. But I was a district president by 1964 and saw the need to become a nation-wide synod or start withering on the vine. The COP at that time was very supportive of mission expansion even though it meant creating some dual parishes and using other innovations to serve our Midwestern congregations at a time when there was a pastor shortage resulting from fallout in both directions because of the break with Missouri.

- **To what do you attribute the rapid expansion in Texas? (the subtitle of my paper is “a story of God’s grace” so I think I have that part covered in my paper. With this question I’m trying to get at more the human contingency than the divine providence.)**

I think the deterioration of the WELS-LCMS relationship was one of the main factors in our growth in Texas, perhaps more so than in some areas. I indicated earlier that Texas was considered a conservative district in those years and perhaps was more keenly aware of the change in Missouri than some areas were.

- **What was the role of the laity in Texas through all of this?**
- **Personal vignettes about the WELS work beginning in Texas?**

I am of the impression that the laity were quite involved in Texas. They had no neighboring WELS Pastors who might have directed them. A Mr. Burgdorf stands out in my mind. (His first name escapes me at the moment) But his father was a conservative Lutheran pastor in the LCMS and editor of the “Confessional Lutheran” for many years. On February 5, 1989 I had the privilege of preaching for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Calvary in Dallas. I recall that there was a fresh ice storm that day and the natives were having trouble driving. The caterer who had been engaged for the noon meal refused to come because of the roads. So they had to scrounge around at the local grocery stores to put a meal together.

The program that followed that meal was one that I have not forgotten. I've attended many such dinners and programs over the years. Some were not that exciting. But this one stands out in a class by itself. Mr. Burgdorf attended the above, he was the M.C. He called on various members of the congregation to speak, both men and women, young and old. One by one they came forward and told what the coming of the WELS to Texas meant to them personally. It was a moving experience. A lot of eyes, including my own, were not completely dry. These were indeed folks who had come to us for the right reasons, faithfulness to the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. For me, it made our move into Texas all worthwhile.

Pastor C. Mischke