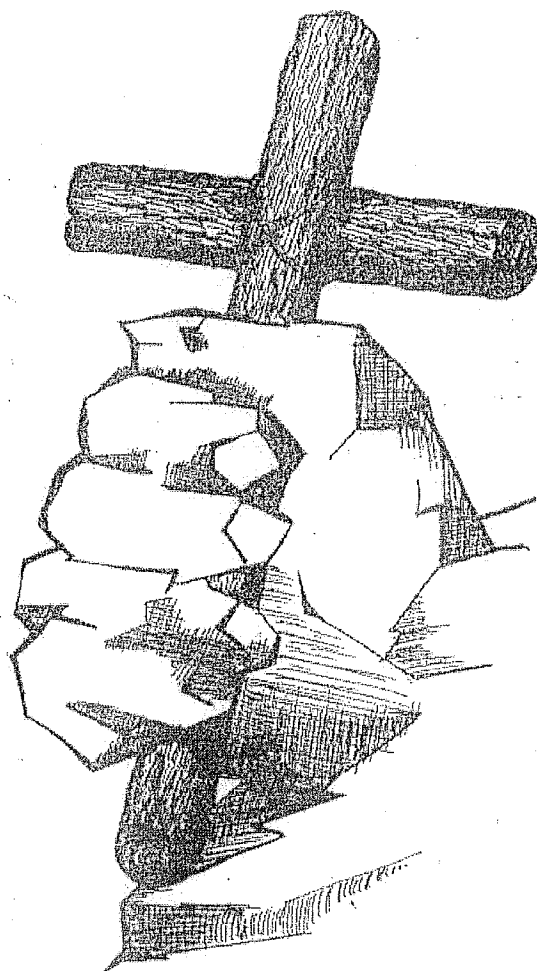


Built on a Firm Foundation—  
Rock of Ages Evangelical Lutheran Church, Madison, Tennessee  
1971-2002



Church History 331—Lutheranism in America  
Benjy E. Pederson  
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Look again at the illustration on the front cover. It is a fist hewn out of rock tightly holding a wooden cross. In the early 1970's it was once hoped that a sculpture similar to this illustration would be made for the newly formed church in Hendersonville, Tennessee. It depicted very clearly what this church believed and taught, that Jesus Christ and his saving message were the firm foundation on which this church was built, and that foundation was solid as rock. The following pages trace the history of this congregation, Rock of Ages, from its beginning to the present.

### **I. Built on "the Rock"**

As it is with many Wisconsin Synod churches, especially those outside the Midwest, Rock of Ages began with a small group of believers. In fact, it was a very small group. Two families totaling seven souls, Jack and Audry Jeske, and Larry and Gloria Jordan and their three children, were the beginnings of Rock of Ages.<sup>1</sup> Until 1970, these two families from the Nashville area had been nurtured in their Christian faith by "attending services in Huntsville, Alabama (the nearest WELS congregation 130 miles to the south), by receiving taped services, and by maintaining their own family devotions."<sup>2</sup> At this time there was no South Atlantic District of the WELS. Congregations in the states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and North and South Carolina were a part of the Gulf-Atlantic Mission District of the Michigan District. So, on March 6, 1970, these two families made a request to the Southeastern District Mission Board of WELS to start a mission in the Nashville area and in June of that same year work was begun.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hemmrich, Fred, "History of God's Children—Rock of Ages Lutheran Church" (1996), 1. (Hereafter cited as Hemmrich.)

<sup>2</sup> Stadler, Richard, "Under God's Grace," (January 1975), 1. (Hereafter cited as Stadler, God's Grace.)

<sup>3</sup> Hemmrich, 1.

Pastor John Raabe, the District Missionary of the aforementioned district, and Vicar Elwyn Klumb, a student from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, were sent to canvass the Nashville area. Because of their efforts the Southeastern Wisconsin District authorized exploratory services in the Nashville area.<sup>4</sup> The immediate scheduling of services was put on hold due to the fact that in August of 1970 Pastor Myrl Wagenknecht of Huntsville, Alabama, who had been called to start the Nashville Mission, accepted a call to a congregation in Texas.<sup>5</sup>

Pastor Raabe finally began services at 10:00 a.m. on March 21, 1971 in the Phillips-Robinson Funeral Chapel in Hendersonville, a suburb of Nashville. Twenty-six souls were in attendance to hear a sermon on Luke 2:49, "Let us be about our Father's business."<sup>6</sup> In the following weeks Pastor Raabe continued services along with the following students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Galen Sommer, David Dolan, Carl Lindemann, David Waege, David Priebe, Andrew Martens, Gerald Hintz, Quincy Wiley, John Seifert, Paul Werner, Larry Wiederich, and Marvin Ahlborn.<sup>7</sup>

After receiving "mission status" from the general Board for Home Missions on May 4, 1971, the first Wisconsin Synod church in Tennessee called its first full-time pastor. Richard H. Stadler, a <sup>1971</sup>1975 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, accepted the call to Rock of Ages.

## II. Ministers of the gospel at Rock of Ages

Over the course of their thirty-one year history, five men have served as shepherd at Rock of Ages: Richard H. Stadler, Joel B. Schroeder, Randall J. Bartelt, Keith C. Kruck, and Aaron H. Glaeske.

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<sup>4</sup> Stadler, God's Grace, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Hemmrich, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Stadler, God's Grace, 8.

### Richard H. Stadler, 1971-1975

On July 25, 1971, Richard H. Stadler was ordained and installed as exploratory pastor in



Seminary Grad.  
Photo--1971

Hendersonville, Tennessee. The congregation at that time consisted of nine souls, including his wife Jeanine and son Jonathan. Pastor Stadler had gained experience in evangelism by serving as a vicar in Milwaukee and Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and in San Jose and Citrus Heights, California.<sup>8</sup>

The Mission Board had rented a parsonage at 124 Elnora Drive in Hendersonville. Although services were usually held at the funeral home, they were occasionally moved to the parsonage when the funeral home was in use. Bible classes during the week, as well as Vacation Bible School for the first two years, were held at the parsonage.<sup>9</sup>

The first order of business was to choose a name for the new congregation. In a pamphlet inviting people to the church, Pastor Stadler explains the choice of the name, "Rock of Ages:"

The ROCK OF AGES and foundation of our faith is JESUS CHRIST. He is for all ages, young and old. He lives for all ages, because He is eternal. We completely rest on Him for eternal life, because He is solid. He will not let us down. He is not sand which shifts with every current change. He is a ROCK, immovable, unchangeable, and unfailing as a source of strength. We find our hope, joy, and peace in Him and Him alone, our ROCK OF AGES for all ages, forever!<sup>10</sup>

Pastor Stadler arrived with a great deal of excitement, a zeal for mission work and a willingness to travel. God put all three of these attributes to work immediately. Besides his duties in the Nashville area, Pastor Stadler had also been assigned the duty of starting missions in Memphis and Knoxville, Tennessee. In addition to these two mission possibilities the Military

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<sup>8</sup> Stadler, Richard, Telephone interview, April 23, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Stadler, Interview.)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Stadler, Richard, Rock of Ages Invitation Pamphlet, 1973.

Services Board also requested that Pastor Stadler serve the military personnel of the WELS at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and Millington Naval Air Station, near Memphis.<sup>11</sup>

Pastor Stadler conducted the first service at Millington on October 24, 1971. Services continued on the base until November 5, 1972, when the District Mission Board authorized exploratory services in Memphis. These services were held in members' homes and later in a meeting room of a Ramada Inn. Up until exploratory status had been granted Pastor Stadler had been holding one service a month at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and one service a month at a home in Crossville, Tennessee (between Nashville and Knoxville). When Memphis was granted exploratory status the services at Fort Campbell were discontinued because of the small number of people there. Pastor Stadler began making weekly flights to Memphis, with Pastor Ralph Waack from Huntsville flying up when Pastor Stadler would go to Crossville.<sup>12</sup>

After only one-half year of being in exploratory status, Memphis was granted mission status and called its first pastor, Seminary Graduate Rodney Busch, who was installed and ordained on August 5, 1973. Pastor Stadler no longer had to make the weekly trips to Memphis so the services at Fort Campbell were restarted, with greater attendance than before.<sup>13</sup>

All of this took place while Pastor Stadler faithfully served his own congregation in Hendersonville. He conducted door-to-door canvassing one night each week. Tennessee is a part of the "Bible-belt" and Pastor Stadler was working in a very Baptist area. While many people appreciated his efforts and encouraged him, prospects were difficult to come by. Nevertheless, he continued, finding different ways to reach out to the community.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stadler, *God's Grace*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Stadler, Interview.

One outreach tool that met with a good amount of success (humanly speaking) was Rock of Ages' Vacation Bible School program (VBS). According to Pastor Stadler, a Lutheran Collegians Canvass-Witness from Wisconsin volunteered to help with VBS. They canvassed the neighborhoods, hung up and handed out flyers, and also assisted with teaching. In the summer of 1972 ninety-one of God's little lambs attended Rock of Ages' first VBS called "The 'underground' VBS," held in the basement of the parsonage. The following year ninety-six children were present, again in the basement. The following year the Goodlettsville Community Center was rented to accommodate the many children coming to hear about their Savior.<sup>15</sup>

Pastor Stadler made good use of the public media as well in Nashville in order to get the word out about Rock of Ages. Articles on his arrival and services at Rock of Ages were printed in "The Tennessean" (September 5, 1971) and the "Community News and Madison Shopper" (September 8, 1971). Here Pastor Stadler boldly displayed the confessionalism of the WELS. "Congregations of the Wisconsin Synod still subscribe to the historic confessions of the Lutheran Reformation, profess the Bible to be God's Word and the only source of Christian doctrine... We teach that eternal life is in no way merited by man, but is solely the gift of God, offered freely because of the life and death of Jesus as man's substitute."<sup>16</sup> This wonderful statement was true of Rock of Ages then and is true of Rock of Ages now.

Pastor Stadler also had a few opportunities to be in front of a camera during his years in Tennessee. For six different weeks from 1971-1974 Pastor Stadler appeared on the *Noon* show,

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<sup>15</sup> Stadler, Interview.

<sup>16</sup> Reed, W.A. "Rev. Stadler Pastor to Only 9 Members." *The Tennessean*, October 5, 1972.

a local program. He also presented the Word of God on *Your Church*, another local program, on December 1 and 22, 1974.<sup>17</sup>

Services continued on a regular basis throughout Pastor Stadler's ministry, but not always at a regular location. From 1971 through April of 1973 Rock of Ages met consistently (barring any funerals) at the Phillips-Robinson Funeral in Hendersonville. When the home was in use they used such "emergency locations" as the basement of the Bank of Hendersonville, the "Father's house" (Christian Teen Center), and the pastor's home. For the remainder of 1973 they met at a vacant space in the McHenry Shopping Center and in 1974 they gathered together around God's Word at the Goodlettsville Elementary School Cafetorium. In 1975 Rock of Ages rented the facilities of a Seventh-Day Adventist church in Madison, Tennessee.<sup>18</sup>

To the delight of the members of Rock of Ages the weekly routine of "setting up church" in different locations would soon come to an end. On January 10, 1974 Rock of Ages purchased six acres of land for \$24,000 along Campbell Road in Madison, the current location of the church. In November of 1974 they received \$131,502 in building funds from the General Board for Home Missions and on August 24, 1975 Rock of Ages held a groundbreaking ceremony for its first worship facility.<sup>19</sup>

In 1975 Pastor Stadler received a divine call to serve at Saint James in West St. Paul, Minnesota. It was a difficult decision for him since Rock of Ages had just entered into its building project. Pastor Stadler recalled this advice he received from a brother in the ministry: "If you are not planning on leaving in the next ten years, then return it. But if you think you

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<sup>17</sup> Stadler, *God's Grace*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

might be leaving soon, now would be the time to do it so a new pastor can come in and run with [the new church].”<sup>20</sup> After much prayer and deliberation Pastor Stadler accepted the call to Saint James and is currently serving there. God had blessed his time at Rock of Ages and the members were appreciative of his work.

He had led us from a group of less than a dozen to the point where we had purchased land and were building our own Church building. No more would we meet in the Funeral Home, the Bank Basement, The Teen Center, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church or the Goodlettsville Elementary School. We were on solid operating ground with dedicated men prayerfully leading us in a God-pleasing direction.<sup>21</sup>

Congregational membership statistics during Pastor Stadler’s years at Rock of Ages, as well as statistics of all the years are charted on Appendix A.<sup>22</sup>

Pastor Stadler has many fond memories of his time at Rock of Ages. He related a few of the highlights in an interview. In 1973, the South Atlantic District was created. It consisted of congregations in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, part of Louisiana and also Tennessee.<sup>23</sup> Pastor Stadler enjoyed the three-day conferences of the South Atlantic District, which were family events. They were opportunities for pastors, wives and children to get together and form lasting friendships. The “camaraderie of brotherhood” which Pastor Stadler experienced was something he really appreciated.

Pastor Stadler recalled one couple from Chuckey, Tennessee, who drove 240 miles on a Saturday to attend a service at Rock of Ages. When he offered a few interesting spots to visit in Nashville the couple declined saying, “We drove 240 miles to come to church and we’re going to

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<sup>19</sup> Hemmrich, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Hemmrich, 3.

<sup>22</sup> --*Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod*, for the years 1971-2001.

<sup>23</sup> Stadler, *God’s Grace*, 2.



be well rested for it.” Along those same lines Pastor Stadler is still amazed at the dedication of many of the members who drove as much as seventy miles each Sunday to join with their fellow believers around Word and Sacrament. He also remembers a trip to Memphis one Sunday. After church he borrowed a Ford Thunderbird and drove seventy miles north to baptize a baby in Newbern, Tennessee.<sup>24</sup>

When Pastor Stadler left he received “A piece of the Rock,” a rock with a “Rock of Ages” inscribed-plaque attached. Every member of Rock of Ages receives this when leaving as a reminder of his or her time there. It is a tradition continued still today.<sup>25</sup>

### **Pastor Joel B. Schroeder, 1976-1982**



Seminary Grad.  
Photo--1976

After Pastor Stadler left three calls were extended to men currently serving in the field, all of which were returned. Rock of Ages looked to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to fill its vacancy. In mid-June of 1976 Graduate Joel B. Schroeder arrived after accepting the call. He was installed on June 20, 1976.<sup>26</sup>

Construction on the worship facility and parsonage were nearing completion. Dedication for the church was set for Reformation Sunday, October 31. The parsonage was completed in December 1976. Final costs for both buildings were \$168,645.00 for the church and \$38,500.00 for the parsonage.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stadler, Interview.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Hemmrich, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

A few days before the actual dedication an unfortunate and at the same time amazing event occurred. On Thursday, October 28, three days before the dedication, Pastor Schroeder received a call from the church builder that there had been a fire in the church. Pastor Schroeder drove the twelve miles from the parsonage in Hendersonville not knowing what to expect. In an article for *The Northwestern Lutheran* (attached as Appendix B) Pastor Schroeder described what he saw. “The carpeting was tracked full of ashes, and firemen were ripping out charred drywall, furring strips, and four-by-fours. Throughout the entire seven-sided stucco building there was a thin, black, oily film.”<sup>28</sup>

The probable cause for the fire (which is believed to have started Wednesday evening) was the wiring, although the direct cause was never determined. What was amazing was how the fire stopped. A fire extinguisher had been left near the corner where the fire had started. The heat from the blaze had melted part of the plastic head of the extinguisher, which caused it to discharge the CO<sub>2</sub> and keep the fire under control until it was discovered. After an incredibly quick cleanup job by the insurance company the church was ready for dedication that Sunday with minimal visible damage left.<sup>29</sup>

God’s hand was seen not only in stopping the fire but also in using it. The fire brought the family of Rock of Ages closer together and also brought in a new family member, the fire adjuster, who was attracted by the “closed fellowship” of Rock of Ages and the WELS.<sup>30</sup>

Pastor Schroeder continued holding services at Fort Campbell and at Crossville once a month. Along with regular confirmation classes at Rock of Ages he also conducted classes in

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<sup>28</sup> Schroeder, Joel B., “And, Oh Yes, Thanks for the Fire!”, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, Vol. 64, number 3, (February 6, 1977): 43. (Hereafter cited as Schroeder, Thanks for the Fire.)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Schroeder Joel B., Telephone Interview conducted on April 18, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Schroeder, Interview.)

Clarksville, Tennessee, about twenty-five miles north of Nashville.<sup>31</sup> He continued evangelism efforts in the neighborhood, with the Lord blessing his efforts. To aid in that area he enlisted the help of Pastor A.T. Kretzmann and Miss Gunilla Peterson, a native of Sweden, who did evangelism work for three summers.<sup>32</sup>

In 1981 Pastor Schroeder received a divine call to serve at Mt. Olive in Overland, Kansas. After considering a change in ministry he decided to return it. Less than a year later, however, he received the same call. This time he accepted and preached his last sermon on February 14, 1982.

Pastor Schroeder shared some of his personal joys and highlights from his time at Rock of Ages. At the top of his list was a wedding that took place on January 5, 1980. It was his own to Ruth Carden, a member of Rock of Ages. A little over a year later, in March of 1981, their daughter, Addie Beth was born.

A major congregational highlight occurred in 1978 when Rock of Ages reached self-supporting status. God had truly blessed a congregation that began with nine souls only seven years before. Pastor Schroeder also had the privilege of serving during the congregation's tenth anniversary. About the anniversary service he remarked, "Because things are done a little differently in the South than in the Midwest we included 'testimonials' in the service. A few people recounted how God had blessed the congregation over the last ten years. It was wonderful to hear."<sup>33</sup>

Pastor Schroeder enjoyed the close connection with the pastors in the conference as Pastor Stadler had. He also was impressed with the congregation's zeal in mission giving,

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<sup>31</sup> Hemmrich, 5.

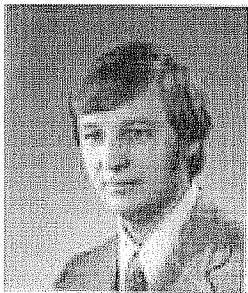
<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 6.

especially for such a small congregation. Clearly the Word of God was at work in the hearts of the believers at Rock of Ages.

Currently Pastor Schroeder is living in Overland, Kansas. In 1990 he resigned from the ministry due to family health concerns but he remains an active member at Mt. Olive, occasionally preaching. He acknowledges that he does not know what the Lord has in store for him; perhaps, if it is God's will, it might include service in the full-time ministry.

### **Pastor Randall J. Bartelt, 1982-1986**

In the spring of 1982 Pastor Randall J. Bartelt received and accepted the call to serve



Seminary Grad.  
Photo--1976

Rock of Ages. A seminary classmate of Pastor Schroeder, Pastor Bartelt was then serving Beautiful Savior in Charleston, South Carolina. Pastor Lester Hieber, a retired pastor from Indiana and the father of a member at Rock of Ages, served as vacancy pastor until Pastor Bartelt and his wife arrived in late April. Pastor Bartelt was installed on April 25, 1982.<sup>34</sup>

During his ministry Pastor Bartelt continued holding services at Fort Campbell in Kentucky. He conducted door-to-door canvassing and trained a few members that they might conduct in-home law-gospel presentations.<sup>35</sup> In 1985 he initiated Youth Sunday Bible Class at Rock of Ages, an important part of every church's ministry. In addition to that, the following year he began holding midweek Bible classes at members' homes. "The intent was to make Bible Study more accessible to our members and their friends."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Schroeder, Interview.

<sup>34</sup> Hemmrich, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Bartelt, Randall J., Telephone interview conducted on April 17, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Bartelt, Interview.)

<sup>36</sup> Hemmrich, 13.

Pastor Bartelt enjoyed watching Rock of Ages grow together. Even though it was a self-supporting congregation Rock of Ages still had a “mission congregation” feel because of its size. Members met together frequently to grow in the Word and enjoy fellowship. Funerals at Rock of Ages were also very memorable because there were so few of them. They were opportunities to discuss the effects of sin and remind God’s people of blessings awaiting them in heaven.<sup>37</sup>

In November of 1986 Pastor Bartelt announced his resignation from Rock of Ages. Some members had approached him about concerns they had in his ministry. Pastor Bartelt admitted that he thought he had neglected certain areas of ministry, evangelism being one. Although he believed that these problems could be corrected he did not want to cause a division in the church. Wanting what was best for God’s kingdom he resigned from Rock of Ages and waited for another call. After one year he removed himself from the list of candidates for the ministry and became “your average church member.”<sup>38</sup> Rock of Ages displayed God-given love and humility in their twenty-fifth anniversary history by stating, “In retrospect, we see that we, as a congregation, failed to provide the support and encouragement we should have to this faithful, courageous, loving-hearted man of God. He and Mary and their family of lovely children have remained as shining examples of Christian love and forgiveness to all members of Rock of Ages.”<sup>39</sup> Mr. Bartelt currently works as a computer programmer in the Nashville area and has served on various committees at Rock of Ages.

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<sup>37</sup> Bartelt, Interview.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

### Pastor Keith C. Kruck, 1987-1995



Seminary Grad.  
Photo—1965.

The vacancy at Rock of Ages was served by Pastor Roy Brassow of Huntsville, Alabama for almost a year. Pastor David Liestekow served as temporary pastor from July 5 to August 2, 1987. After nine calls extended by Rock of Ages had been returned, Keith C. Kruck of Clearwater, Florida was called. Pastor Kruck arrived with his wife Margaret and family and was installed on November 1, 1987.<sup>40</sup>

When Pastor Kruck arrived he recalled that at first it was a little uncomfortable with the former pastor now as a member. But both men had only the good of the kingdom in mind and had no problems.<sup>41</sup> Under Pastor Kruck's leadership it was noted that "activities picked up and a spirit of new vitality emerged in the congregation. Members worship attendance became more regular and Board Chairmen became more thorough and enthusiastic in performing their duties."<sup>42</sup>

In April of 1988 Rock of Ages received a new look. Two additional rooms were created at the sides of the altar area by Gary Voecks. This "greatly improved the appearance of that area of the church."<sup>43</sup>

Fifteen new members joined Rock of Ages in August and October of 1988. These were the first families to join who were employed at the new Saturn auto-manufacturing plant in Springhill, Tennessee. The following year a study was made by the District Mission Board to

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<sup>39</sup> Hemmrich, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Kruck, Keith C., Telephone Interview conducted on April 17, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Kruck, Interview.)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 16.

determine a need for a new congregation in the Springhill area to serve WELS members employed by Saturn.<sup>44</sup> Eventually this resulted in the founding of Christ Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church in Columbia, Tennessee. These events will be discussed more thoroughly in Section III.

Pastor Kruck began holding services at Fort Campbell in October of 1989. These services were canceled in August 1990 due to the deployment of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to Saudi Arabia.<sup>45</sup> Pastor Kruck remembers the safe return in May 1991 of nine Rock of Ages members who served in the Gulf War. This resulted in a special service to “honor and praise our Father in heaven for His blessings to our nation and our veterans for their service to God and country.”<sup>46</sup>

In 1991 planning began for a “Family Enrichment Center.” The following year the Stewardship Committee received commitments for \$10,000 over the current budget. This money was put into the building fund for the new facility.<sup>47</sup> Ground was broken for this fellowship building on May 3, 1992, the cornerstone was laid on May 31, and the building was dedicated on September 20, 1992.<sup>48</sup> With a new area for fellowship Rock of Ages converted their existing building into a permanent sanctuary. Up to this time they had used folding chairs and tables which were set up and rearranged for worship, pot-lucks and fellowship gatherings. Rock of Ages members continued to worship in the church as carpet and pews were put in.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>47</sup> Kruck, Interview.

<sup>48</sup> Hemmrich, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Kruck, Interview.

Throughout his ministry at Rock of Ages Pastor Kruck continued evangelism efforts in the neighborhood. He pointed out the difficulty a Lutheran church has in reaching out to a heavily Baptist area. This difficulty and the fact that so many members were spread out around the area were two of the challenges he remembers working with.<sup>50</sup>

Two of the highlights of the congregation during Pastor Kruck's years at Rock of Ages have already been mentioned, the safe return of members from the Gulf War and the incredible amount of giving that made the Family Enrichment Center possible. In addition, Pastor Kruck remembers that Rock of Ages was "a good group of Christians who became good friends. We had many good times there and enjoyed the wonderful fellowship."<sup>51</sup>

Pastor Kruck received a call in February 1995 to serve at Ascension Lutheran Church in Sarasota, Florida. Although urged by some members to stay, after consideration he accepted the call and left in April after Easter. Pastor Kruck currently serves at Ascension but will retire in two years. At that time he plans to return to Rock of Ages where his son's family are members.<sup>52</sup>

#### **Pastor Aaron H. Glaeske, 1995-**



Photo by  
Ardith Hieber.

After two calls to the field were returned Rock of Ages decided to wait for a Seminary graduate. Pastor Wernor Wagner served the vacancy from May 1, 1995 through June of the same year. Pastor Wagner and his wife attended the Call Service at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on May 16 and learned that Aaron H. Glaeske would be the next pastor at Rock of

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



Ages. Pastor Glaeske had graduated in 1993 from the Seminary and had served as a tutor at Martin Luther Preparatory School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He was installed on July 2, 1995.<sup>53</sup>

Pastor Glaeske continued serving believers in the Clarksville area as Pastor Kruck had been doing. Many of these faithful people were making the drive every Sunday to Madison to worship, but Pastor Glaeske continued holding Bible classes regularly with as many as twenty people in attendance. These trips north are no longer necessary because Clarksville was granted exploratory status in 2000. This will be discussed in Section III.

In 1996 Rock of Ages celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Pastor Lester Hieber preached on Matthew 16:13-18 for the morning service. His theme was “Twenty-five Years of Solid Building at Rock of Ages.” For their afternoon celebration Rock of Ages welcomed WELS President Karl Gurgel and heard his sermon, “Raise The Song Of Our Salvation,” on Isaiah 12:1-6.<sup>54</sup>

Pastor Glaeske has enjoyed the outreach mindset of Rock of Ages. New strides have been taken to aid in evangelism. Through a ‘Seek and Keep’ grant from the Wisconsin Synod they are now able to present PowerPoint law-gospel slideshows to members and prospects on laptops. They also have PowerPoint capability to use during their regular service. Rock of Ages holds special evangelism festivals like the “Festival of Friendship” and they continue to canvass every summer.

Pastor Glaeske admitted that it is difficult to pick out highlights of his time at Rock of Ages since he is still serving there. He was able to point to one experience that he thoroughly

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<sup>53</sup> Hemmrich, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Rock of Ages 25<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary Service Bulletin.

enjoys, as most pastors do. He's fortunate that it happens once a week. "The best thing is what happens on Sunday morning—preaching, teaching and worship." Under Pastor Glaeske's leadership Rock of Ages has experienced many different forms and styles of worship and liturgy. Most of the people have "appreciated a variety in worship."<sup>55</sup>

One other highlight to note is Pastor Glaeske's wedding on June 11, 1999 to Kristin Frey, a daughter of the congregation.

### **III. Breaking off a piece of the Rock**

To understand the history of Rock of Ages it is important to consider the history of three other churches in the Nashville area: Christ Our Savior, Columbia; Abiding Faith, Smyrna; and Beautiful Savior, Clarksville. Pastors and members of Rock of Ages have played a role in some way in the beginnings of all three of these churches. Their role will now be looked at briefly.

#### **Christ Our Savior, Columbia**

As was mentioned earlier, many families who worked at the Saturn plant in Springhill had been making the drive to Rock of Ages. In 1990 Springhill was granted exploratory status due in part to the work of Pastor Kruck.<sup>56</sup> In late May Pastor Charles Westra accepted the call to serve. He arrived in early July and became a member of Rock of Ages. On August 5, 1990 his commissioning service was held at Rock of Ages.<sup>57</sup>

Christ Our Savior held its first service on October 21, 1990 at the Steeplechase Inn in Springhill.<sup>58</sup> Four months later, February 24, 1991, Rock of Ages held a special service to

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<sup>55</sup> Glaeske, Aaron H. Telephone Interview conducted on April 17, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Glaeske, Interview.)

<sup>56</sup> Kruck, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Hemmrich, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 23.

celebrate the birth of Christ Our Savior congregation. The following Sunday weekly services began.

Nine families totaling thirty-nine souls transferred membership from Rock of Ages to Christ Our Savior. That was one-fifth of the previous year's membership and a sizable portion of their budget. Saying goodbye (of sorts) to so many friends was difficult but "recognizing God's will and His Almighty hand at work, we (Rock of Ages members) prayed for their success."<sup>59</sup>

On May 1, 1992 Christ Our Savior received mission status and officially became a congregation. Two years later, in April 1994, they dedicated their newly constructed church to the glory of God.<sup>60</sup>

When asked about those early beginnings and his relationship with Pastor Kruck and Rock of Ages, Pastor Westra had nothing but admiration for them. "Basically we owe our existence to Pastor Kruck's mission mindset and to Rock of Ages commitment to evangelism."<sup>61</sup> According to Pastor Westra, Pastor Kruck had instilled a spirit of outreach in the members of Rock of Ages to begin Christ Our Savior. Pastor Kruck also was a big help as a mentor in those early years. As for the Rock of Ages members Pastor Westra felt like a part of their family even though he was there for less than a year. He recalled the warm, friendly atmosphere and looked forward to his drive north from Columbia once a week.<sup>62</sup>

God has continued to bless the work at Christ Our Savior, whose membership now is around 350 souls.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Westra, Charles, Telephone Interview conducted on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Westra, Interview.)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

### **Abiding Faith, Smyrna**

In October of 1997 a family that had moved to Smyrna from Wisconsin requested that Smyrna be considered as a possible exploratory site. Three months later in January their request was answered. Smyrna had been approved for exploratory work and in August of 1998 Graduate Mark Kaesmeyer arrived from the Seminary. Christ Our Savior held an ordination, installation and commissioning service for Pastor Kaesmeyer as exploratory / outreach pastor to the Smyrna area on August 30, 1998.<sup>63</sup>

January 1999 saw the start of a Bible Study class in Smyrna, with their official first service occurring on March 21. In February seven members from Rock of Ages transferred to join the family at Abiding Faith.<sup>64</sup>

Pastor Kaesmeyer is appreciative of the fellowship he and his congregation enjoy with Rock of Ages. He, Pastor Glaeske and Pastor Matt Brown of Clarksville meet regularly on Mondays to discuss their sermon studies. They also spend a few days of vacation together. Their congregations meet together for various functions such as a concert series or, as they did this past Lenten season, for a seder supper.

Abiding Faith is still in exploratory status with sixty-seven total members. Overall, Pastor Kaesmeyer gives thanks to Rock of Ages for being “very encouraging” in his ministry.<sup>65</sup>

### **Beautiful Savior, Clarksville**

The most recent “breaking off a piece of the Rock” began in August of 2000. Actually it began back in September 1991 when monthly services were started on a trial basis in Clarksville. Pastor Kruck had recommended Clarksville as a possible exploratory site with no results. Pastor

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<sup>63</sup> Kaesmeyer, Mark, Telephone interview conducted on April 22, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Glaeske, Interview.

Glaeske continued to serve in Clarksville and also pushed Clarksville as an exploratory site. In 2000 exploratory status was granted and in May of that year Seminary Graduate Matthew Brown was assigned. On August 6 he was ordained, installed and commissioned to serve the Clarksville area at a service at Rock of Ages.<sup>66</sup>

Twenty-three members from Rock of Ages and a number of people Pastor Glaeske served in Clarksville joined Beautiful Savior in February 2001.<sup>67</sup> On the eleventh of that same month Beautiful Savior held its first service.

Pastor Brown is currently reaching out to a large German population in the area, mainly due to the Army Post at Fort Campbell. On December 23, 2001 Senior Seminarian Thomas Ehnert conducted a German Christmas service in the storefront where Beautiful Savior currently meets. Attendance expectations of fifty to sixty people were greatly underestimated as over 150 people piled into the two-room section. A German service was also conducted on Palm Sunday, 2002 with ninety-five people in attendance. Pastor Brown hopes to continue these special services which have met with so much success.<sup>68</sup>

#### **IV. A Final Look**

In many ways Rock of Ages is similar to your average WELS congregation. They conduct regular services and Bible classes. They gather around Word and Sacrament. They provide opportunities for people to serve with different programs. They also have their struggles. While specific and individual problems were not pointed out above each pastor of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, Matt, Telephone Interview conducted on April 23, 2002. (Hereafter cited as Brown, Interview.)

<sup>67</sup> Glaeske, Interview.

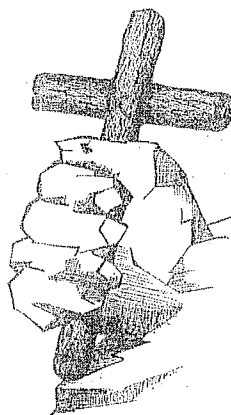
<sup>68</sup> Brown, Interview.

Rock of Ages has had to deal with delinquent members, members leaving over disagreement in doctrine, and struggles in reaching out in a non-Lutheran area.

But it is Rock of Ages' outreach that makes it stand out as a congregation. In this endeavor they have met with some difficulty as some of the pastors noted, but that has not stopped them. Churches were started in Memphis, Columbia, Smyrna and Clarksville due in some part to the members of Rock of Ages and their pastors. All praise to our gracious God for instilling in his people the desire and drive to share the gospel and also for blessing their work with incredible results!

What does the future hold for Rock of Ages? Only our good Lord in heaven knows. A recent survey of the area showed that Rock of Ages was one of forty-three religious churches within a three-mile radius. The congregation has currently begun studies to determine whether or not they might better serve the Lord in a different area around Nashville. In June 2002 the congregation will meet and vote concerning its future.<sup>69</sup>

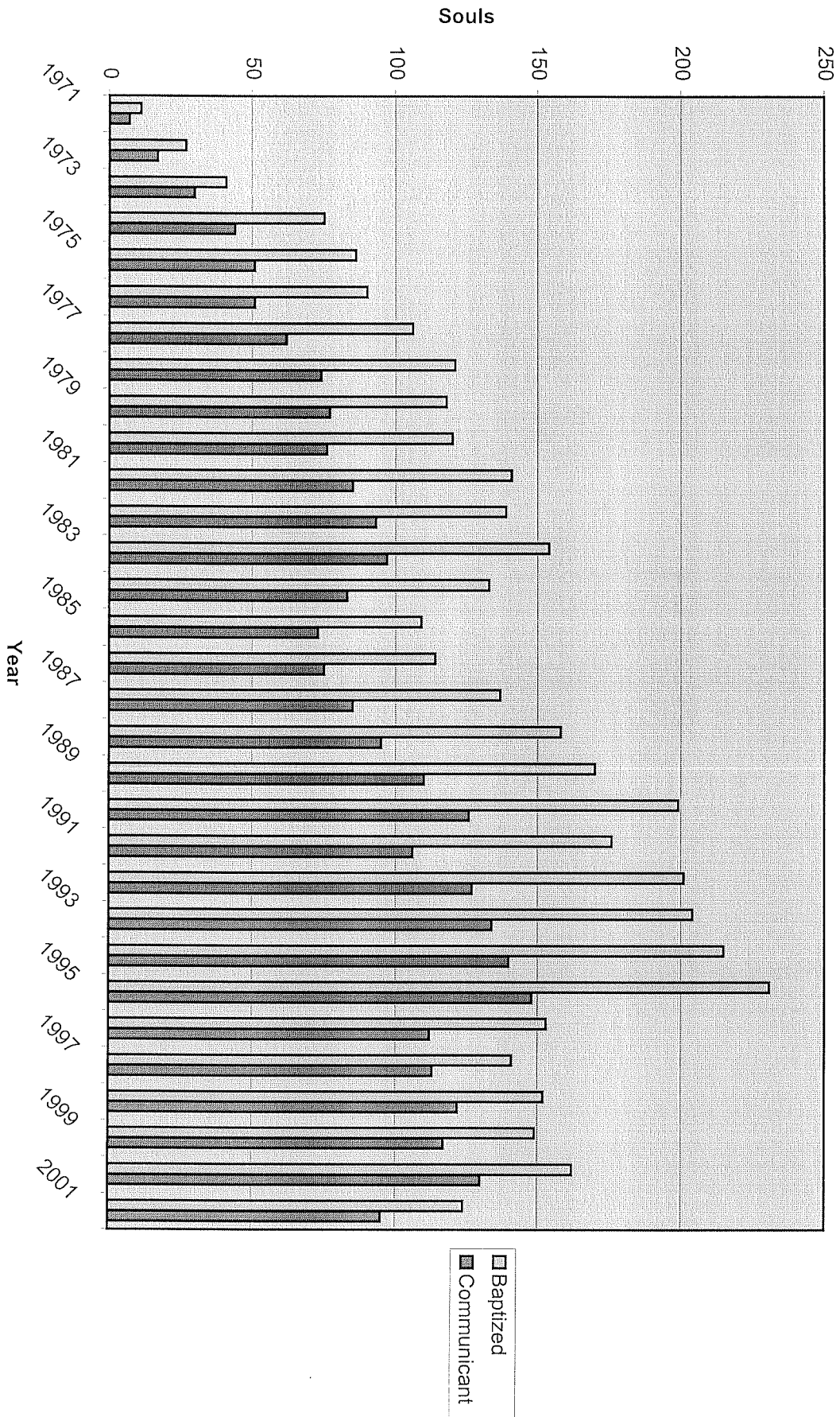
The dream of that sculpture on the front lawn never became a reality and probably has been forgotten. Thanks be to God that the thought behind it never has. For thirty-one years and counting Rock of Ages has been a church built on a firm foundation—our Savior, Jesus Christ.



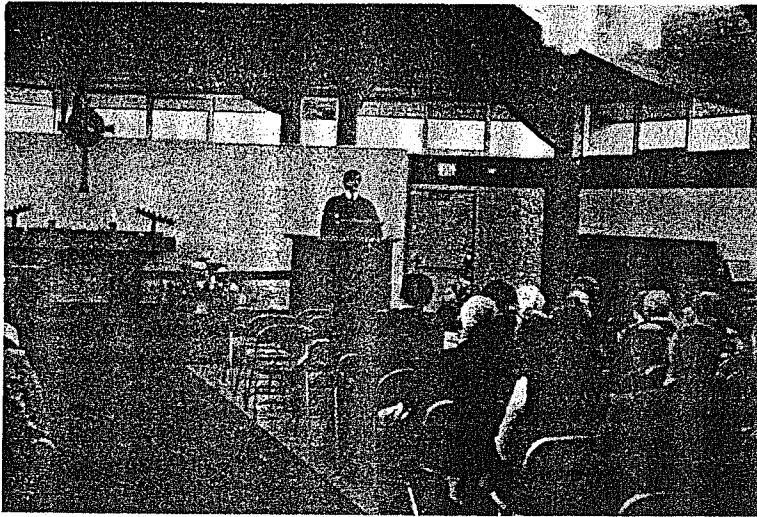
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<sup>69</sup> Glaeske, Interview.

Appendix A--Rock of Ages Membership--1971-2001



## And, Oh Yes, Thanks for the Fire!



Dedication at Madison, Tennessee

I guess it was the worst 20-minute drive I ever made, as I headed from the parsonage in Hendersonville to our new church in Madison, Tennessee, about 12 miles away. It was a Thursday afternoon, and I had just received a call from our builder. He reported with a very worried quaver in his voice that our church was completely filled with smoke. "I pray it isn't too serious. I pray the fire or whatever it is doesn't leave permanent damage as in our church in Salt Lake City. I pray that we can still hold our Reformation-Dedication Service this Sunday."

When I turned into the church property just off Interstate 65, several fire trucks were on the scene, feeding their hoses into the building like tubes into a dying body. "Oh no! It's worse than I thought!" When my eyes scanned the inside of the building, my heart sank even lower. The carpeting was tracked full of ashes, and firemen were ripping out charred drywall, furring strips, and four-by-fours. Throughout the entire seven-sided stucco building there was a thin, black, oily film.

As the Madison fire chief tried to determine the cause of the blaze, several possibilities were explored. The wiring received the most votes as the culprit, but to this day the direct cause of the fire is not known.

How the fire started is not the important thing. How it stopped is! It was

when the fire chief examined the five-pound fire extinguisher lying near the fire that I knew how merciful God had been. The chief showed us a plastic part in the head of the extinguisher. When this piece melted from the heat, the extinguisher set itself off. The pin was still in position. It seemed that by discharging its full load of CO<sub>2</sub> in the small kitchen, the extinguisher had kept the fire under control until it could be discovered at 1:00 P.M. Thursday. The smoke damage indicated the fire must have started already on Wednesday evening.

Three "coincidences" stopped the fire. The builder "just happened" to choose that particular afternoon to do a small repair job. The fire extinguisher melted and set itself off. And the extinguisher was in the very corner where the fire started, right next to the most flammable material.

With saddened and yet grateful hearts we had to decide whether to hold our dedication three days later. A call to the insurance company brought a helpful adjustor who made sure a Servicemaster cleaning crew was on the job early the next morning. The crew worked all day Friday and most of Saturday. Late Saturday night, when the door to the kitchen was closed and a few coats of paint had been given to the foyer walls, the only signs of the

fire were some stains in the carpeting, a hole from the kitchen into the study, and the smell of smoke. The services would be held as planned — even the dinner!

Sunday, October 31, 1976, at Rock of Ages began with Sunday school and Bible study. Those attending watched a filmstrip about the mission work of our Wisconsin Synod in Japan. As we watched the filmstrip, the fire at Rock of Ages almost seemed to fade into the background as we heard again of people headed for the fires of hell unless someone tells them about Jesus. Next came a worship service which concentrated on the blessings of the Reformation. How insignificant our fire compared to the fire of God's Word which burst forth at the time of the Reformation!

At 4:00 P.M. the congregation regathered for the Dedication Service. The theme of the sermon — the text was Ephesians 2:19-22 — by the pastor of Rock of Ages, was "A Building for Building." Our building was indeed a gracious gift from the Triune God, but given to us as a tool for achieving our real goal and mission as a congregation, namely, for bringing souls to saving faith in Christ. The fire underscored the same thought. It was as though God was saying, "I have given this building to you. I can take it away. You concentrate on telling all the people you can about My Son, Jesus Christ, and His saving work for all mankind."

In one of the prayers the worshipers thanked God for the Lutheran Reformation and for the Word Luther helped to make known in its purity. The other prayer thanked God for the beautiful church, and then for the fire! Why not! For the 51 communicant members of Rock of Ages, their children, and the friends and visitors who swelled the attendance to 110 on Dedication Day, God had shown His powerful presence by the miraculous way He caused this fire to stop.

As we go about restoring the original beauty of our church, we thank God for sparing our church and for letting His pure Word be heard there. We also thank the faithful Christians in Nashville and in the rest of the Synod's congregations whose offerings helped build our church. And, oh yes, thanks for the fire!

Joel B. Schroeder



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