

# Rediscovering the New World:

The Years Preceding the Formation of the North Atlantic District

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*“Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35).* These words define the mission fields and neighborhoods that make up the North Atlantic District (NAD) of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The NAD holds over sixty million souls waiting to hear the Gospel. Hearing that number, one understands why the WELS aggressively established churches on the eastern seaboard of America some forty-five years ago: the field was, and still is, ripe and harvesting waiting.

This paper and writer plan to record the founding of the NAD district—from its beginnings as the Southeastern conference of the Michigan district, through its years as the Colonial conference and Colonial Mission District, until the establishment of the North Atlantic District of the WELS in 1983.

### **Seeing the ripe mission field**

The WELS initially avoided the eastern seaboard as a potential mission field, later the NAD, during the first century of its existence. It avoided the east coast this way not because it lacked mission zeal or only catered to German immigrants, but because of a membership in the Synodical Council. Following the founding of the Synodical Council, the WELS, along with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), adopted mission strategies to help increase their efficiency in carrying out the great commission. One of the adopted strategies was to avoid having two Synodical Conference missions in one area--one LCMS funded, the other WELS funded—and as a result waste resources. In both theory and practice this meant that if the LCMS “claimed” one area as a mission field, the WELS would “stake a claim” on a mission field elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The hesitancy of the WELS to enter California until the 1950s stands as another example of this mission strategy. For many years the WELS avoided entering California since the LCMS had “claimed” it. The WELS ended up “staking a claim” on the neighboring state of Arizona.

This mission strategy took place on the eastern seaboard of the United States. The LCMS started missions in the colonial states, during which time the LCMS supported a strong mission program in this portion of the United States. So strong was their presence that LCMS found good reason to open a Concordia prep school and college in the New York City suburbs as a feeder program for its seminaries.

With such a strong LCMS presence in the east, the WELS continually looked elsewhere for potential mission fields, until the WELS/LCMS doctrinal split in 1961. Following the split with the LCMS, awareness about a ripe east coast mission field grew in the WELS. Requests for a resident pastor from WELS members transplanted on the east coast helped raise the greatest degree of awareness.

Prior to 1961, WELS pastors would have answered east coast requests, "The nearest LCMS church to you is here." WELS pastors gladly encouraged their members to attend an LCMS church since no doctrinal or fellowship problems yet existed. That all changed with the split. Post-split requests presented a new problem: how would the WELS feed its scattered sheep.

This problem eventually became a blessing in disguise. An area that had once been labeled LCMS territory opened its door and waited to be harvested, even asked to be harvested. So much so, that a group of pastors commented to Walter Beckmann, the first resident pastor of the future NAD, that the WELS had fallen behind on the east coast. Beckmann said, "A number of people wished me well and told me, 'It's about time we started work out there on the East Coast. We should have been there 25 years ago.'"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Walt Beckmann, "Report to the Convention of the DISTRICT PRESIDENT North Atlantic District," June 14, 1988.

**“Hark the voice of Jesus crying, who will go and work to day”**

A mission field with borders stretching from South Carolina to Maine and from the shores of the Atlantic to the beginnings of the Ohio River valley causes a problem: where does one start? Undoubtedly, the Michigan mission board struggled with this question. With sixty million people scattered over thousands of square miles of never explored by the WELS, district mission board chairman H.L. Engel faced a problem. As always, a gracious Lord answered the mission board's prayers and question by speaking through the simple request of a relocated WELS family.

In the summer of 1963, several WELS families inquired about the possibility of starting a mission in the Washington D.C. area. The district mission board excitedly acted on this request, seeing it as an open door to the east coast. By September, two Michigan district mission board members, H. L. Engel and Daniel Gieschen, had their bags packed. They arrived in Washington D.C. on September 23 and met with two of the interested families, the Robert Geweke family (whose living room they met in) and the Earl Cooper family, the following day.

Upon hearing reports about the meeting's proceedings with these two families, the mission board gave the green light for mission work to start in the suburbs of D.C. The board had just the man in mind to start the mission, Leonard Koeninger.

Despite the fact that Pastor Leonard Koeninger was serving Emanuel First Lutheran Church in Lansing, MI at the time, the mission board still approached him about working in the D.C. area. They believed Koeninger's experience in mission start ups would be a perfect match for their current situation. Koeninger never received a call, thought, to start the mission in D.C. Instead of calling Koeninger, the board asked him to take a six week leave of absence from his

Lansing parish to merely launch the mission. Koeninger brought the request before his church council. In the spirit of spreading the Gospel, the council granted the six week leave of absence.<sup>3</sup>

By later January of 1963, the mission board had the stage set. They had everything they needed for a mission—a nucleus of members and a pastor to serve the nucleus. They had heard the voice of Jesus calling them into D.C. through the request of a few families. They answered the request. Now they could only wait and see how the Lord planned to bless this new mission field.

On Sunday March 31, 1963, God blessed their plans. Pastor Koeninger, on his six week leave of absence, conducted the first WELS church service in McLean, Virginia. He opened the doors of the Churchill Road School early on Sunday morning, rearranged the school cafeteria to resemble a mock-church sanctuary, and conducted a service for the twenty-eight people who had expressed an interest in starting a WELS mission in the D.C. area.

Following the service these twenty-eight people met to discuss the WELS plans for their area. The last bulletin announcement on that day read as follows:

A brief meeting explaining the hopes and plans of the Mission Board of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod for this area will follow after the close of the service.<sup>4</sup>

For five more Sundays Pastor Koeninger conducted services for this new, dedicated mission nucleus. During those six weeks, Pastor Koeninger accomplished a tremendous amount of work in McLean, VA. He laid a solid foundation for the mission and organized things enough so he could leave the end of his six week hiatus from Michigan.

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<sup>3</sup> The flexibility and eagerness of the members of Emanuel, Lansing, MI deserves recognition. What an example of Christian love and zeal they demonstrated by allowing other Christians to borrow their pastor for six weeks. What a blessing that produced great dividends, which, twenty years later, resulted in the founding of the North Atlantic District.

<sup>4</sup> Worship bulletin from the March 31, 1963 church service. Hosted by Pastor Leonard Koeninger.

He eventually returned to Lansing, MI to serve his flock at Emanuel Lutheran, but the mission in McLean continued to meet every Sunday. Pastor Koeninger, along with the district mission board, had put together a plan to continue holding services in Virginia after he left the mission. The plan anticipated filling the pulpit each week with various WELS professors, tutors, and retired pastors, while they called a permanent resident pastor. The plan was a good band-aid that worked well until they found a permanent resident pastor.

Calling a pastor for the Virginia church proved to be a challenge. The future pastor needed strength both physically and mentally. The long distances of driving involved with this call demand it. He needed physical strength because hundreds of miles would be spent behind in the driver's seat. This mission covered a four hundred mile area, with some of its regular attendees driving about an hour and a half to attend church. (Remember that the Eisenhower interstate system was still under construction at this time.) He needed mental strength because five hundred miles would separate him from the nearest WELS pastor in Toledo, OH, and an even bigger expanse would probably divide this pastor from his extended family. This pastor would be an island unto himself. Aware of this, the mission board looked for a strong, motivated pastor.

The first two pastors—Harry Scheile and Corky Koeplin—to whom the mission board extended this call, declined on account of the demands and circumstances that came with the call. The mission board filled the spot on their third try though. They called Walter Beckmann, a Michigan pastor in Battle Creek, MI. Pastor Beckmann accepted the call, thinking he would serve the mission for half a dozen years or so, only to return to the mid-west. The exact opposite happened. Beckmann remained on the east coast for 41 years, helping this mission field develop into the North Atlantic District and becoming the NAD's first district president. Walter

Beckmann arrived in Virginia soon after accepting the call. His installation took place on September 22, 1963—almost exactly one year after the two man mission board team from met in the Geweke residence. Pastor Norm Berg, district president of the Michigan district, was the only pastor present for Beckmann's installation. In fact, he conducted the whole service, minus the final prayer and blessing which Beckmann did as the newly installed pastor.

The Michigan District mission board had moved quickly and agilely through the process of starting this mission on the east coast. In less than a year from the initial meeting with those transplanted families, the mission board had fulfilled their request for a pastor. This stands as a testament to the zeal and drive of the Michigan mission board during the 60s. They recognized the Lord opening a door to a new mission field and never looked back. They put their hand on the plow and kept plowing. This speed and determination displayed by the mission board in establishing a mission on the east coast foreshadowed the speed with which the mission field would grow.

### **“Go labor on; spend and be spent”**

Following the arrival of the Walter Beckmann, this little light on the eastern seaboard experienced substantial growth—on both the congregational level and conference level. Ultimately, these results came from the hand of the Almighty Lord, but the Lord bestowed these blessings on the mission field through the hard work of pastors and summer vicars assigned to it, starting with Beckmann.

On the congregational level, the growth was tremendous. Grace Church in Falls Church, VA, the name the picked by members of Beckmann's church in November of '63, jumped from an average attendance of twenty-nine per Sunday in '63 to 112 communicant members in '68.

On the conference level, another church opened in 1965 *just* two hundred and forty miles away in East Brunswick, NJ. Besides thumping the streets in the D.C area, Beckmann and two summer vicars, Kieth Kruck and John Henning, worked hard in the New Jersey area. After receiving a request from the Kevin Sholes family, a new transplant to the New Jersey/New York City area, Beckmann sent his two summer vicars to follow up on the Sholes' request in 1964, along with some other requests that had crossed the mission board's desk. Kruck and Henning conducted an exploratory service for the Sholes family and some others interested families at the Sholes' house in Matawan, NJ. Beckmann, because of the strong interest expressed in a mission, drove two hundred and forty miles to New Jersey to hold services some where near exit 9<sup>5</sup> on the NJ turnpike. He did this once a month for ten months until this new mission field received a second pastor on assignment day in 1965. The WELS assignment committee assigned Gary Baumler to East Brunswick, NJ and the greater New York City area. In less then two years this new mission field had a second pastor.

With the east coast now being cut in half by Baumler in the north and Beckmann in the south, they could more readily investigate requests that transplanted WELS families, and some former LCMS members, kept filing.

The next major request came from the Philadelphia, PA area. Beckman and Baumler immediately began splitting work there until the mission board's required number of twenty-five or thirty members for a mission start was met. The Lord blessed the work of these men. By the fall of '65 the Philadelphia nucleus had a resident pastor, Pastor Ron Ulhorn.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Gary Baumler, the story goes that Walt Beckmann just drove up the New Jersey turn pike looking for growing subdivisions as a place to hold temporary services. Beckmann liked what he found at exit 9 and stopped and found a place to hold services near exit 9 until Gary Baumler could find better land. Gary Baumler found the better land about two miles from exit 9, which Beckmann supposedly picked after only a few minutes after stopping.



Even during all of their exploratory work, Beckmann and Baumler continued to “spend and be spent” at their own parishes. They never depended on WELS transplants for their churches primary source of growth. These pastors strived to make their parishes community based churches, drawing their main support from the each church’s surrounding area. They hit the streets and booming subdivisions in their cities, and their work showed results. Pastor Beckmann experienced steady growth at Grace Church in Falls Church, VA. After its first five years of existence, Grace had 112 communicant members on its books. Baumler too experienced steady growth at the East Brunswick parish because of repeatedly large adult confirmation classes. The church witnessed a number of years where their adult confirmations topped twenty. Even Pastor Ulhorn, despite his membership dwindling to eleven for a time, kept his nose to the grind stone and confidently spread God’s Word, and it had an effect. The numbers of his parish, eventually named Peace, surpassed their original peak membership record as the church grew. Concerning the hard work these pastors put in, Pastor Gary Baumler said, “We really didn’t know how hard the work was at the time. We were young and ambitious. I guess that was a good thing at the time. It was what those churches needed.”<sup>6</sup>

Other blessings, or better perks, came with the establishment and growth of these three parishes. As a part of the southeastern district of the Michigan district initially, these pastors had to trek back to Michigan for pastors’ conferences, if they desired too. This was not cheap for them. They often had to pay most of the travel expenses because the mission board only covered so much, not because they lacked apathy for these pastors but because of synod guidelines.<sup>7</sup> As

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Gary Baumler. November 26, 2007, 1:00-1:45 p.m.

<sup>7</sup> The truth be told, the Michigan District Mission Board often bent mission start guidelines to accommodate pastors on the east coast. With the cost of living being seven to fourteen percent higher around Washington D.C., the mission board often granted, without question, requests for building projects that exceeded the then current codes of the home mission board by thousands of dollars. The building program at Grace, Falls Church displayed their willingness. When it came time to build a parsonage, typical synod code for missions was set at \$17,000, but for Grace they bumped the limit to \$19,000. Grace spent more than the adjusted number of \$19,000 by spending

Beckmann recalled, “We were allowed to attend one conference each year, plus the district convention, with our expenses covered by the mission board.”<sup>8</sup> Things changed, though, once this new mission field had three “neighboring”<sup>9</sup> resident pastors. These three held mini-conferences with each other, and they did not relax at their conferences. They presented the traditional conference papers—one practical paper, one confessional paper, and one original language exegesis paper.

The next new mission area ended up being in D.C. again. After four years of growth, Grace Church achieved self-supporting status. Grace Church never stopped reaching out though. With their church standing on a solid foundation, they started tossing around the idea of a sister congregation in the Baltimore suburbs of D.C. Beckmann, along with Ulhorn and Baumler, started following leads from people who expressed interest in a church in that area. They served the Baltimore area until they reached the core number of members needed to convince the Michigan mission board another pastor could be sent.

The men continued working and praying for the Lord to bless their latest mission area. The Lord again answered their prayers by sending the Donald Schuppe family to the Baltimore area. The Schuppes visited Grace Church where Walter Beckmann greeted them with, “‘We’re glad to see you. We’ve been praying for your arrival. We didn’t know who you were going to be, but here you are,’ or words to that effect.”<sup>10</sup> Following the Schuppe family’s arrival, the Baltimore mission reached the critical nucleus member number needed to justify another pastor.

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\$25,000. The Mission board never questioned Grace. Or take the church building itself. Beckmann wrote, “Since we were to be the first WELS church in our area, the mission board felt it should be a showplace. Original plans were to spend about \$60,000....The low bid came in at a little over \$70,000 and it was approved *without complaint*.”

<sup>8</sup> Walter Beckmann, “Anecdotal History of the North Atlantic District,” Southern Pastoral Conference, October 20-21, 1992

<sup>9</sup> Neighboring here means that two hundred or so miles still separated Baumler, Beckmann, and Ulhorn. They compensated for this distance problem by holding joint family camping trips where these pastors met to present their papers to each other.

<sup>10</sup> Beckmann, “Anecdotal History”

The mission board approved of the request and asked the assignment committee for a graduate in 1967. Baltimore was assigned Carl Pagel on assignment day.

Carl Pagel's arrival freed up some much needed time to answer other requests in the state of Connecticut. After all four pastors met with an interested group in Connecticut, Gary Baumler served this nucleus of people until a graduate could be assigned in 1968. The mission was filled by Karl Gurgel following assignment day of that year. The east coast now had five full time pastors—Beckmann, Baumler, Gurgel, Ulhorn, and Pagel—serving it and one semi-retired pastor—Luther Voss—serving WELS troops stationed in Norfolk, VA.

These pastors continued to “spend and be spent,” especially Karl Gurgel according to Beckmann. “Pastor Karl Gurgel always had more energy than the average person so it didn't take him long to check out some new leads in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.”<sup>11</sup> The Lord continued to bless the future NAD with steady growth over the next few years.

Then 1970 arrived and changed the entire look of this growing, yet still small, mission field. In that year, the roster of pastors on the east coast doubled. The Lord, through the WELS assignment committee, assigned three new grads to this mission field. Paul Kelm went to Pittsfield, MA; Paul Ziemer to Norfolk, VA; and John Mittelstaedt to Largo, MD. Also in that year, two former LCMS pastors joined the WELS through colloquy. Pastor Thomas Pfotenhauer of Ottawa, Ontario and Pastor Otto Zeeb of Dover, NJ joined the WELS' east coast mission field. (These men also brought with them their congregations.)

Pastor Pfotenhauer's entrance into the WELS brought two blessings. Not only did he bless this mission field with another resident pastor and congregation, but he extended the mission field's borders to include the eastern portion of Canada.

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<sup>11</sup> Beckmann, “Anecdotal History”

All these additional pastors brought changes in the structure of the mission field. Before 1970 the Michigan district considered the east coast pastors to be members of the Southeastern Michigan Conference. With 10 pastors in the general vicinity of each other, the Michigan District, along with these 10 pastors, agreed that a separate east coast conference would add efficiency to their ministries, so they formed a new conference in 1971. They named the conference the “Colonial Conference” since many of the pastors lived in the some of America’s thirteen founding colonies.

The formation of the colonial conference planted the seed for the founding of the North Atlantic District in twelve years. This restructuring of the east coast meant less and less dependence on the Michigan district for the majority of its support and resources. Looking back on 1971, it seems to be the year when the east coast started to venture out on its own and cut its apron strings that connected it to Michigan.

The next four call days (1971-74) at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary brought continued growth to the new “Colonial Conference.” It brought three new graduates to three new mission fields on the east coast. These next four years also brought Pastor Erich Waldek, another former LCMS pastor serving a congregation in Clifton Park, NY, to the WELS by means of the colloquy process. Pastor Waldek’s congregation followed him through the change and became a WELS congregation.

These four years of growth moved the WELS to officially change the name of the Colonial Conference to the Colonial Mission District (CMD) of the Michigan District at the 1975 biennial synod convention. This watered the seed of the future NAD.

This new name assigned by the synod brought with it another restructuring of the east coast. This sudden growth moved the pastors to split the Colonial Mission District into two

conferences—a northern conference and a southern conference. This reduced driving times for the pastors and in turn increased the amount of time they could spend doing evangelism.

With ten pastors now serving the east coast, it could be more thoroughly explored, and their evangelism and exploration continued to produce more mission start ups. More and more mission starts popped within the borders of the CMD. These pastors, eager to spread the gospel, discovered many potential mission starts.

Some starts lasted; others, unfortunately, closed. Pastor Kelm began to work in northern Vermont near Burlington with a group of people. Eventually the group lost interest in the WELS and the majority left for the ALC, American Lutheran Church. Work continued there, though, until a church, which still functions today, was established in Berre, VT. Pastor Waldek helped the struggling church survive by chartering a single prop plain each week from New York to Vermont. Interest in Connecticut continued to grow with mission starts opening in Danbury and Trumbull. The Danbury mission closed, but the Trumbull church, after struggling for a few years, eventually strengthened its roots and still opens its doors every Sunday. Pastor Pfothauer reported to his fellow brothers in 1977 that a massive mission field existed in Toronto, a metropolitan area containing some two and a half million souls, after learning of some interested families in the area. All this expansion led the CMD to slowly and very carefully rely on itself to a greater degree.

Their greatest amount of self-dependence began as pastors started leaving the district. After twelve years of existence, pastors began accepting calls out of the area. Gary Baumler left in 1975, only to have Karl Gurgel follow him shortly thereafter. These departures, difficult because good men left, brought about a good change. The CMD decided to call pastors already serving a parish to their area. They no longer planned to rely heavily on graduates filling their

pulpits. Eventually pastors began to accept calls to the CMD. The seed for a new district was beginning to show its first sprouts.

A study report in 1979 confirmed that a new district was sprouting. After reviewing questions and interviews, members of the study report resolved that the conference request district status. In 1983 the CMD made the 1979 study report's findings official. They requested that the WELS allow it to become an independent district.

After much consideration and encouragement from the Michigan district the CMD believed it was time. They believed they were mature and stable enough to form a district, even though only eight of the CMD's twenty-six churches were self-supporting in 1983. They had, though, thirty-four mission fields, thirty-one pastors, 3,570 baptized souls, 2,518 communicant members, and an average Sunday attendance of 2,017 throughout the CMD in 1983.

The WELS delegates liked CMD's numbers at the 1983 biennial Synod convention and passed the CMD's resolution to create the North Atlantic District. Two months later the CMD met at Grace Church in Falls Church, VA for a constituting convention to elect officers and form boards. It was fitting for the district to meet at this church because that is where the seed of the NAD was planted twenty years earlier on a fall day in September 1963. The constituting convention also saw it fitting to elect this church's pastor as the NAD's first district president. They elected Walter Beckmann, the first resident pastor of this new mission field back in 1963.

After almost exactly twenty years from the first day the WELS officially established a mission on the east coast, the North Atlantic District was founded, showing that the WELS intended to stay on the east coast and continue doing mission work for years to come.

### **“Until they lay their trophies at your feet”**

As H. L. Engel and Daniel Gieschen planned to travel and meet with a few families requesting a pastor on the east coast, they could not tell what they would discover. The WELS was unknown on the east coast and they could not anticipate how the east coast might receive the WELS. They quickly discovered that the east coast contained a ripe mission field ready to be harvested. Amazingly, and *by God's grace alone*, the Michigan mission board's endeavors out east flourished. After twenty years, a mission field that started with one pastor serving twenty eight people in Falls Church, VA had matured into a district with thirty-one pastors and over three thousand baptized souls. The Lord had greatly blessed the NAD through the dedicated work of its pastors over the first twenty years. (Those pastors would be the first to credit a gracious Lord for all their success.)

After twenty years of mission work, the resident pastors in the NAD had explored a great deal of the east coast, including the founding thirteen colonies of the United States, in search of potential mission fields. In exploring the east coast they discovered ripe mission fields, which the Lord led them to explore and harvest. For this reason, the years leading up to the founding of the NAD can truly be labeled: The years when the WELS rediscovered the new world.

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## Addenda

*Some stories require a good story teller. If the wrong person tells a story, it can lose its humor, joy, and vividness. For this reason, this writer has attached these first hand stories about a few of the joys, struggles, and legends that came with the founding of the NAD. Any attempt to try and retell them would have come at the loss of a good story.*

*All of these stores come from the fingers of Walt Beckmann in his 1992 conference paper entitled. "An Anecdotal History of the North Atlantic District." If the name Walt Beckmann is unfamiliar to you, understand that he was a master story teller and joker.*

The assignment of this paper coincides amazingly with the arrival of the author's 60th birthday. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to picture a meeting of the steering committee and a conversation which may have gone something like this - "He's starting to get up there in years.. He doesn't have all that many holes left to play yet on the back nine of his career. We'd better get him to put some of this stuff down on paper before he starts to forget it." Well, hopefully this assignment was not given too late, because in the words of one of my contemporaries, "The things I'm starting to remember most clearly are things which never happened." But maybe that's what an anecdotal history really is. I checked the meaning of the word, anecdote, in my Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary and it is defined as, "a short story." It also says, "See synonyms under story," and this is what I saw under "story" - "a narrative or recital of an event or series of events, whether real or fictitious." I realized immediately that with such parameters I was probably equal to the task, so here it is, "An Anecdotal History of the North Atlantic District," or perhaps a more accurate title might be, "It May Have Been Something Like This."

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### How It Was In Those Days

Things were different back in 1963. The Mission Handbook was church bulletin size and about 8 pages long, three of which were blank and reserved for additional notes. About the only regulation I remember was that a mission congregation was not allowed to pay its pastor's health insurance. When I arrived at my first congregation they were paying my health insurance so, in the interest of truth and fair play, I told them I would have to refuse this extravagant benefit and pay the \$120 myself. About

a month later I received a letter from the mission board stating that mission congregations were being asked to pay their pastor's health insurance. That's the last time I looked at that handbook. I have no idea what I ever did with it. I suppose if I still had it, it would be practically worthless by now.

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at the time and I didn't feel I could abandon it. I first heard about our new field in Virginia at our district convention in June of 1963. Pastor Hilbert Engel, chairman of the Michigan District Mission Board, presented it to the convention delegates in his usual glowing terms and also shared with us the exciting news that the district board had just been granted permission to call. I had gotten to know Pastor Engel quite well from discussing my past calls with him, so I felt comfortable about asking him a dumb question when I was sitting next to him at lunch that day - "Wow! Whom do you put on a call list like that one to Virginia?"

Perhaps I should explain my reason for asking that question. When we terminated our fellowship with the LCMS, I was worried that we were too small and too concentrated in the Midwest to be able to survive on our own. I don't remember where I said it or even if anyone was listening when I said it, but I do remember that I said, more in fear and frustration than with courage and dedication, "Well, now we'd better be ready to go and serve our people when they move into those places where we don't have churches." So that sort of explains why I was so excited to hear that our synod was planning to start a church way out east in the Washington, DC, suburbs.

But getting back to my dumb question about which names were on that call list - Pastor Engel, with a twinkle in his eye because he knew I was about to be embarrassed, told me, "Oh, we have Harry Scheile, Waldemar Pless, Corky Koeplin and - Walt Beckmann on the list." I was not only embarrassed, I was scared. Then I was

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### The Early Years

When I accepted the call to Northern Virginia, it was with the understanding that I would organize a Virginia mission, and within a year or two start work across the Potomac in Maryland. While Pastor Koeninger was conducting the original services several Maryland families had become part of the nucleus and since the Capital Beltway was not yet finished it was not an easy commute for them. I once made a "delinquent" call on one of our Maryland members. It took me an hour and fifteen minutes to get there. By the time I got there, I realized why the person was a delinquent. Another reason for wanting to start a second mission

### Vicars and Summer Vicars

In the summer of 1964, I was able to get away on vacation because of two summer vicars which were assigned to assist me for about 6 weeks. They were John Henning and Kieth Kruck. I don't have a record of all the summer vicars who served our district during our "colonial" days, but there would be quite a list of them. Their services were most appreciated. They did some great canvass work for us, were a source of fellowship and often the key to our summer vacation plans. Of all our summer vicars the one I will probably always remember most clearly is Paul Schmiede, not only because of the years he spent serving our congregation in Raleigh and on our district mission board, but also because of an experience during his summer vicarage. We had been doing some door-to-door canvassing near our church and it was getting close to quitting time so I drove to about where I thought he would probably be and got there just in time to see him clearing a hedge just inches ahead of a bulldog which didn't seem to take too kindly to strangers.

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There are just a few memories I have which didn't seem to fit anywhere else - that conference we held in the Army Navy Club in Manhattan in the early 70's with over 20 pastors and lay delegates present. What an exciting experience that was compared to our old "one original and two carbon copy" conferences of only a few years earlier. There was also the time the Southeastern Conference of the Michigan District came and met at our church in the late 60's. There was the Colonial Conference Crier which some years ago just gradually lost its voice. There was Paul Ziemer, the only pastor to take two calls out of one district and miss both of his farewell parties. There was that great audio visual aid we produced - "Go to Those Great Cities." Don't fail to miss it if you ever have the opportunity.

Finally I'd like to dedicate this paper to Earl and Elaine Cooper who were part of the nucleus waiting for me when I arrived in 1963 and are still members of our church today. And a special word of thanks to our secretary, Shirley (nee' Popp) Schuler, who's going to have to type and copy this paper. I mention her maiden name because that's how she was listed in our 1963 annual report. We give all glory to God for all the success we've enjoyed in the Colonial Conference and the North Atlantic District. I've tried to share some of my impressions of people and events from years ago. I've tried not to damage anyone's memory or reputations in the process. If I have, I ask their forgiveness and your help in editing any such offenses out of this paper before you accept it with thanks. If any historical inaccuracies have crept in, what can I say except, "If it didn't happen, maybe it should have," and remember the alternate title I have proposed, "It May Have Been Something Like This."

Walt Beckmann