

Seeking the Saints in the Sixties and Seventies

A review of the Board for Home Missions practice during
this vital time, and what we have learned.

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Church History
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This paper is a reflection. It is intended to review the portion of history from the mid-sixties to 1979 in general. This paper is also an evaluation and appraisal. The goal is to look at education of students for missions and several key ideas and practices of the Board for WELS Home Missions. It is intended in no way to indict, to implicate or ascribe sin on behalf of any one person or even Synod. Rather, it is the hope of this author that by studying the rich, wonderful, and blessed past of the WELS during this period, we may serve God and his people even better in the future.

The stage of the early sixties was a volatile one for the Wisconsin Synod:

Before the break, "WELS was somewhat tied to Missouri and the Synodical Conference," but the break "made WELS more self-sufficient and independent," more able "to stand on its own two feet." Realizing that "we could no longer lean on 'Big Brother' in our mission priorities, we became more independent in accepting these responsibilities," which "has worked out to our advantage." Reflecting the "small Synoditis" syndrome mentioned earlier, one respondent said, "I believe it helped the WELS shed its ugly duckling complex." Another added, "We no longer have to be the squeaking mouse intimidated by the roaring lion, LCMS or ELCA [Evangelical Church in America]." Breaking with the Missouri Synod was "a wonderful thing. It was as if somebody took our water wings off, and we found out, 'Hey, I can swim!'" The WELS "emerged a more viable church body, no longer in LCMS' shadow."¹

Once the official break between the sister synods had taken place, WELS as a Synod was freed from the obligations imposed by the Synodical Conference. These obligations restricted a majority of mission movement and activity without permission from the Conference. Now the floodgates were opened, as the smaller Synod was about to discover.

The break made the Wisconsin Synod more mission-minded. Previously it had been "fairly common to let Missouri or the Synodical Conference take care of outreach, while we hung back." No longer able simply to transfer members to Missouri Synod congregations around the United States, "we became more conscious of outreach opportunities." Wisconsin was compelled to recognize that "without the Synodical Conference, the WELS would itself be obliged to preach the Gospel to every creature." The break with the LCMS "put us all on notice that the remark of one Missouri pastor was very much in place: 'The WELS is holding the *reine Lehre* [true doctrine], and is sitting on it!'"

...Quite suddenly, the Wisconsin Synod, which for more than a century had been exclusively a regional church body, with congregations in 16 states in 1961, found itself

¹ Braun, Mark. "Those were trying years!" Recollections of the "split". WLS Essay File. Page 47.

announcing mission openings across the United States. “In our district it provided a new zeal and energy for mission outreach. The Missouri Synod no longer had ‘squatter rights’ to promising fields and areas in which they were located.” Unfortunately, former Missourians who endured the traumatic experience of a church body “changing out from under them” sometimes brought with them to their new synod fears that any change in church methodology, however incidental were bellwethers that “Wisconsin will just go like Missouri did.”²

After the split, many confessional Missourians would leave their synod in the sixties. Many more follow in the seventies after the extent of liberalism is revealed and demonstrated by the actions at Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne. WELS will receive countless official and unofficial calls to come and serve pockets of these confessional Lutherans during this time. Pastor Bob Hochmuth said this in regard to the split and WELS Home Missions, “In any case the emphasis on home mission work was not inspired by split from LCMS, although it was definitely accelerated by it. Most notably King of Kings, Garden Grove. There was even wider impact especially after the Seminex episode in the early 70's, when "conservative Missourians" began to search us out.”³

The changing national scene also left an imprint on the WELS. Due to increased mobility people began to travel. Because of the shifting face of businesses, many families were uprooted from the Midwest and scattered to the coasts. During the Synodical Conference days, WELS pastors could simply transfer members to Missouri Synod churches. Now they could do so no longer. The Wisconsin Synod was compelled and forced to think on a national level for the sake of souls. The WELS was forced by God to learn to do missions for the sake of His elect—and did they ever.

In many respects the ‘60s and ‘70s represent the period of our synod’s greatest numerical growth and expansion. In 1960 we were active in 16 states. By 1984 we had organized congregations in all 50 states. (Maine was the last state with Beautiful Savior congregation in Portland organized in 1984.) In the ‘60s 136 congregations were organized and 203 in the ‘70s. Twenty percent of our current number of congregations were organized during this 20-year period. We also experienced communicant growth of 12.7 percent in the ‘60s and 15.8 percent in the ‘70s.

² Braun, Mark. “Those were trying years!” Recollections of the “split”. WLS EF. Pages 48-50.

³ Pastor Bob Hochmuth was vital in the organizing and establishing of the Northern California congregations during the sixties and seventies. All of his quotations in this paper were from email correspondence.

During the '60s and '70s the greatest number of new churches in any district were established in the Arizona-California District and in the outlying areas of the Michigan District. The '70s also saw a high number of new churches organized in the South Atlantic District. Over 15 percent of our communicant growth in the '70s came in the AZ-CA District, in a district that was only one-third the size of the five large Midwest districts. Most of the balance of our communicant growth came from these large Midwest districts (Michigan—12.8 percent, Minnesota—10.8 percent, Northern Wisconsin—16.1 percent, Southeastern Wisconsin—9.8 percent, and Western Wisconsin—17.5 percent) The growth of the '70s is no less than amazing.

Much of this growth came from children's confirmations (a result of the high number of baptisms in the '50s), and from those who joined us by profession of faith, confessional Christians joining a confessional church body. Adult confirmations decreased in the '60s as compared to the '50s, but increased by 17.5% in the '70s. The '80s show the highest number ever in adult confirmations, an increase of 22 percent over the '70s. Children's confirmations reached an all time high, 74,436. However, the children's baptisms in the '70s declined to 81,618, 25,000 less than during the peak of the '50s and gives one primary reason for the flattening of our growth rate in the '80s.

We had a very clear focus during this period. Start new churches and start them all over this country. The slogan of the '70s became "Every state by '78." In fact, we could say that the '60's and '70s had but one key thrust: mission expansion—both at home and abroad.⁴

The Synod had changed drastically in just forty to fifty years from what is described in the following:

In its early years the Synod's constituency kept itself quite aloof from the "Americans" around it. In one congregational history it is noted that to purchase a chapel "the *Americans* loaned us money," referring to the local banker. There was limited identification with non-German fellow citizens.

Connected with this isolating attitude was the language barrier which remained firm much longer in the Wisconsin Synod than in others. Only seven percent of all congregations had any English services at all, and only about two percent had them every Sunday in the year 1920!⁵

Our work to date in the mission field has been a miserable, petty bugling, a botchery lacking fire and force. At every convention we seem to be asking ourselves do we, or do we not want to do mission work? Half a heart, half an effort and half a result. We work as in a dream...⁶

⁴ WELS Historical Institute Journal. "Nationwide Expansion (1960-1979)." Volume 8, Number 2, 1991. Pages 37-38.

⁵ Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, & Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. 1998. *Vol. 73: Wisconsin Lutheran quarterly, Volume 73* (electronic edition.). Logos Library System; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Northwestern Publishing House: Milwaukee

⁶ A WELS 1919 Synod Convention Speaker. As quoted in Marshall, Daniel R. "The Possible Impact of the 1961 Wisconsin-Missouri separation on the WELS Home and World Mission Outreach." WLS Essay File. Page 2.

For various reasons, most of the pastors in the field who were called to a mission congregation would not leave their established church. This occurrence placed a majority of the responsibility on the shoulders of the Seminary graduates.⁷ In a phone interview with Pastor Daniel Gieschen⁸, he said the following, “Pastor Berg⁹ and I would meet with seniors at the Seminary, would go over the responsibilities of being a missionary and at a mission. This happened after the assignment committee gave calls.” On the whole, this sort of training was all that Seminarians received before going into a home mission congregation. Pastor Bob Hochmuth noted this experience in response to an email questionnaire:

The week after I arrived in AZ upon Sem graduation, Pastor Ray Zimmermann and Vic Schultz invited my bride and me to meet with them in downtown Phoenix. After 10 minutes of kindly welcoming and small talk, they suggested Esther might like to go shopping for an hour or so. After Scripture and prayer, their opening statement was: “You are a Sem graduate, you are qualified to serve as pastor in a congregation. Now you need to learn to be a missionary.” The two of them and all the other veterans in AZ were constantly concerned to be helpful in that.

Pastor Dan Gieschen did not comment on the lack of emphasis of missions at the Seminary, rather he highlighted the benefits of field training when he said, “Some of the biggest training that could be received was given on-hand.” Similarly, Pastor Hochmuth reiterated the same by saying, “Our best training ground was the vicarage. Men who vicared in CA in those years and were called back into missions here and elsewhere included: John Boehringer, Bob Koester, Paul Kelm, Jon Mahnke, Paul Schmiede, and Glen Schmiede.”

⁷ Some graduates who went to missions still longed for the established congregation. Pastor Hochmuth mentioned, “Some pastors in home mission fields, when confronted with a call back to an established congregation, and inclined to accept it, have articulated this idea: “I was trained (and my inclination is) to be a shepherd caring for a flock, not a cowboy rounding up strays.”

⁸ Pastor Dan Gieschen is a WELS pastor who has served in South Dakota—Clear Lake, Altmont. There he was elected to the district mission board, then in a short time became the Dakota –Montana district mission board chairman. This was all in his first five years of ministry. He accepted a call to St. Stephen’s in Adrian Michigan. There he was elected to be the financial secretary for the district mission board (for two years), and became the chairman for 13 years. Pastor Gieschen then accepted a call to be the chairman for the World Mission board, serving for 18 years. He himself was actively helping the Michigan District send men and money to start churches in Florida. All quotes from Pastor Gieschen are from a telephone interview.

⁹ Pastor Norm Berg was the Chairman for the GBHM starting in 1968. He served in that capacity until 1988.

However, Pastor Joel Gerlach¹⁰ in a video interview did make mention of the lack of mission education in the following:

The training that I received at the seminary during my student from (19)50-53, was strictly training to be a parish pastor, back in those days was the expectation after we graduated we would be serving a congregation in the Dakota's or we would be assistant pastors in a larger congregation somewhere. But the training we had to be pastors in missions was minimal, even perhaps less than minimal. That wasn't a part of our training during my time.

During this time period, there were no "Mission and Ministry" seminars at the seminary. In fact there was no emphasis at all geared toward training men for a mission call. This eventually changed with the calling of Pastor Gerlach, Professor David Valleskey from California, and also world missionary Professor E. H. Wendland from Africa. Pastor Gerlach emphasized this in response to the question, "What do you think we have learned from the sixties and seventies?"

Hindsight is always better than foresight...a major change for example is a change at the seminary. From what it was during the time I was teaching here to what it is today with the calling of Prof. Valleskey to teach evangelism, calling Prof. Wendland to bring a world mission emphasis onto the campus, and I think those were good decisions, and that the Synod and the pastors that have studied here have benefited from those changes.

Pastor Hochmuth still noted the value and benefit of the training at the seminary—even for the possibility of a mission call when he wrote, "Seems to me a valuable element in preparedness for (home) missions was/is thorough exegetically based knowledge of the NT, which translates into confidence for making Scripture based decision decisions in dealing with unconventional situations and non-traditional people."

¹⁰ "Was an assistant pastor at Grace Church in Tucson Arizona. Served there a little over two years. Then served two congregations in a joint parish on the New Mexican border in Douglas and Warren Arizona until 1963. Was called to start a mission congregation in Orange County California in Garden Grove from 1963 till the end of 1970. In 1977 was at the Seminary. Taught for eleven years teaching homiletics and dogmatics, and then went to serve as a mission counselor for the California mission board in the AZ-CA mission district. Served in that capacity from 1981 till the summer of 1985, then accepted a call to a parish at Santa Barbara California, and served there till the end of 1988 when he went to serve as senior pastor at Saint John's in Wauwatosa." All quotes from Pastor Gerlach are from a video interview that is submitted with this paper.

The Wisconsin Synod in a sense was caught off guard by the massive and quick expansion during these twenty years. Who could have predicted or thought possible such events? Yet God saw fit to send these men and to bless them, even if the results could not be measured in visible church numbers.

Because WELS was placing recent graduates in missions, there was an easy tendency for some to grow frustrated. This is not difficult to imagine when one considers several factors: hundreds of miles from the Midwest, beginning a ministry outside of the familiar norm of Midwest congregations, in some places the converts are not coming quickly—if at all, and the small nucleus is content to have a pastor and not do outreach. In order to try and help these pastors, the Mission Board developed the office of Mission Counselor. In respect to this Pastor Hochmuth said, "... The idea of a Mission Counselor was developed for mentoring and helping Seminary graduates advance as home missionaries. Meanwhile, of course, the Sem curriculum was broadening and deepening along these lines." Pastor Gerlach was called to be the mission counselor in the Arizona/California district. He described his activity as the following way:

Well, as a mission counselor myself there were a number of things that I had to do. First of all [there were] personal visits. [It was] simply to give the mission pastor an opportunity to sit down and talk about the problems he was facing. And the purpose of those visits primarily was to provide encouragement. Along with the encouragement one of the things I did was to help him understand short range and long range planning for him to have a plan, to set goals and give serious consideration to the steps your going to take to accomplish those goals. And a third thing that we did as mission counselors was to set up workshops for those congregations, to train members of those congregations for outreach, to be more effective witnesses when they spoke to somebody else about their savior. And also to emphasize in the congregations the importance of having a very specific game plan for their work, short range and long range plan. These things were required by the Mission Board. Each mission congregation had to file its one-year and five year plan with the Mission Board, and I would work with congregations helping them to prepare those plans.

Several pastors still active in WELS ministry commented privately to your author that if it were not for the help of their Mission Counselor, they would no longer be public ministers today. Pastor Gerlach also made mention of the successes of the program when he said:

I think if you'd ask a lot of those pastors they would say, "Yes" it was helpful. I think one of the things that I learned and I guess I expected that when I accepted the call as mission counselor, is that there would be two types of pastors. There would be pastors who would openly welcome the mission counselor any time he wanted to come and spend time. And then there were other pastors who weren't real happy to have a mission counselor park on their doorstep. Because they felt insecure and they felt their mission counselors visit with them would intensify their insecurity. So there were some who didn't really look for the help of the mission counselor and there were some who did. And the ones who welcomed the MC were for the most part the pastors who didn't need most of the help of the MC. And those who didn't welcome the help of the MC were the ones who really needed his help. So to answer your question, I would say yes the mission counselor program was successful. Not as successful as we would have liked it to have been. But it certainly did provide help to a lot of pastors who were looking for that help. And appreciated it.

Besides starting the mission counselor program, the Board for Home Missions under Pastor Norm Berg also encouraged each mission to acquire land and facility. The type of facility pushed by the GBHM was called the *WEF* unit. WEF stands for 'worship,' 'education,' and 'fellowship'. This meant that the facility would have a church to worship, room for classes on Sunday morning, and room for Christian fellowship. A mission would receive one of three WEF choices based on the size of the communicant membership. Pastor Gerlach spoke of the WEF usage in California:

When I was serving in Garden Grove, there were three types of units that could be built. And the type of chapel you built depended on the number of communicant members. The larger the number of communicant members when you built your first unit, the larger the facility you got. There was an 'A', 'B', 'C' type and I think the 'C' type was the largest, and we built the chapel out of the first church in Garden Grove we built the C type. It was a church that had a seating capacity of about 220, and there was about 1200 square feet of parish hall that was a part of the plan too. And we would have been in a real bind if we wouldn't have had that advantage. In fact within six months after the church was dedicated we were already holding three services on Sunday morning to accommodate the congregation. When I accepted the call as mission counselor in 1981, the WEF policy was in affect, and a number of congregations that I worked with in CA did build WEF units. There was one in the San Diego area that I thought was a very satisfactory chapel the limitation was 2000 square feet, and that

congregation derived maximum benefit. I think the architect worked with them was probably partly responsible for that. We had another one in my time that was built in Yorba Linda, fortunately the city wanted the property and it was sold and they relocated. But that [WEF] was not an advantage for that congregation. Yorba Linda, or at least the area in which was its property was pretty upscale. Most of the homes in that area I'm sure were selling from \$400,000 dollars up to 1 million. And we put up a two thousand square foot WEF unit that had four walls and roof with a cross on it. And it didn't attract anybody. That was a mistake. A couple of other congregations maybe because of the area in which the cong was located the WEF unit sufficed as a first unit, but I think that some of our congregations were handicapped by the WEF unit because it was a multi-purposed building as you said it worship, education, fellowship hall, all in 2000 square feet. I hope I have that number right, the 2000. It wasn't any more than that, I am sure of that.

Several others pastors had opinions on the WEF as well. Pastor Hochmuth commented, "Let me just point out that some missions started "progressed" with less than a WEF, for example a parsonage chapel. A bigger factor than the first unit, in my estimation, is the effort that follows. Too many Lutherans [were] thinking in terms of having a church, rather than being Church." Pastor Harry Hagedorn¹¹ spoke about the WEF when he said, "One of the major issues was the philosophy that every mission be provided land and facility and at a time during high inflation when a relatively small group took on debt for the land and facility." Pastor Gieschen commented towards the WEF unit saying, "Pastor Norm Berg would defend the WEF unit by saying the mission was supposed to be out of it in five years! Still three factors plagued the WEF: financial obligation, it usually couldn't grow fast enough, and a church couldn't add on to it reasonably." After saying this though, he followed up by saying, "When missions got their own facilities it was really an asset. Unchurched people were reluctant to come to a cafeteria or gym." Pastor Gerlach added a different perspective when answering the question, "...[going back to the WEF], one of the drawbacks was we were expecting people [unchurched] to come into our circles on our terms..."

I think that there was a mentality that was pervasive at one time that says we put a wall up around our churches and we were going to maintain our purity and if you want

¹¹ Pastor Harry Hagedorn is the current Board for Home Missions Chairman. He was called in 1988 to succeed Pastor Norm Berg.

to join us you have to climb over the wall. But I think we've learned we need to be more open-minded with people, we need to meet them where they're at, not us where we're at—instead of expecting them to meet us where we are at.

One of the worst comments came from a Pastor who said, "The Mission Board told missionaries not to build it too churchy, because if this mission fails we want to be able to sell this off and churches are hard to sell." The WEF idea may best be described by Pastor Gieschen who stated, "The Mission board made a mistake with the WEF." This author is not aware of the total number of WEF units still used in the WELS. However, after speaking with the Board for Home Missions many mission congregations who built them in the late 1970's are still using them today.

In saying this, one does well to note that never before had the WELS experienced anything like the 1960's and 1970's. The men in positions of authority during this time frankly did the best they could with the means they had and facing the issues they did. They were simply trying to carry out the function of their office to God's glory. Pastor Hagedorn said in respect to this, "People didn't make evil sinful judgments, but in hindsight they weren't good ideas."

Many good ideas have developed from the work of all the pastors from the Sixties and Seventies. One already mentioned is the practical focus of evangelism and missions at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Pastor Gerlach said, "Well I think the training at the seminary has adjusted considerably to a changed situation. We are putting more and more graduates into mission congregations, and I think they are better equipped to do that kind of work than let's say 25 years ago. Pastor Gieschen opined that the Seminary continue to "get top drawer missionaries to speak to the graduating classes."

Another benefit has been the growth for the WELS laity and even non-members through the experiences and efforts of the Home Missions pastors. Pastor Gerlach said:

In fact, I even wrote a couple of articles when I was writing for Northwestern Lutheran and Forward in Christ about the experiences I had meeting with an individual,

how the conversations got going, what we talked about, and how finally I had the opportunity to say something one on one and say something to that person about my savior. I often wondered if I am going to meet some of those people heaven someday who had the seed planted ... [from his conversations with people]

Specifically for the Board for Home Missions, many improvements in practice have developed.

Pastor Bob Hochmuth mentioned several points:

There is the desirability of sending a ministry team into a new field. We want to select a field on the basis of outreach potential rather than on a “dissatisfied conservative Lutheran transmission” potential. Also there is the desirability of realistic plan for providing substantial facilities at an early date. The congregation needs to develop an outreach mindset, not just the missionary. Finally we need to try to help people emphasize “**being** Christ's Church” rather than “**having** a church.”

As your author spoke to Pastors Gieschen, Hochmuth and Gerlach, many things were always evident. One could not miss—whether in email, over the phone, or in a sit down interview—the zeal for ministry and the joy of being able to serve the Lord—especially during this time. This was a period like no other in history, and most likely will not be repeated. Through it God used these men [and others] to extend the visible kingdom, to search out the lost, and also to sustain and nurture other workers in the kingdom. Some final quotations and insight included from these men:

Pastor Gieschen said, “The Lord used that period to give strength to the synod. I considered that a marvelous privilege [to be a part of that mission expansion]. As the lord granted us to open these missions, we developed a mission outlook desire, plus we strengthened the base of the WELS.”

Pastor Hochmuth mentioned about his ministry,

In the ministry, from my western and limited point of involvement I was not conscious of a major change taking place. In my experience from day one reaching out was what ministry was all about. I was called from the Sem to start a new congregation in Tucson with a nucleus of (former LCMS) Midwesterners who were promised we would start on the growing edge of the city, now burgeoning after WWII. A week before I arrived they started the first LCMS cong in AZ. So I began by canvassing for three months—looking not for WELS people, but for unchurched.

In an answer to the question, “Any sort of closing thoughts you would like to add about ministry or home missions,” Pastor Gerlach stated:

Oh I suppose I could say that during the sixties and seventies I was glad to be where I was. The experience in coming to Orange County CA, and starting a congregation from scratch basically—there’s just nothing that compares with that. The Synod already owned the property when we got there, they had purchased an abandoned orange grove and there was a core, a small core of people so it was not like I was doing exploratory work. But that growth that we experienced there, the influx of members and the opportunity to see a congregation get self-established and off on its feet and then proceed with the mission of the church—a great experience. I hope a lot of graduates from the Seminary have that same experience. It’s going to be a lot tougher in this century than it was back in the sixties and seventies.

What great blessings God has poured out on the Wisconsin Synod. He remained faithful to His promises: to give workers for the harvest, to never let His Word return empty, and also to strengthen the stakes of the WELS through the Word. May God bless the WELS through Home [and World] Missions and through its people to keep on spreading the gospel. To God be the glory.

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Interview of Pastor Joel Gerlach

December 5, 2003

Interviewer: Aaron T. Mueller

For Church History Paper: Evaluation of 1960's and 1970's WELS Home Mission Programs;

Aaron: Thank you again for coming today, and for taking the time to do this. By way of introduction, can you give me a history of where you grew up?

Pastor Gerlach: I grew up in Southern Minnesota, my father was a principle of the school in Arlington Minnesota. His background was in the Missouri Synod. But because it was only 25 miles from New Ulm, I went to prep school there, and then off to Northwestern and then graduated from the Seminary here at 1953, fifty years ago. My first assignment was an assistant pastor at Grace Church in Tucson Arizona. I served there a little over two years, and then I accepted a call to serve two congregations in a joint parish on the New Mexican border in Douglas and Warren Arizona. I served there until 1963 I was called to start a mission congregation in Orange County California in Garden Grove. Actually the congregation had been started by one of the pastors in LA I was the first pastor to serve the congregation full time. I served in garden grove from 1963 till the end of 1970. In '71 I was installed here at the Seminary. I taught for eleven years teaching homiletics and dogmatics, and then I accepted a call to serve as a mission counselor. For the California mission board in the AZ-CA mission district. I served in that capacity from 1981 till the summer of 1985, accepted a call to a parish at Santa Barbara California, and I served there till the end of 1988 when I accepted a call to serve as senior pastor at Saint John's in Wauwatosa. I went to that congregation in 1988, since then I have had months of opportunities to do many different things, I had served in Germany as an assistant to the chaplain. I spent two summers on Kodiak Island in Alaska doing exploratory mission work and I served vacancies in East Brunswick New Jersey, and Portland OR, I just finished a four month stint in Richmond Virginia, assisting Pastor John Kuske at an outreach program at Living Hope Lutheran Church and then Roanoke Virginia.

Aaron: You are very experienced in a variety of different places across the country and world. Can you tell me more about what was it like first going into a mission? What specific things of training did you receive...

Pastor Gerlach: The training that I received at the seminary during my student from (19)50-53, was strictly training to be a parish pastor, back in those days was the expectation after we graduated we would be serving a congregation in the Dakota's or we would be assistant pastors in a larger congregation somewhere. But the training we had to be pastors in missions was minimal, even perhaps less than minimal. That wasn't a part of our training during my time.

Aaron: So what're your ideas or insight on the focus now for the student body here?

Pastor Gerlach: Well I think the training at the seminary has adjusted considerably to a changed situation. We are putting more and more graduates into mission congregations, and I think they are better equipped to do that kind of work then let's say 25 years ago. If it serves me correctly, Prof. Valleskey was the first man called to the Seminary, to put an emphasis on evangelism and outreach.

Aaron: Going back those 25 years, what kind of things would you incorporate for yourself and then in the realm of outreach? How did you push your congregation to do outreach?

Pastor Gerlach: I think I developed an appreciation for what it means to be a mission minded pastor when I served as an assistant in Tucson AZ, because we had a large influx of winter visitors, we also had a lot of people who came out there from the Midwest because they had health problems from respiratory or

TB or whatever it might have been. And that exposed me to a lot of people who weren't typically Midwesterners. It was more of a cosmopolitan setting, and I had grown up in a small town in Minnesota with a lot of farmers in a small town atmosphere. So I think that changed my outlook on what ministry involves. Then I served in two small congregations that were receiving synod subsidy down on the Mexican border. Which gave me more time for study, to prepare myself to serve more effectively in the ministry, with time for study, sermon preparation and so forth. Then when I came to CA, to Orange County, that was a very cosmopolitan setting. And I think that some of the people I was exposed to in Tucson the mayor of the city was a member of Grace Church, there were faculty members from the university just a couple blocks away from Grace Church. It was a different kind of a setting. I think I learned things from most people that enabled me to serve more effectively when I came to a mission congregation in California.

Aaron: What sort of things did you incorporate to try to instill in your congregation to do evangelism

Pastor Gerlach: Are you thinking of that time in particular or when I was mission counselor?

Aaron: How about before mission counselor?

Pastor Gerlach: In those early years in Garden Grove, I didn't do a lot of training of the members of the congregation for outreach because we had a growth in membership that included people that had been trained elsewhere before they came to our mission. Specifically from the ALC, a neighboring congregation was split because of the charismatic movement and its pastor's involvement in speaking in tongues and the whole charismatic bit. And we gained quite a number of members from that congregation who had been trained by someone else for outreach. So I learned a little about outreach from my members, from the enthusiasm that they have. There were people in the congregation who witnessed to friends and neighbors and brought them to adult instruction classes. People that I had never met before I walked into the classroom on Sunday morning to start the class. We had another member who was unable to serve on the evangelism committee. He was originally from Wisconsin and had a RV business and sold motor homes and RV's vehicles and so he was unavailable during the weekly evenings to participate in evangelism efforts by being a member of the evangelism committee. About two or three times a month he would come on Monday morning and pick up leftover service folders from the previous days service he had a map of the area and he had mapped out a certain area on that map that he was going to cover on his own. He would spend time Monday mornings going up and down the streets ringing doorbells and handing out service folders and inviting people to come to King of King's Church. So what did I do to prepare people to do that? I just sat back and watched them do it. They were prepared by somebody else before they came to that congregation. I learned a lot about outreach from those people that served me in good stead in later years.

Aaron: What sort of things did you pick up for your personal growth in doing outreach and being a missionary?

Pastor Gerlach: One of the things that I learned soon after I came to Orange County is that this is a whole new world from the little old mining community in the west. It was cosmopolitan, it was, how shall I characterize it? It was yuppie types. Many people were driving porches and Mercedes and BMW's. It was the heart of the aerospace industry; the Apollo program was born in Orange County CA. McDonald Douglas was one of the primary contractors that built the spacecraft that went to the moon. One of the members of the congregation—still a good friend—was the lead engineer in developing the lunar legs on the lunar lander. Another man in the cong. of whom I had lunch just a number of weeks ago in Richmond Virginia, was originally from Fond du Lac, graduated from Winnebago Lutheran Academy, and he was involved in the Apollo Program. Another man in the congregation originally from Neenah was a man who

put the final stamp on the Apollo rockets before they were sent to Cape Canaveral, to send men to space, so it was a different kind of clientele if you will, and I had met a young man and his wife during his army days at Fort Watchuka in Arizona, who worshipped at Grace Church in Warren Arizona, when I had accepted this call to start his mission congregation in Orange County, this man and his wife had just moved to the area. Just a few months before we did. He was a typical Southern Californian, very cosmopolitan in his outlook. And in a sense he kinda took me under his wings and helped me to brush off some of the Midwest exterior that was quite evident to everybody and help fit me into that society into that culture rather, and to feel comfortable in reaching out to and witnessing to people in that environment.

Aaron: Did you pick up any gifts along the way that might have helped your growth to have a wider range of perspective?

Pastor Gerlach: I would say this friend did a lot of things to help me to grow. When I accepted the call to the seminary, for a number of years after I had left there and was serving here, he bought me a subscription to the Wilson Quarterly, a magazine that has a lot of summary material in it from every field of endeavor: economics, politics, science, literature, and drama and so forth, the one section of the Wilson quarterly contains synopsis of articles that have been contained in other journals and it was a way to spend a minimal amount of time getting some familiarity with other kind of thinking that was going on out there in the world in which I was living and working. I also when I was here at the seminary I reviewed a homiletics text that was written by a professor at Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne in which he talked about the importance of pastors as far as their sermon preparation is concerned of exposing themselves to what he called belletristic literature. I didn't know what the word meant. I figured it out from context and looked it up in the dictionary. It's a word that means, that covers a wide range of material. Belletristic literature is literature that keeps you abreast of times of the world you live in. In sermon preparation for instance, you can include things that relate to things that people who are sitting in your pews are thinking about and are exposed to on a regular basis. I think that's important for pastors to be familiar with the culture in which the people live and move and work.

Aaron: In regards to the discussion in which we're working towards and which I've asked you to come here for, discussing the sixties and seventies, in respect to Home Missions and the practices that were done, can you just give your outlook in general in how things happened and developed, just a history.

Pastor Gerlach: Well those were the decades of mission expansion in our Synod, we were establishing as many as 20-25 new mission congregations a year. In many of those mission congregation's calls were extended to men to serve and establish congregations and not many of them were of a mind to lead and establish congregations to start from scratch in a mission. And the result of that was the Board for Home Missions were looking to the Seminary to provide pastor for those congregations. They were trained to be parish pastors, but they weren't trained as we said before to be mission pastors, and so some of them floundered. They didn't know things that they need to know to serve effectively in those situations, and that's how the mission counselor program was conceived and born, and one of the purposes of the mission counselor program was to provide an experienced pastor to sit down with young mission pastors and work with them to give them insights and help in areas where they needed insight and help, so they could function effectively as mission pastors.

Aaron: What sort of things do you recall that Home Missions developed to sort of help pastors?

Pastor Gerlach: Well, as a mission counselor myself there were a number of things that I had to do. First of all personal visits. Simply to give the mission pastor an opportunity to sit down and talk about the problems he was facing. And the purpose of those visits primarily was to provide encouragement. Along

with the encouragement one of the things I did was to help him understand short range and long range planning for him. To have a plan, to set goals and give serious consideration to the steps you going to take to accomplish those goals. And a third thing that we did as mission counselors was to set up workshops for those congregations, to train members of those congregations for outreach, to be more effective witnesses when they spoke to somebody else about their savior. And also to emphasize in the congregations the importance of having a very specific game plan for their work, short range and long range plan. These things were required by the mission board. Each mission congregation had to file its one year and five year plan with the MB, and I would work with congregations helping them to prepare those plans.

Aaron: During this time did you feel the Mission Counselor program was a successful one?

Pastor Gerlach: I think if you'd ask a lot of those pastors they would say 'yes' it was helpful. I think one of the things that I learned and I guess I expected that when I accepted the call as mission counselor, is that there would be two types of pastors. There would be pastors who would openly welcome the mission counselor any time he wanted to come and spend time. And then there were other pastors who weren't real happy to have a mission counselor park on their doorstep. Because they felt insecure and they felt their mission counselors visit with them would intensify their insecurity. So there were some who didn't really look for the help of the mission counselor and there were some who did. And the ones who welcomed the MC were for the most part the pastors who didn't need most of the help of the MC. And those who didn't welcome the help of the MC were the ones who really needed his help. So to answer your question, I would say yes the mission counselor program was successful. Not as successful as we would have liked it to have been. But it certainly did provide help to a lot of pastors who were looking for that help. And appreciated it.

Aaron: What about today? Do you consider due to the reality that starting home missions and exploratories has really tapered off for financial reasons, would you consider the MC to be a vital aspect and necessity for our Synod?

Pastor Gerlach: That's a hard one for me to answer. Because I have been removed from the mission setting for so long, except for the four months I spent in Virginia. But that was kind of a different situation. My guess is the MC program is still serving a purpose, within the Synod, and that there are young pastors who are being placed in mission congregations or accepting calls into mission cong and I think the MC who are now serving have been at it long enough that they know what they need to do to provide the help required in those situations.

Aaron: Just for the tape reasons, what number mission counselor were you?

Pastor Gerlach: I was the third one. If I remember correctly, Robert Hartman was the first man called to be a MC, and I can't recall who the second one was. And we would meet once a year at one of the times for the General Board for Home Missions.

Aaron: Another one of the things that came out during the sixties and seventies was this idea of the WEF unit that developed in the mid to later seventies, and then finally implemented. One of the first two spots it was used was in Plymouth Wisconsin. I am not sure if the WEF (Worship, Education, Fellowship) was used much in California or ...

Pastor Gerlach: It was unfortunately.

Aaron: Would you mind giving a history?

Pastor Gerlach: Well, I had the advantage of working with a mission congregation and building a facility before the WEF policy was established. When I was serving in Garden Grove, there were three types of units that could be built. And the type of chapel you built depended on the number of communicant members. The larger the number of communicant members when you built your first unit, the larger the facility you got. There was an 'A', 'B', 'C' type and I think the 'C' type was the largest, and we built the chapel out of the first church in Garden Grove we built the C type. It was a church that had a seating capacity of about 220, and there was about 1200 square feet of parish hall that was a part of the plan too. And we would have been in a real bind if we wouldn't have had that advantage. In fact within six months after the church was dedicated we were already holding three services on Sunday morning to accommodate the congregation. When I accepted the call as mission counselor in 1981, the WEF policy was in affect, and a number of congregations that I worked with in CA did build WEF units. There was one in the San Diego area that I thought was a very satisfactory chapel the limitation was 2000 square feet, and that congregation in ??? derived maximum benefit. I think the architect worked with them was probably partly responsible for that. We had another one in my time that was built in Jorbalinda, fortunately the city wanted the property and it was sold and they relocated. But that (WEF) was not an advantage for that congregation. Jorabalinda, or at least the area in which was its property was pretty upscale. Most of the homes in that area I'm sure were selling from 400,000 dollars up to 1 million. And we put up a two thousand square foot WEF unit that had four walls and roof with a cross on it. And it didn't attract anybody. That was a mistake. A couple of other congregations maybe because of the area in which the cong was located the WEF unit sufficed as a first unit, but I think that some of our congregations were handicapped by the WEF unit because it was a multi-purposed building as you said it worship, education, fellowship hall, all in 2000 square feet. I hope I have that number right, the 2000. It wasn't any more than that, I am sure of that.

Aaron: Do you know off hand if there are any congregations in CA, that are still in the WEF?

Pastor Gerlach: No, I don't know that because I have been out of the CA area for quite some time. I am trying to think of congregations that we visited. I think the one in Santa Maria might still be a WEF unit. I don't know.

Aaron: The reason I bring that up is WEF was designed for the short term, to build and then about 5 to 10 years, to have something else in its place. It is interesting to note that 20 to 30 years later some churches are still in WEF units.

In your general opinion, where do you think we would be without the sixties and seventies? I think we have been noting sort of a double-edged sword with this mission expansion here, by God's grace it is a joy and a wonder to see these men go out into the field and start congregations, and seek the lost. And yet on the other hand, some maybe negative things happened as well. Perhaps that's the reason for the mission counselors program, to help some of these gentlemen.

What do you think was the benefit or the results of the sixties and seventies?

Pastor Gerlach: The sixties and the seventies were unique for a number of different reasons. One of them, our separation from the Missouri Synod, meant that if we wanted to serve our people, we had to expand our mission efforts. For another thing, I think that that time, there were more and more people from congregations, whether the ALC or ULC or the Missouri Synod who realized that some radical changes were taking place. And they felt the need to find a church that was still faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. And I think a lot of our missions benefited from that, they were people who were Lutherans who were looking for a Lutheran home. That isn't happening anymore. Even with the radicalism that has taken over the ELCA I don't see a lot of people leaving the ELCA and looking for a more conservative church. And I think to a large extent that is true in the Missouri Synod too even

thought the Missouri Synod is a house divided. There are a few of Missouri Synod pastors who are looking elsewhere and some members of ...not to the extent of that was the case in the sixties and seventies. Going back to King of Kings in Orange County, after the church was built, the next year, it was dedicated in 1963, was 1961, no 63, and the church was dedicated, my history is getting fuzzy, I was installed in January of 1963, and October of 1964 we dedicated the church, and the next year we started a Christian day school, with two teachers. Two teachers had left a large Missouri Synod congregation in Orange California and joined the congregation and served as a faculty of the school. Did I relate to you before about the neighboring congregation that had split because of the charismatic movement? We had an influx of people from that congregation? That kind of thing isn't happening anymore, not to the extent that it was back in the sixties and seventies. How has mission work changed? Mission pastors now are having to find different ways to make contact with people and in working with them oftentimes they are working with people who have no real understanding of Christianity at all, they are not conservative Lutherans looking for a more comfortable Lutheran church. They have a feeling that something is mission in their lives. They are looking for a spiritual element but they don't really know what they are looking for, and I think mission pastors today have to find ways to be able to communicate with those people to share the gospel with them.

Aaron: Where do you think your Synod would be without the sixties and seventies?

Pastor Gerlach: That's a good question. We certainly wouldn't have expanded all across the 48 states the way we have without two decades of mission expansion. We are still predominantly a midwestern church body, but we would be much more so without the expansion of the sixties and seventies. We came up with the slogan at the synod convention in the late sixties, and the slogan was, "In every state by '78". And I think we accomplished that.

Aaron: I think the goal was accomplished in '82 or '83 with the last church being built in Portland, Maine. What do you think are the negatives, if you can say there are any negatives from doing mission outreach? What are negatives or drawbacks from our efforts during this time?

Pastor Gerlach: The drawbacks of the sixties and seventies? I am not sure I know how to address that one. Oh one of them would be the necessity of finding new ways to do mission work. People were coming to us because they were dissatisfied with what was going on in their own churches. And I am not thinking only of Lutherans. We had a good friend of mine in CA who came to us was a Presbyterian, and were still good friends of his who happen to be in the ELS now. But we have people coming to us from other denominations, and a lot of Lutherans and that isn't happening anymore. So one of the things we have to learn is how do we reach out to people in communities to people who are totally unchurched. In the sixties and seventies we were reaching out and a lot of instances to church.

Aaron: going back to the WEF, one of the drawbacks was we were expecting people (unchurched) to come into our circles on our terms.....??

Pastor Gerlach: I think that there was a mentality that was pervasive at one time that says we put a wall up around our churches and we were going to maintain our purity and if you want to join us you have to climb over the wall. But I think we've learned we need to be more open minded with people, we need to meet them where they're at, not us where we're at—instead of expecting them to meet us where we are at. Does that make sense?

Aaron: Do you have any examples of that—I know I asked you off the cuff...

Pastor Gerlach: When I was serving in a mission congregation, no. I can remember a lot of instances when I was a MC and I did a lot of traveling between Northern and Southern California. Initially we lived in the San Jose area and we were members of Apostles in San Jose. I traveled to Southern California a lot and then the Synod bought a home in Orange County and I traveled to the North, and I met a lot of people traveling, because the cheapest way to travel in those days was by air. In fact it was cheaper than the Greyhound Bus, so if I didn't drive I met a lot of people on those flights and strike up a conversation with them and usually I would try to turn the conversation around to see spiritual things, where they were at, whether he was a Christian or not. I think I learned some things from those experiences: how to approach people, what to talk about, how to arouse interest so that instead of asking them questions, they would begin to ask me about what I believe. That's a technique I think that pastors have to know how to find ways to make people curious about what we believe and teach. In fact, I even wrote a couple of articles when I was writing for Northwestern Lutheran and Forward in Christ about the experiences I had meeting with an individual, how the conversations got going, what we talked about, and how finally I had the opportunity to say something one on one and say something to that person about my savior. I often wondered if I am going to meet some of those people heaven someday who had the seed planted and saw that seed sprout.

Aaron: Without passing judgment, do you think having a crash course in trying to do missions in those 20 years, do you think we used those twenty years in the best possible ways, or do you think we can learn more from them?

Pastor Gerlach: Hindsight is always better than foresight. When we look back we can see mistakes that were made, strategies that we employed that weren't the best strategies for employing at the time. And I think we have learned from our mistakes that we have—a major change for example is a change at the seminary. From what it was during the time I was teaching here to what it is today with the calling of Prof. Valleskey to teach evangelism, calling Prof. Wendland to bring a world mission emphasis onto the campus, and I think those were good decisions, and that the Synod and the pastors that have studied here have benefited from those changes.

Aaron: Question about rationale of sending graduates (warm-bodies) into the mission field just because we have the money and the manpower.

Pastor Gerlach: I don't think that's a good policy. I would imagine that Pastors or graduates who get calls like that have a MC to take that person under their wing much more quickly than was the case years ago, and while that student may not have been prepared in the best way to do that kind of mission work while I was here at the Sem, I think that mission counselors will see to it that he gets the help that he needs, much more quickly than those pastors did back in the 70's and 80's.

Aaron: Looking back to your ministry what are some of the joys in thinking back to your ministry...

Pastor Gerlach: My heart has always been in missions. When I accepted the call to Santa Barbara, the congregation arranged for my son in El Paso at the time to preach for my installation in Santa Barbara, without telling me about it. I remember him telling me something in the sermon about how he knew that when I was serving here at the Sem I had always hoped to be back in the parish again someday, and he referred to that in his sermon and said that I had to be feeling especially good about being back in a mission congregation again. Now, I do have a lot of satisfaction from being at the Sem, training young men for the ministry, but there is nothing that equates it with being out in the mission field when you sit down with people who don't know their Savior, and then help them to know God's plan of salvation. I've had some remarkable experiences. During my Garden Grove days, I had the opportunity to instruct and bring into the congregation two Jewish families. Had a member of the congregation whose name was

Walter ?? he was a pharmacist and his parents were Orthodox Jews from New York who sort of ostracized him when he became a Christian, because he couldn't always attend a bible class on Sun., he asked if he could come on Wed. when I had a women's bible class, he joined the cong. And started attending the Wed. morning class we were studying Jeremiah there and he sat there always in the front row with his Hebrew Bible, and I had a stock answer when he would ask questions, "Walter I don't know, but I'll look it up and can tell you next week!" He made me realize how rusty my Hebrew had become, but that's off the subject. With that kind of experience, taking people who have no knowledge whatsoever about the Christian gospel, they have their own ideas about what Christianity is, their incorrect ones, to sit down take those people into the word and see the look in their eyes when the Holy Spirit starts turning on the light. I didn't make many converts to the Christian faith during the eleven years that I spent here on the hill. I was compensated for that when I got back in the parish again. Santa Barbara was a good place for me.

Aaron: (Reminding Pastor of how many people he affected through all the students he helped teach at the Seminary, and the practical experiences in missions that made them better witnesses...)

Pastor Gerlach: I got the satisfaction every once in a while of crossing paths with a former student, who says, "Prof, in dogmatics at the Sem, you once said, (and I don't have any recollection) he said, that has always stuck with me and I always wanted to express my appreciation." Those kind of things happen every once in awhile. That is very rewarding. That's not nearly as rewarding as someone saying to you, "Without you I would never have known my savior."

Aaron: Any sort of closing thoughts you would like to add about ministry or home missions...

Pastor Gerlach: Oh I suppose I could say that during the sixties and seventies I was glad to be where I was. The experience in coming to Orange County CA, and starting a congregation from scratch basically—There's just nothing that compares with that. The Synod already owned the property when we got there, they had purchased an abandoned orange grove and there was a core, a small core of people so it was not like I was doing exploratory work. But that growth that we experienced there, the influx of members and the opportunity to see a congregation get self-established and off on its feet and then proceed with the mission of the church. A great experience. I hope a lot of graduates from the seminary have that same experience. It's going to be a lot tougher in this century than it was back in the sixties and seventies.

Thanking Pastor for his time

NOTE: there is more on this tape. I am not sure if Pastor realizes it, but he just started talking after the interview, and I hit record and just let him go. I am not going to record those notes here, since they are not an official part of the interview.