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Church History Project 2007
Dan Koelpin Interview

For my project, I sat down for an interview with Dan Koelpin, WELS Administrator for World Missions. The main focus of the interview was the changes that have happened in WELS World Mission strategies over the last twenty years. IN response to my questions, he spoke of how these changes have affected the ministry of the gospel.

One recent change was passed at the 2007 WELS convention, a restructuring of the World Board. Under the new structure, there will not be as many members on the World Board. These members will get to visit the world fields more often, thereby giving them greater knowledge for decision making. In the past, the members of the board knew a lot about their particular missions, but very little about the rest of the missions. In the future, these decisions will be made by an educated board, rather than by competing entities.

Since 1987, the number of world mission fields has grown rapidly. There are many world outreach opportunities that are now available to the WELS. Due to expanding opportunities, strategies have been altered. Due to limited resources, including financial limitations, the WELS cannot serve many more fields than are being served currently. As a result, Pastor Koelpin tells us that the WELS has put a greater emphasis on indigenization than there was in the early years of world missions. This is not to say that the WELS did not set indigenization as a goal years ago, but now the WELS more eagerly looks toward indigenization, because there are other missions opportunities that our resources could be directed to.

There are other factors which have led to this emphasis on indigenization. There are times when political situations force missionaries to leave. On occasion a lack of finances has caused the WELS to pull missionaries out of fields more quickly than originally planned. Pastor Koelpin declares that in all these situations, God has used the circumstances to raise up new leaders and has blessed the spread of the gospel as a result.

At the core of the indigenization process is the theological training of national leaders. Therefore, with an added emphasis placed on indigenization comes an added emphasis placed on theological training in the native lands. As a result WELS World Seminaries have played a larger role as time has gone on. Many new strategies have been utilized in the training of national pastors. Pastor Koelpin discusses the use of online courses, The Pastoral Studies Institute, and The Latin American Traveling Theological Educators. Each of these provides immense benefits, but none are without their challenges.

In recent years the amount of work that is being done jointly by the Home and World Mission branches of the WELS has increased dramatically. Due to the influx of other cultures into the United States, it has become necessary that the two boards share ideas and resources to spread the gospel. Both boards have greatly benefited through their combined work.

Since 1987, technology has made incredible advances. WELS World Missions have taken full advantage of the new tools at their disposal, most notably, the internet. Pastor Koelpin tells us about the availability of online courses, the use of skype, and how the internet affects communication with the missionaries. One of the duties of the WELS World Mission Administrator is to identify new fields for mission objectives. The

internet has revolutionized this process. There have even been other church bodies which have made their first contact with the WELS over the internet.

A further new way that the WELS has been reaching out to the lost is through Multi-Language Publications. Though it was begun just twelve years ago, this has become an invaluable resource for our taking the gospel to the world. Other church bodies have used “The Promise”¹ because it is so well done. As Pastor Koelpin says, “We don’t care because they are spreading the gospel.”

WELS Kingdom Workers has been an additional tool utilized by world missions. Years ago it would have been unheard of for anyone other than a missionary to be working in overseas mission fields, but in recent years the WELS has had lay members working in places like India and Africa. These lay workers are a great asset because they resources which are over and above the WELS World Mission budget. A side benefit of lay missionaries is an increased awareness among laypeople about world missions.

In years past, it was a regularity for Seminary graduates to be assigned to foreign fields. In recent years, there has been an intentional change. The WELS Board for World Missions feels as though more experienced pastors would be of greater value in the world fields. Pastor Koelpin also speaks of the difficulty to find men and wives who are suited for work in world fields.

Finally, Pastor Koelpin gives us a look into what he sees as being the future of WELS World Missions, as well as what new strategies he sees being used.

I learned a great deal about WELS World Missions. One thing I learned is that we must constantly be willing to adapt. We are given the command by our Lord to go

¹ This is a publication of WELS Multi-Language Publications that outlines sin and grace. It has been published in many different languages. It is a colorful design with pictures that speak to all languages.

into all the world with the gospel. There are people around the globe who are dying without the saving message of the gospel. I learned a lot about the ways that mission outreach is being done, as well as reasons and rationale for the methods that are being used. What cannot change is the gospel message. That message is timeless and meant for all. As we step boldly into the future, we have been given a great responsibility as well as a great opportunity. More world field opportunities present themselves as well as more tools to take the gospel to those fields. We must continue to strive to find new ways and better ways to take the saving message of the gospel to every nation, tribe, people and language. As we strive to do this, we must ask the Lord's help and be willing to adapt new strategies while singing the old, old song. God be with us.